

Student Front: Policy And Tasks
(Adopted at the March 31 to April 02, 2007
Meeting of the Central Committee)

Introduction

The Political Organisational Report of the 18th Congress noted the need to draw up a policy document on the student and youth fronts to develop a “clear understanding about the front’s priorities and perspective”. Though the student front has, from time to time, been adopting such documents, including the updating of the Programme of the mass front, the Party has not discussed in detail such a policy approach. The need for such an approach becomes all the more necessary given the big changes, both at the international and national level, that have occurred since the formation of the student front and particularly the new challenges that have emerged since the unfolding of the imperialist globalisation process. This document seeks to meet this need. Hence, this is not a review document like the ones the Central Committee had adopted for the trade union and kisan fronts. Though reports of the student front have been regularly featured in the Political Organisational reports of successive Party Congresses, these need to be regularly reviewed by the Central Committee in the future.

The 1970 programme of the student organisation had laid down the basic understanding and approach for organising the student community.

Subsequently, the Central Committee adopted a document ‘On Mass Organisations’ in 1981. This is what it stated as far as the student front was concerned: “The document on students produced and adopted several years ago should be restudied. Its appeal and preamble is nothing but a restatement of Party’s formulations on international and national situation which overshoot the common consciousness of the average student and cannot be a weapon for building a mass student organisation. But fortunately the main activity of the organisation was concentrated on student demands, educational, political and this was given prominence in the document itself. The document talks about scientific socialism. If adherence to scientific socialism was to be made the test of membership then only CPI(M) members would be eligible. Even if propaganda and agitation on scientific socialism, correctly understood, was to be carried on as part of daily work, i.e., identify the organisation with scientific socialism, it would hinder the students organisation from being a mass organisation. The saving clause in the document assured that the organisation would not allow politics of any particular party to be imposed on it, while explaining what scientific socialism is.”

The student front’s Programme has since undergone two major updatings—in 1993 and 2004 on the above lines. Apart from being amended on various occasions, to correct certain formulations, the 2004 updated Programme makes serious corrections of certain formulations related to the international situation following the dismantling of socialism in USSR and Eastern Europe. It deals with the consequent concerted efforts being made at pushing the student community into rightwing political consciousness as well as the unleashing of a serious de-

politicisation process. The later also serves to bolster the former. In addition, this updating also took into account the major changes that have occurred in the Indian education system and the character of student life in the last three decades.

The Central Committee Resolution of 2004 'On Approach to Mass Organisations' notes: "Why is it necessary to concentrate on the functioning of mass organisations and the relationship between the Party and mass organisations? Without the development and expansion of the mass organisations and new sections of people joining them, the Party's growth is not possible. As the 1981 resolution explains, the mass organisation is the link between the Party and the vast mass of the people most of them with backward consciousness who are neither under the Party's fold or political influence. The mass organisations are required because the Party's direct political slogans are unable to rouse these masses immediately. It is through the struggle for partial demands and the experience gained through these struggles that the consciousness of the masses under the guidance of the Party can be developed."

With regard to mass organisations of youth, women, students etc, it says: "These are multi-class organisations and in the democratic stage of the revolution their slogans and demands should conform to the general democratic character which means apart from raising their own demands, they should be able to raise the consciousness of the people they work with to the demands of the general democratic movement. This matter was clinched in the 1981 resolution, but a narrow or incorrect approach still prevails in some sections."

In this context, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the basic approach towards mass organisations undertaken in the 1981 resolution. "The proper outlook towards mass organisations, its programme, its constitution, its appeal is to be determined by the character of the mass whose organisation it is, the place this mass occupies in building the PDF and the direct and immediate interests of this mass which impel it to enter the arena of struggle and how this mass is brought into the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, anti-monopolist struggle. The guiding role of the Party in these organisations consists in leading over larger sections of the masses to a new and higher consciousness, to win them over to the Party's basic slogans without in the least changing the broad mass character of the organisation."

During the course of the debate on the updating of the Programme of the student front, there was considerable discussion on whether adherence to scientific socialism could be a precondition to becoming a member of the student front. It was decided that since the student front was not a political party, it must encourage free and frank discussion on scientific socialism and the correct way to achieve it. The slogan of socialism was retained in the flag alongwith independence and democracy as a reaffirmation of the need to pursue the socialist alternative for the sake of any genuine upliftment and betterment of the student community.

Student Movement: Character

The students constitute an important section of our society, primarily a multi-class mass of literate/educated youngsters. Undergoing education, they are exposed to the ongoing social, political, economic, cultural process in any society. This exposure in itself moulds their consciousness and defines their approach in comprehending and changing the existing situation. Being at an impressionable age, the student community is always susceptible to changes taking place in society and sensitive to the direction that these changes are moving in. Being a multi-class mass, the students have links with almost all classes in any society, hence, conversely they are open to the influence of ideas of all classes. At any point of time therefore, the student community is the theatre that reflects the ongoing battle of ideas that is taking place in the society. Given this character, the student community in any society at any point of time constitutes an important element reflecting and, at times, influencing the direction of future changes.

Being not directly related to the bourgeois-landlord production system, students, by themselves, cannot constitute the class force for economic and social change. They, however, can play the role of an important catalyst in either advancing or retarding such a movement for social transformation. Hence, the task of developing and consolidating the student front must constitute an important thrust of Communist activity.

The historical experience of all socialist revolutions in the world confirm the role of the students in the evolving social changes that have occurred - Lenin's writings on the youth-student movements during the course of the Russian revolution, the historic May 4th movement of 1919 and its contributions for advancing the socialist revolution in China, their role in Vietnam, Cuba etc. In the capitalist countries, the massive global anti-imperialist student movements sparked by the students of French universities in the late-sixties centering around US imperialist offensive on Vietnam had rocked the entire world and roused anti-imperialist consciousness. This experience also served to remind everybody of two important aspects of the character of the student movement. However mighty the movement may be, by itself, the students cannot bring about a revolutionary change precisely because of their multi-class character as noted above.

Secondly, the failure to establish bonds of solidarity and links through struggle with the basic class movements of the workers and the peasantry would derail the student movement, however powerful, leading to its eventual dissipation. This is precisely what happened to this global student upsurge. Notwithstanding this, in recent years, the protest against imperialist globalisation and US imperialism's hegemonic drive reflected in the military occupation of Iraq have been issues on which widespread student mobilisation has taken place globally.

Student Movement: India

In India, the students played an important role in the struggle for freedom. On August 12, 1936 at Lucknow, the first conference of the All India Student's Federation began with Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the chair and inaugurated by

Jawaharlal Nehru. With this began a glorious chapter of the organised students movement and its role in achieving India's freedom.

The origins of the student's movement, in fact, dates back further. The partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement in the first decade of the last century saw a large number of students being drawn into struggles. Independent of each other the students in the presidencies of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and the Punjab joined the mainstream struggle for freedom. In 1919-22, responding to Gandhi's call for non-cooperation, a large number of students boycotted schools and colleges and joined the movement. Another big upsurge was there in 1927-28 associated with the boycott of the Simon Commission. All through this period attempts at organising an all-India body were going on. In fact, at the sessions of the Congress in 1927 and 1928, the students met separately for this purpose. But these efforts could not fructify till the mid-30s.

The international situation—the global capitalist crisis and depression, the growth and consolidation of the socialist Soviet Union—and, the disappointment following the failure of the two rounds of the civil disobedience movement had a profound impact on the student community. Socialism was a big attraction. The hanging of Bhagat Singh and his comrades, the Meerut Conspiracy case and other developments triggered a big protest and debate amongst the students. This was strengthened by the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1935. The search for an alternative eventually materialised in the formation of the AISF in 1936.

In its formation, the student community had answered an important question of those times. Is the purpose of student organisation limited to the issue of achieving independence or something beyond? While the attainment of freedom was of course, the paramount objective and the source of inspiration, the student movement also directed its energies towards a radical transformation of the society—a society where the scourge of unemployment and illiteracy that plagues the capitalist world, would be eliminated. At its foundation conference itself, the AISF emphatically declared that the students movement would work for a radical restructuring of the society.

However, a large number of differences existed in the perception of how this restructuring should be done. And naturally so. In fact, within two years after the formation of AISF, matters reached the point of a split. What was the issue? One section of the students wished to acclaim and highlight the new Soviet Constitution which, for the first time in the world, enshrined the right to employment as a fundamental right. A section led by Minoo Masani known for his anti-communism, opposed this move and refused to allow such a resolution from being tabled in the 1938 Conference. By 1940, an irreversible split took place between those associated with the Communists and the Congress Socialist Party. In the meanwhile, Jinnah organised a separate Muslim Students Federation in 1940. Notwithstanding these differences, the sheer momentum of the events taking place in the 30s plummeted the student masses into the mainstream of the national movement.

The second world war and the fascist attack on Socialist Soviet Union brought to the fore a major issue amongst the student masses. The radical and the progressive elements, conscious of fascism and all that it implies advanced the

slogan of 'People's war' and rallied the students in an all out effort to defeat fascism. They were also conscious of the fact that the defeat of fascism would unleash a powerful movement in the colonial world and India's independence was also linked to the outcome of the war. Subsequent history vindicated this understanding. However, the general student masses gripped by the anti-imperialist sentiments saw the ouster of British as the immediate objective. Given all these developments, the united front amongst the students became considerably weaker.

All through this period, the question of the objective of the students movement continued to remain a contentious issue. Those who had argued that the students movement's role was limited only to achieving independence advanced the understanding that after independence, the student movement should participate in the construction of independent India. The Congress leadership called upon the students to abandon agitation and struggle. Those very leaders who had urged the students to boycott schools and colleges now advanced the theory that students should not take part in politics. This process led to the formation of the National Student's union of India. This in fact was part of the overall plan of the Congress to set-up mass organisations of various sections to bolster its rule, exploiting the illusions that accompanied independence.

A different and a new question, arising out of the circumstances, arose amongst those who held the view that the student movement should work for the restructuring of the society—for a society free from unemployment, illiteracy and ignorance. How is this to be achieved? One section had argued that this should be done in cooperation with the Congress, the other, analysing the concrete conditions, felt that Congress pursuing policies of the ruling classes after independence were not eliminating the basic problems of the people and hence the students movement can advance towards a restructuring of the society only by opposing the anti-people policies of the Congress.

In the initial few years, big hopes and illusions were raised which led to the vacillating middle classes veering around to support the Congress. However, subsequently, the true nature of the Congress policies became manifestly clear. Unemployment was rising, education continued to be a privilege, the economic conditions of the masses of the Indian people was getting no better, in fact worse. The student movement continued to be plagued with the two conflicting opinions all through the fifties. The leadership of the AISF held on to the first opinion of collaborating with the Congress. While the student masses, on the basis of their own experience found it necessary to oppose the policies of the Congress government. It is precisely during this period that the reactionary and communal forces started organising the students in various places and the RSS-sponsored and led Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad came into existence.

While the general student masses were disappointed with the Congress policies, with illusions that accompanied independence being shattered, the AISF leadership advanced the slogan of supporting Congress policies. Rejecting this opinion students in various states started organising themselves. By 1960, in as many as seven states, independent student organisations came into existence, like the Bengal Provincial Students Federation, Punjab Students Union, the AP Students Federation etc. Picking up the threads of the student movement of the

pre-independence days these federations began organising the students on the basic issues of jobs and education for all.

By the mid sixties the general discontent amongst the people against Congress policies rose dramatically. In the 1967 elections, the Congress for the first time since independence, lost in many states. This objective situation, reflecting the discontent, created the need to properly reorient the student movement and give it a new and a correct direction. This was necessary all the more, in the face of the efforts of reactionary, communal forces who were making a determined effort to organise the students in separate groups.

Responding to this necessity the leaders of the various state level federations met and drafted a programme which formed the basis for the formation of a new student organisation.

The emergence of this student organisation is the culmination of this history. The threads of the glorious student movement of the pre-independence days, had to be carried forward. The distortions that crept within the movement had to be corrected. And, the history of the student front, its growth to become the largest organisation of the democratic minded students in the country, inheriting the traditions of the pre-independence student movement, vindicate the correctness of the essence of its Programme.

Since then, the student organisation's contributions towards drawing up a progressive agenda for the Indian student community has been advancing. Apart from championing the basic issues of better education facilities and the democratic rights of the student community, the student front played an important role in articulating an alternative scientific mass education system. There were also positive efforts at forging united struggles on concrete issues in the concrete conditions of the period.

In the seventies, the dominant trend in the student movement was against corruption and authoritarian political tendencies, which culminated in the emergency. The most important of these were Nav Nirman Movement of Gujarat and the massive struggle led by Jay Prakash Narain in Bihar. In both these struggles, very large number of students participated. However, diverse ideological tendencies were present in these struggles including the RSS-run ABVP. During the eighties and nineties, ideological processes have affected the unity and broad based nature of the student movement. Significant student mobilisation were achieved by the reactionary forces. The secessionist and divisive slogans of the Assam Movement were largely spearheaded by sections of the student community. During the active phase of the Khalistan Movement in Punjab, the separatists rallied students, in a considerable way, under the banner of All India Sikh Student Federation. Similarly, the anti-Mandal agitations and the pro-Mandir slogans of the communal forces have also led to mobilisation of students and youth by the forces of Hindutva.

During this period, since the mid-sixties various shades of ultra Left tendencies also arose amongst the students. Seeking to divorce the student movement from the general democratic movement, advancing the slogan of "student power", such forces strengthened anarchic trends disrupting and weakening the united student movement.

This brief historical recollection is necessary to underscore the fact that the student movement can advance only on the basis of an ideological thrust. The reactionary, backward and radical elements amongst students may converge in struggles on specific issues like democratic rights or better facilities in educational institutes. But, the direction of the student movement can only be determined by its ideological thrust. This reaffirms the decision to retain independence, democracy and socialism as the main slogans of the student front.

Education in Class Societies

While it is necessary to note such developments and join issue in such a battle of ideas that constantly takes place within the student community, the important thrust of the student front must be to address the problems facing Indian education and to advance the struggle for “education for all”.

Education understood as mere instruction existed in the most primitive forms of social organisation. With the development of class divided society, education ceases to be merely a process of instruction and transmission of skills. In addition, to transmitting the necessary skills, education becomes the process of transmitting also a consciousness specific to that form of social organisation.

In class societies, the nurturing of a specific consciousness becomes necessary for the continuance of the class rule. The process of education under the class society, therefore, embraces the process of generating and nurturing a consciousness in the interest of the ruling class.

As Marx and Engels observe: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations; dominant material relations grasped as ideas: hence of the relations which made the one class the ruling one, and therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things, consciousness, and therefore, think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, *and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age*; thus their ideas’ are the ruling ideas of the epoch” (emphasis added).

In societies prior to capitalism, the process of education was essentially confined to those sections belonging to the ruling classes, i.e.....to those, who consequent to the division of material and mental labour, had leisure at their disposal to conduct the affairs of the society and planned productive activities. The example of Greek institutions and more specifically, the Indian system of “Gurukuls” illustrate this fact. The story of ‘Ekalavya’ illustrates the fact that not only was education confined to the ruling classes but that the labouring classes were disallowed from learning.

The Two Faces of Education

With the development of productive forces and the division of society into two antagonistic camps—bourgeoisie and the proletariat—and when all relations in society have been subsumed under the dominant capital labour relationship, it becomes necessary for the bourgeoisie to impart technical skills and knowledge to the proletariat whose development is an essential element in the working of the capitalist system. After all, commodities have to be produced for profits and wars have to be fought!

Thus it becomes necessary for capitalism to provide a certain degree of education to the working people, which will serve and strengthen its class domination. But while ensuring the spread of education, this in itself creates conditions for raising the level of consciousness of the working class. As Marx and Engels noted in the *Communist Manifesto*, “Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death unto itself: it has also called into existence the men who are to wield these weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians”. Further, they note, “the bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education. In other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie”. The bourgeoisie for its own advance, initially in its fight against feudalism and monarchy and later for the consolidation of its rule, gives the proletariat knowledge and skills which in turn can be used by the organised working class as weapons against this very bourgeois class rule. Education, under capitalism, therefore, assumes a contradictory nature: A reflection of its basic contradiction i.e., the social nature of production and individual nature of appropriation.

With the emergence of monopoly capitalism, the educational system develops in such a manner that science and knowledge are regulated and placed at the disposal and service of capital. Marx’s analysis in *Capital* reveals that in a capitalist society, science becomes “a productive force distinct from labour and pressed into the service of capital”. In the era of monopoly capitalism, scientific research is more highly organised than ever before, but always with the overriding aim of private profit, and devoted increasingly to war. The training of natural scientists is so departmentalised as make it difficult to acquire a theoretical grasp of natural science as a whole, and such students receive no training at all in the study of human society. Conversely, social and historical studies are cut off from the natural sciences and from each other. Economics is separated from history and both from politics. History is taught as though it was not a branch of science at all. In the natural sciences, the student may know nothing of Marxism, yet at least he recognises the dialectical processes in nature, even though he does not know them by that name; but the laws of dialectics mean nothing to the bourgeois historian, who does not even recognise the class struggle.

This separation of natural sciences from social sciences and the separation of various branches of social sciences from each other, serves the purpose of preventing the student from acquiring a knowledge of the totality of his or her existence and on the other hand, gives him or her a distorted world view. An educational system that is deliberately used by capitalism, in its offensive against Marxism and socialism. Education under capitalism, therefore, reflects the

conflict in bourgeois consciousness between the need to develop science as a productive force and the need to conceal the true relationship between labour and capital.

In this process, education itself, may become the casualty. *However, the ruling classes, at all times, ensure that the basic class requirement for their continued rule is produced.* This is resoundingly reflected in the evolution of the education system in India. Since much material and analysis of this is undertaken in other Party documents, only the required and necessary aspects are discussed here.

Education System: Colonial India

The origins of the present educational system in India and its evolution during the colonial period was directly linked with the efforts of the British to consolidate their rule. Initially, their efforts were directed towards conciliation with the upper class 'natives'. One of the ways in which this understanding expressed itself was the official patronage given to traditional and oriental learning. Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrasa in 1791 and Jonathan Duncan established the Benaras Sanskrit College in 1792.

In 1837, the English replaced Persian as the official and court language and in 1844 Hardinge announced preference for English educated Indians in the Civil Service. These two steps effectively sealed any growth of education other than English education. Consequently, in 1853, an enquiry was conducted by the East India Company, which resulted in the famous despatch of Sir Charles Wood to the Board of Directors in 1854. Described by many as the 'Magna Carta' of English education in India, this despatch set forth a comprehensive scheme of education for the country. Following the political, economic, administrative and cultural needs of the British, this despatch reaffirming the policy laid down in 1835 by Macaulay, recommended the concentration of higher education to the upper classes. Its recommendation led to the establishment of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras Universities in 1857. The Woods Despatch also suggested the administrative machinery for the education system which included among other things, the university senates, the specific methods of examination, setting up of separate departments of public instruction under an important officer called the Director of Public Instructions: in fact, the entire administrative set-up that continues to exist even today.

However, as noted above, the spread of education under colonial rule also led to the spread of consciousness that was seeking liberty from such foreign rule. Of the many incidents that confirmed such a trend was the famous murder of the Collector of Pune by the legendary Chepakar brothers in 1897. Curzon noted, "It is impossible to dissociate their ideas and their hatred of England from the course of education and training through which they have passed". What followed was the restriction of the spread of education in order to curb the rise of enlightened Indian nationalism. Curzon, in fact, argued, "It is quality and not quantity that we should have in view".

Education System: Independent India

It is precisely the same expression that the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes of independent India have put forward following the initial years of massive

expansion of education in free India. To meet the needs of the ruling classes following independence, through the Dr. Radhakrishnan Committee on university education and Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar Committee on secondary and technical education, there was a rapid expansion of educational facilities to create the necessary scientific and technical manpower required for domestic capitalist development. However, the inherently flawed process of capitalist development as analysed by the CPI(M) Programme led to the emergence of an economic crisis in the mid-sixties where the students thrown up by such expansion could not be absorbed by the economy. The Kothari Commission set-up in the mid-sixties came out with a report based on a vision of a modern developed and highly educated society which, amongst others, recommended at least 6 per cent of the GDP be spent on education. This has never seen the light of the day till date. The 1986 New Education Policy of the Rajiv Gandhi government was the contemporary expression of the ruling classes to create (read produce) the manpower required for the consolidation and advance of the class rule while consigning the rest to non-formal education. This, once again, reaffirmed the ruling classes' approach towards education.

What followed subsequently, naturally, was the inadequate growth of education facilities to meet the needs of our people. Education continues to become increasingly a privilege than a right.

The CPI(M) Programme notes: "The Constitution of Republic of India which was adopted in 1950 had laid down a set of directive principles to be followed by the State. These includeright to education and provision of free and compulsory education for children. ... None of these principles had been realised in practice. The glaring gap between the constitution's precepts and the practice of the bourgeois rulers is a scathing indictment of the bourgeois-landlord system instituted after independence." (Para 2.37)

Education System: Present Challenges

The present challenges that the student movement faces arise out of this basic class orientation of the bourgeois-landlord Indian State which has authored the current education policy. The crisis of the path of capitalist development in India has led to major changes which were influenced both by the internal, as well as, external circumstances. The crisis has now resulted in a new offensive on the rights to education and employment.

The present challenges become most obvious in the onslaught on public and mass education. The relative undermining of public education at the primary and the secondary stage in the overall context of decrease in allocation for education *per se* substantiates this approach. With the onset of the neo-liberal globalisation policies, situation has become extremely harsh for large sections of the students. There is an attack on every aspect of the daily student life.

Notwithstanding the recent increases, education has seen a reduction in outlays over the period of neo-liberal reforms. It is not as though the State is withdrawing from its social responsibilities. That, of course, it is. But more importantly, the fact is that the State is redefining its priorities under the neo-liberal dispensation. The State is pre-occupied with increasing the avenues for maximisation of profits to both foreign and domestic capital. Education

increasingly is being seen as a profit generating activity. In order to permit private profit, the State must vacate the space it holds. This is precisely what is happening since the mid-eighties. Self-financing colleges and universities have mushroomed as autonomous institutions. Private technical institutions have grown manifold all across the country. Private universities are being considered while facing strong protests. Deemed university status has been confirmed on many private institutions. The government is now seeking to permit foreign universities to operate in India and discussing 'education' as a 'service' in the ongoing WTO negotiations.

The pattern of commercialisation and privatisation is presupposing that private investment in technical education will generate very remunerative returns on such investment. This implies that in terms of employment, the students coming out of such institutions have brighter prospects of employment. This is triggering off a disproportionate race towards these branches of education. This is undermining the social sciences and humanities. This can only be extremely detrimental for the overall balance of our education.

Our research activities and our higher education are being increasingly subverted by foreign entities undermining our national objectives. The MNCs are seeking to dictate our research agenda. The permission sought for entry of FDI in higher education highlights the threat to our intellectual life. This is an issue which conflicts with our patriotic yearning and has the potential of rallying very wide sections of the students in defence of intellectual self-reliance.

The role of the judiciary in freeing private institutions from regulatory control has further accentuated the process of privatisation of higher education, particularly technical education. While these tendencies have their own adverse impact on the right and access to education *per se*, it particularly affects the question of social justice and further marginalizes the socially underprivileged sections of the students.

Quantity; Quality; Equity

The eternal challenge to Indian education arises in the need to balance the conflict between quantity, quality and equity. If education for all can be ensured, then such a conflict simply does not arise. However, given the intentions of the Indian ruling classes, as noted above, in the absence of moving in that direction, the conflicts between these objectives is bound to take ugly expressions dividing the student community in very deep and injurious manner. While we shall work towards strengthening the struggle for universal education, in the interim, it becomes necessary to confront the problems arising in this conflict.

Since the question of implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations have come to the forefront from the late eighties, large-scale opposition to this process has also been witnessed. Such developments have been much more conspicuous in North India where the social reform movement has, unfortunately, not been strong. Instead of realising that equal opportunity requires the overall expansion of the infrastructure rather than perpetuating social injustice, some elements move towards an anti-reservation retrograde platform. Given the largely iniquitous situation, students belonging to the dalit and other backward sections are a small portion of the total student population,

particularly, in the sphere of higher education. The challenge of uniting the student movement demands a simultaneous articulation of the need for social justice and the imperatives of expanding educational infrastructure and opportunities.

The shrinking opportunities for access to and development of education is also accentuating the challenge of communalisation. During the NDA regime, we witnessed a vicious attempt at saffronisation of the content of education. This drive assumed dangerous proportions when key educational administrators were appointed with RSS patronage. The NCERT initiated moves to change the syllabus and the teaching material in social sciences particularly history. Similarly, the UGC also wanted to introduce new programmes for the undergraduate and the postgraduate programmes and wanted to legitimise unscientific and obscurantist ideas. While the formal educational structures were sought to be subverted from within, the RSS and its affiliates went on an expansion drive for its *Saraswati Shishu Mandirs* and *Vidya Bharati* institutions. These institutions went on an aggressive spread of communal venom while receiving State support. Apart from support from Central institutions, the state governments led by the BJP also wreaked havoc on the content of education at the state level. The tendency continues as we find insistence on introducing 'Saraswati Vandana' and the compulsory rendering of 'Vande Mataram' to vitiate the communal atmosphere.

The recent Sachar Committee Report has brought out the comparatively backward status of Muslim community in both education and employment opportunities. But, in the past, the communal forces had denied the existence of such a discrimination and any move which required additional compensatory policies were branded as 'appeasement'. On the other hand, the resulting alienation were often taken advantage of by fundamentalist forces. The challenge of uniting the student movement irrespective of their religious denomination will need an articulation for compensatory action to ensure equal opportunity.

In India, the girl child faces discrimination even before being born. The obscurantists treat women as unequal human beings. In the 21st century, when some claim that India has reached the global stage, the continuing female foeticide is a blot on all of us. There is strong evidence that the discrimination against the girl child continues at every stage of her educational life. This is reflected in literacy, access and drop-out rates. The violence that marks many of our campuses is also perversely getting manifested in girl students becoming special targets for sexual harassment and atrocities. This is a challenge which has to be specifically resisted by the democratic student movement.

The overall environment is generating a sense of insecurity among large sections of students which is leading to expressions of frustration which further accentuates the atmosphere of anarchy and lawlessness. This is particularly pronounced in areas where the democratic forces are weak. This atmosphere also manifests itself in a manner which eventually undermines the democratic atmosphere in educational institutions and particularly sabotages the democratic rights of the students. In large parts of the country, today, democratic students' union elections are not held. The legitimacy of the demand for holding students

union election also stands questioned due to the growing violence which takes place around them.

All these issues ranging from attacks on the right to education, the growing privatisation and commercialisation of education, communalisation of education, entry of foreign players to reap superprofits in education, the aggressive assertion of caste and communal forces are challenges which have to be faced. The manifestation of the sense of uncertainty and insecurity which affects the student's psyche is resulting in anarchy, violence and complete break down of the peaceful academic atmosphere is what the democratic student movement has to encounter increasingly.

Facing the Challenges

For the democratic student movement to face these complex challenges, certain policy reorientation on some of these issues has become urgent. From the available information, it is apparent that the size of the organised student movement is extremely small. The combined membership of the student front in all the states as a percentage of the total number of students who can be enrolled is a shockingly meagre 3.6 per cent.

The reach of other student organisations, most of which act as direct wings of various political parties like NSUI, ABVP, etc. are also not very significant. Given this picture, it will not be incorrect to conclude that the overall size of the organised student movement in the country is extremely small. This, in itself, poses a big challenge because being unorganised makes them also prone to be swayed by various social and ideological influences including parochial and communal passions.

Added to this is a new challenge. The blind opposition to the state is acting as a complement to neo-liberal offensive against the state. This is leading to broad anti-Left umbrella platforms emerging where they extreme Left and the extreme Right cohabit. This also compounds the problem of depoliticisation.

The question is, what should be our priorities to overcome this situation. What should be our policy approach? At the outset, it should be recognised that the character of education is, itself, changing. The bulk of the brighter students, by force, are having to attend private professional institutions where normal student organisational activity is not permitted. Such insulation deliberately fostered by the administration seeks to buttress the process of de-politicisation. Further, in the absence of regular colleges and courses, tutorial classes seem to have become the order of the day in many places. Such developments inhibit the general student from becoming a part of the democratic mainstream.

The response to the new situation has to be two-pronged. First and foremost, the organised nature (collectively studying) of the student community has to be fully utilised in uniting them at the level of educational institutions. The second is to link their unity on issues affecting their daily student life with those larger political-ideological policy questions, which result in the challenges that they face. Newer forms of organisation need to be evolved. For instance, the free software movement is a platform that can organise students who normally may not come in the ambit of traditional student front activities.

Reduction in investment for education lead to large-scale curtailment of infrastructure. Drinking water, toilets, buildings, class room, availability of teachers, facilities for co-curricular activities pertain to one set of issues. Content, syllabus, teaching methods, examination system - another. The third issue is the increasing burden of fees. The fourth set of issues relate to compensatory policies for improving access to socially and economically underprivileged—scholarship and special hostel facilities for the dalits, tribals and the socially and economically backward communities. All these issues are related to the policies of central and state governments, as well as, agencies like UGC, MCI, AICTE, who act as regulators. The democratic student movement has to develop vigorous struggles on these issues pinpointing the role of all those who are responsible for the non-availability of the basic amenities of education. Issues pertaining to the quality of education and additional support for making education inclusive will have to be taken up. There is no doubt that if all these questions are taken up earnestly, a very broad based unity of the students can indeed be forged. Such a unity will have, as its core, the poor and marginalized sections, who are the first victims of such reduction of investment. The participation of students in struggles on such issues will also raise their level of awareness about policy approach and their shortcomings of these entities.

Given the nature of the changes in the education landscape, government institutions, except for the special ones like IITs, IIMs or other technical and medical colleges, both at the school and undergraduate levels are where poorer students are going. This is most pronounced in the rural areas. Decidedly, they can become the most militant component of the student movement. Our objective has to be to lead these sections.

In terms of its size, the students in schools, both at the secondary and the higher secondary level, constitute a bulk of the student population. At the moment, in the weaker states, they remain largely outside organised student activity. This situation needs to be reversed. The issue of developing activities among school students will depend on our capacity to relate with teachers and parents. The general atmosphere of anarchy and violence which plagues substantial educational institutions, adversely affects the psyche of the guardians as well. Therefore, taking up issues apart from those which affect education - of constructive activities with humanitarian and social overtone can also prove to be a very effective intervention. Literacy campaigns, health camps, improvement of the neighbourhood environment, cultural competitions are examples of such activity.

While school students produce the numbers, the college and university students remain the most articulate, hence the effective component of the student movement. While facing the challenges, the student organisation has to evolve a priority of building the movement in important institutions of higher education, particularly university centres and big colleges. The major issue which adversely affects this work is the prevailing atmosphere of anarchy, violence and lawlessness in major campuses in different parts of the country, particularly North India. The outside environment of criminalisation of politics and anti-social activities impacts on the campuses. This violence also affects the democratic rights of the students and in most of the campuses, students union

elections are not being held for a very long period. We must emphasise that elected students unions are very useful instruments for uniting the students within the institution. We must aggressively demand the formation of student unions and regular elections. They are mass student platforms and, therefore, should not be treated as pocket boroughs of student organisations that lead them. They have to be treated as an instrument of struggle.

In many of the strong centres, research scholars are part of the larger student movement. The recent developments of foreign penetration and attempts at manipulating our research agenda and priorities is an issue which can be quite effective in addressing these research scholars.

The growth of private institutions is also posing new problems. Even within government institutions, in new frontier disciplines, self-financing courses are being started. Students getting entry to these institutions pay a huge fee and expect that they have assured employment on the completion of their courses. They, naturally, show some aversion to be part of the democratic student movement. Our struggles against privatisation and commercialisation, particularly in higher education and technical education have not been supplemented by efforts to build the student movement embracing students of such courses. Notwithstanding the expectation of these students, conditions are often not commensurate with the claims of the private sector who run these institutions. We have seen paucity of infrastructure and particularly, quality teaching staff in them. Therefore, there is an opportunity of concretely studying the conditions and raise appropriate slogans. Apart from this, private industry itself is also claiming that many of the students coming out of such mushroom growth do not qualify for an appropriate placement. Many of them are also forced to go to private tutorials for making good their deficiency. Appropriate intervention on each of these conflicting areas can also enable us to surmount the aversion that they show towards the democratic student movement.

Taking into account all these aspects, the democratic student movement has to link up the issues affecting education and employment with those of overall policy orientation. The integration of these two aspects can only lead to a meaningful progress in the activities and influence of the student organisation. Such an approach will also ensure that the student movement articulates itself in a manner which is in keeping with the level of consciousness of the common students and ensures their gradual development. While the independent initiative of the student organisation is crucial, there is an opportunity of building united struggle on many of these issues. The need for addressing those opportunities must be fully utilised, which will also enable us to approach the mass following of the other student organisations.

The specific guidelines to ensure the imperatives of a broad based and independent student organisation which needs to be addressed are as follows:

1. The most important task is to build a movement based in educational institutions and form primary unit committees based on the struggles on an institution level charter. It is only by doing so that the independent character of the mass organisation can be primarily established. The

- membership of the student organisation has to be based on the support to this institution level charter.
2. In weak states, priorities will have to be determined where the student organisation is not in a position to address the students of all the institutions at the same time.
 3. The members of these units must be from amongst the students of the institution itself. The units and the other committees of the organisation must function democratically at all times and their elections should be held at regular intervals as per the provisions of the organisation. The democratic principles of organisation functioning must not be confused with the principle of democratic centralism of the Party organisation.
 4. Efforts have to be made, keeping into account the level of consciousness of the students, so that they can be made aware of the policy roots of the demands which will form the institution level charter of demands. Establishing such linkage would be the most important form of political education.
 5. It is extremely important to take into account the new offensive of imperialism and the aggressive assertion of caste/communal forces. Ideological struggles to strengthen intellectual self-reliance, ensuring social justice, equal opportunity and communal harmony has to be built into our efforts of political education of our student cadre.
 6. The prevailing reality of anarchy, violence and lawlessness is a very disturbing development. It is also affecting the academic atmosphere and paving the way for onslaughts on democratic rights. The struggle for maintaining a peaceful academic atmosphere and the need for a democratically elected students union should be integrated and vigorous campaign to realise this must be launched.
 7. Normally, student organisation should not function from the Party office.
 8. The student organisation's participation in programmes with other mass and class organisations when required and necessary has to be preceded by discussions within the student organisation and its justification should be made clear from the standpoint of the interests of the student community and the movement.
 9. Every opportunity for united action with other student organisations on the basis of a common charter which embraces the interests of the student community should be utilised. Efforts should be also made to forge united action with teachers organisation, both in schools, as well as, college and university, on issues pertaining to education.
 10. Our Party members in the student front should ensure that the leadership of the student organisation should not be with those who are over-aged and has long completed their educational life. Given the delicate age profile of the common students and their sensitivity, such question of the age of the organiser is extremely important.
 11. The student organisation must also be mindful of the social and gender balance of their committees which should be commensurate with the milieu in which they work.

12. The slogan, “study and struggle” must be aggressively propagated and practised by the leaders of the student front.

Building Party among the Students

The 18th Congress, while finalising the tasks, pointed out: “The Party should recruit more young cadres at all levels, deploy them in different parts by assigning specific tasks, monitor their performance and promote them on the basis of their efficiency.”

In the light of this task, properly organising our work in the student front, assumes crucial importance. The Party’s work towards this end involves the guidance to Party comrades working in the student front towards building an independent broad based democratic student organisation which works in keeping with the level of the consciousness of the broad student masses. The Party’s task also includes guiding the comrades in the student front to carry out Party building by recruiting students who have been effective in organising the students at the level of the mass organisations, raising their consciousness so that they can be developed to become Party members.

We have to recognise that these tasks before the Party cannot be discharged by the comrades who are working in the student front all by themselves—it is essentially a responsibility of the Party as a whole. We have already discussed the specific guidelines to be followed for a proper functioning and orientation of the student organisation. But the question is how the Party will organise itself to ensure that those guidelines are implemented? And, how the subsequent task of expanding the Party among the students who have gained useful experience through organising the students will be conducted?

In the light of the mass organisation document, the 16th Congress had formulated a very useful five point guideline for correctly orienting Party work towards mass fronts. These guidelines have been reiterated in the subsequent Party Congresses. They are extremely valid in the context of the tasks of building Party among the students. They are:

“1. Ensure the independent role of the mass organisations and their democratic functioning.

“2. The day to day work of the mass organisation must be conducted by the office bearers of the relevant elected committees.

“3. The principles and methods of Party functioning should not be imposed on the mass organisations which have their own rules and procedures. Party cadres should be educated about the correct role of Party subcommittees and fraction committees of the mass organisations.

“4. Party members working in the mass organisations are bound by the discipline of the Party and they should abide by the decisions taken in the Party forums. They should contribute to the development of the Party apart from their mass organisation work, by doing the specific political and organisational work for the Party.

“5. A regular report should be submitted to the Party committees about the work done in every mass front for building the Party and a review of the general

direction and implementation of the policies of the Party must be undertaken by the Party committees at least once a year.”

Fraction Committee Functioning

During the 18th Congress, we decided to have fraction committees instead of the student-youth sub-committees which we were having earlier. This change was necessitated by the need for greater focus on each of these fronts individually. The other question was that the sub-committees were essentially constituted by members of the relevant Party committees leading to under representation of comrades from the front itself in the decision-making process. While we have to now ensure the regular functioning of the student fraction committees at different levels, the only caution that is needed is that the absence of larger number of Party committee members should not lead to any erosion of legitimacy of the fraction committee decisions. Since important Party committee members will continue to be the in-charge of the fraction committee, the status of the fraction committee as the legitimate body to take decisions regarding the functioning of the front should not get belittled.

Generally, members of the secretariat of the student organisation committee at the respective levels and who are at the same time Party members will form fraction committees at that relevant level. Given the bigger size of the fraction committee, care has to be taken to ensure that the size does not affect regular functioning of the fraction committee. In some strong states, the size of the secretariat may be too large to constitute an effective functioning fraction committee. The Party state committees must constitute appropriate functional effective fraction committees.

At the all India level, available fraction committee members may meet in between full fraction committee meetings for interaction with the Party Centre. There are a large number of districts where the student organisation and Party members functioning in the student front exist. But despite that, no sub-committee/fraction committee exists. In such places, the relevant Party committees should take urgent initiative for forming student fraction committees. In those centres where there is no student organisation, but they happen to be important education centres, Party teams may be set-up to facilitate formation of the student organisation.

In the past, the sub-committees had their discussions and decisions largely limited to the questions of functioning of the mass organisation alone. But now the 18th Congress has decided that these fraction committees should take up the task of building the Party among the students. Of course, they will have to work in close coordination with the Party committees. But they have to also engage themselves in the work of Party building. The involvement of the fraction committee members in the direction of Party building will also help the lower level committees, particularly in weaker states, because they might find themselves short of experience in building Party among the students. If this concept is properly grasped, then Party comrades working in the student front will also become more aware of the need for Party building and the requirement of constantly improving the level of political consciousness of leading activists of the student organisation who have to be drawn into the Party.

Party Branch

All Party members of the student front have to be organised in Party branches except for those who are elected to the leading Party committees. At present, Party members working in the student front are organised either in exclusive student Party branches or mixed branches alongwith other comrades. Organising the Party members in the student branches has shown some positive results in some of the states. But this also has a limitation because once the tenure of a comrade in the student front is over, integrating them with general Party branches may pose some problems. On the other hand, Party comrades of the student front who are part of general branches will not have any fresh problem of integration once their tenure in the student front is over. But in the case of such generalised Party branches, the student Party comrades may not usually get the opportunity to discuss the issues related to their front, not to speak of the question of building Party among the students. Therefore, unless the Party committees take specific initiatives, these problems cannot be overcome. Whatever be the nature of the branch in which the student comrades are members, opportunities must be there for these comrades to discuss and take appropriate decisions for building the student organisation and the Party among the students.

Party Recruitment and Auxiliary Groups

The question of expansion of the Party among the students depends on a constant effort at new recruitment. The experience of working in the mass organisation helps our student activists and raise their level of consciousness. Only when they advance to a commensurate level of consciousness, they could be recruited in the Party. In expanding the Party and recruiting the comrades, we are functioning the auxiliary groups as intermediate structures to prepare them as full-fledged Party members. The detailed guidelines for the functioning of the auxiliary groups have been already decided. But still, the process of recruitment of leading student organisation members in the auxiliary groups are not taking place on a regular basis. Once we examine the numbers of committee members of the student organisation from the unit committee to the highest level, we will find that there is a yawning gap between the mass organisation committee members who are potential recruits for the AGs and the actual strength of the AGs. Therefore, the relevant Party committees must concretely apply these objective criteria for recruitment to the auxiliary groups from among the members of the student organisation committees. There must be proper monitoring on this count.

The Concept of Priority

While building the Party organisation and expanding the Party, the concept of priority needs to be implemented at all levels. The difficulty is that often the Party comrades leading the mass organisations are not properly communicated about such priority fixation. It is also clear that unless the concept of priority also gets incorporated in mass organisations and a correspondence between the Party's priority and the mass organisation's priority is established, neither can

expansion of the mass organisation take place nor can Party be built from among the leading activists of the mass organisation. With educational institutions being the focus of students organisation activities, this concept of priority becomes all the more necessary and relevant. The relevant Party fraction committees while drawing up their annual plan must incorporate the idea of priority and it must be integrated with the Party's overall planning.

Wholetimers

We have already referred to the tasks set out by the 18th Congress in terms of recruitment of young cadres and especially wholetimers. The fact is that in many states, leading Party comrades in the student organisation are already working as wholetimers of the student organisation. Being Party members, they are almost readymade recruits as wholetimers in the Party. But often such a need for recruiting them as full-fledged Party wholetimers are overlooked. This situation must be rectified. Closely inter-connected with the question of recruitment of wholetimers, is the issue of proper wages. In the Party we have already decided on an appropriate wage policy. This must be implemented for student comrades as well.

Conclusions and Tasks

Finally, summing up the tasks for the student front, the following guidelines must be implemented urgently for the development of the Party among the students:

1. Party student fraction committees to be formed at the state and district levels, wherever the student organisation exists. Even in those places where there is no student organisation but they happen to be important education centres with large number of students, Party committees should set-up a Party team to try and facilitate the formation of student organisation.
2. The student fraction committees must have a balanced representation of students with effective participation of the concerned Party leadership so that the authority of the Party can provide the necessary weight behind the decisions taken by the committee.
3. The student fraction committees must take up questions of Party building among the students alongwith the question of Party planning for mass organisation's expansion and development.
4. The Party committees must take care to ensure independent functioning of the mass organisation. Party leaders who are neither associated with the student organisation in the past nor are elected representatives should not participate in programmes on the platform of the student organisation.
5. There has to be a planned initiative to expand the student organisation and the Party among the students by incorporating the concept of priority.
6. The Party must guide the student organisation in drawing up appropriate programme and syllabus for political education at different levels. At the level of the student organisation, popular lectures on contemporary issues in keeping with the interests and level of consciousness of the students should be organised.

7. Recruitment of Party members and auxiliary group members has to be planned systematically. In recruiting auxiliary group members, all committee members of the student organisation are to be treated as potential recruits.
8. Recruitment of student comrades in the Party must take into account the social composition. Special attention has to be given to recruit comrades from dalit, minority, girls, tribals etc.
9. Recruitment of wholetimers from the student front should be taken up on a priority basis. In fact, many leading student comrades are functioning wholetime for the work of the student organisation. They are immediate potential candidates for recruitment as full-fledged Party wholetimers.
10. The principle of providing proper adequate wages as decided must also be implemented uniformly for the student front comrades.

The experience of the Communist movement and particularly the history of our Party suggests that the student movement and the student organisation have played a very important role in the building of the Party. A large number of leading comrades at different levels of the Party today are products of the student movement.

In the present situation, there is no way that the question of expanding the Party can be neglected. And, to do so effectively, we need vibrant and dynamic young people. That cannot be achieved without organising the Party more effectively among the students.