A paper submitted at the Asia Conference
held in Mumbai on January 19-20, 2008

Working Peoples Movement— Challenges And The Way Ahead

1. Concept Of Work Force
And Working People

The term work force expresses the number of working people in any country (also the world) who are able to earn their livelihoods with their respective families pulling on their incomes. In India, the total work force is 40 crore, with 70 crore people depending on them. This work force comprises only 3 crore of organised labour. The remaining 37 crore unorganised labour constitutes 24 crore farming community (with the majority working as independent farmers and some portion engaging in farming labour). The remaining 13 crore are involved in informal sector.

2. Concept Of Trade Union

By the term trade union is generally meant an association of the members working in a trade for the protection of their rights.

3. Origin Of Trade Union Movement

The trade union movement has been a matter of quite recent origin. It did not appear all of a sudden, but emerged as a social need when, following the rise of industrial workers in the Western Europe, particularly Great Britain, there emerged in the first quarter of the 19th century the workers struggle for better living and working conditions, necessitating the formation of some sort of workers organisation.

The working class itself erupted out of the emergence of an industrial technology, its work culture and the organisational principles. This new industrial mechanism (then comprising steam-based machine technology, its multi-sided form of work confined to one place and its organisation consisting of a number of workers doing inter-connected jobs in the work process) demanded a new set of labour relations (or industrial relations) between the workers and industrialists. Because the old type of agricultural labour relations of subordination of the serfs to the landlords (based on the animal-driven plough technology, agricultural operations spread over vast and diverse portion of land and one-man organisation tied to the land) did not meet the requirements of the new industrial technology. Consequently, the old labour relations (where the serf was tied to the land and eventually to the landlord) were replaced by the new labour relations, based on the wage connection between the worker and the industrialist on the acceptable wage.

4. Historical Development Of
Trade Union Movement

Since its inception, the trade union movement has played a positive role in the life of workers in particular and the working people in general. It has contributed in widening the human vision by uniting workers of different races, religious communities, cultural and regional groups, etc., into one union. It has greatly helped in achieving various rights for the working people, particularly the blue and the white collar workers and the unorganised labour. These rights include: workers right to unite in one union, right to strike and collective bargaining, increase in wages and salaries, reduction in the working hours, prohibition of child labour and employment of minors, maternity leave for working women, social security for working people in matters of housing facilities, sickness benefits, childcare centres, factory canteens, ventilation system, safety measures, insurance advantages, holiday homes, health centres, labour welfare schemes, etc.

Over 150 years ago, the trade unions were not regarded as legal bodies. Because, the factory owners were opposed to their formation. To get the trade union rights, the earlier workers had to wage a long struggle and make great sacrifices. And today, the trade unions are not only reorganised

by law but also accepted as a potent force in the development process. In the meanwhile, trade unionism has become a general approach of functioning and organising of all trades and occupations—involving factory and office goers, peasants, middle strata, businessmen, etc.—thus further enhancing trade union role and place in society.

Notwithstanding its numerous achievements, the trade union movement has been marked by some weaknesses as given below.

The trade unions have mainly been led and controlled by the non-working organisers (coming generally from the political parties) who have, while working for their given unions, got them affiliated to their respective party-run trade union centres. These varying centers have kept the workers divided into various political segments, treating them as their respective vote banks.

5. Present State Of Workers Movement And Challenges Facing It

Never in the entire history of labour, the workers have perhaps felt so much depressed as they are feeling today. According to the 2002-report of International Labour Organisation (ILO), the workers of the world are united in just one thing these days: "record levels of stresses". In a survey concerning stress in the workplace in five leading developed countries of the world, i.e., the US, UK, Germany, Poland, Finland, the ILO has found that levels of anxiety, burnout and depression are going out of control. Downsizing, lay-offs, mergers, short-term contracts and higher productivity demands have all exacted their toll in the last 10 years, leaving many workers frazzled and on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

The report cites a two-fold reason for this breakdown: the people find it hard to adopt to new technology and cannot keep up with constantly changing working practices.

The World Federation for Mental Health in October-2000 warned that, by 2020, stress and mental disorders will overtake road accidents, AIDS and violence as the primary cause of lost working time.

6. The Reason Underlying Workers Increasing Stress And Mental Disorders

It is obvious that ILO Report is, firstly, related to the workers' condition in the developed countries' organised sector and leaves out the far from worse situation of the workers (numbering three times more than the former) in the developing countries' organised sector. Secondly, the report does not touch the wretched lot of the workers in the world's unorganised sector.

However, despite the lack of above-mentioned needed information, the ILO report is highly revealing about the distressing position of the organised workers in the developed countries and the reasons of this distress. But, while agreeing with its first part, we basically differ with the second portion, i.e., pertaining to the cause of workers depression.

Our argument is that the quantitative and the qualitative dimension of human depression is related to human perception. If one feels that the things would get settled through one or the other available means, one's anxiety does not exceed any worrisome limit. But, when one finds no wayout of one's trouble, the anxious moments develop into a menacing spectre, haunting one all the time.

It is commonly known that the workers have encountered complex and complicated situations many a times in history, but never they had ever lost hope in their future. Throughout human social existence, they had to continuously adopt new technologies and their respective skills one after the other. Beginning with the food-gathering technology and its practice and passing through hunting, cattle-rearing, and agricultural technologies, they have always proved themselves equal to the task.

The reason underlying loss of workers confidence in their future lies in the fact that since its beginning the capitalist system did not provide any social security to workers or common people, while in all past societies—clan, tribe, feudal—the peoples confidence in their future continued as usual due to the existence and prevance of social security in the form of a joint family system.

7. Principal Cause Of Challenges Facing Workers Movement

This rests with workers and trade unions loyalty and subservience to criminal and corrupt political parties and politicians who steadfastly serve the interests of corporate business, corporate politics and

corporate system—thus surreptitiously undermining and disrupting the workers movement at all times and places. All other reasons, like workers disunity, lack of discipline etc., are of secondary importance and have little value. In brief, the main challenge facing workers movement comes from within itself with its immediate enemy sitting within the frontline of working class, while its fundamental opponent remains the existing world corporate capitalist system.

8. The Wayout

The wayout of workers ever-going distress, deprivation and misery lies in adopting the Nature-Human Centric Viewpoint's General Approach on Working Peoples Movement.

9. Basic Approach

Nature-Human Centric Viewpoint holds that capital comprises a two-sided phenomenon, i.e., the environmental resources, on the one hand, and the human resources, on the other. This is, because the environmental and human resources constitute the very life of human community, and, without them, nothing has any value in human society.

It firmly rejects the two concepts of capital, i.e, liberal (corporate) theory of capital and the Marxian theory of capital. While the liberal (corporate) theory maintains that capital is the product of four factors, i.e., technology, labour, raw material and capital, the Marxian theory considers that workers surplus value (realised by the capitalist through paying the worker less money wages than the actual value of worker's labour) represents the capital. In fact, both theories in practice hold that money or wealth and its growth denotes the capital.

This is, because both liberal and Marxian theories are in agreement that development, progress, and prosperity, whether (individual or collective), is represented by capital.

That is why, in the entire world, all government budgets, business accounts and individual incomes are accepted as the indicators of development, progress and prosperity.

The rightist practice of organising the trade unions on casteist, communal and sectarian lines makes the unions docile to the management.

10. Main Task Of Working Peoples Movement

1. The trade unions need to perform a three-sided integrated activities: (a) to enhance the workers social consciousness by raising their political, economic, legal and cultural levels; (b) to strive for the democratic functioning of the trade unions, and (c) to unite the workers on the basis of their immediate and long-range demands in conformity with the rule of one trade-one union.

2. For enhancing the workers social consciousness, it is necessary to create an adequate understanding of the workers about global social reality and its demands.

3. For democratic functioning of the trade unions, it is necessary to follow the democratic principle at all times and all levels. This also implies the adoption of legal and peaceful means to achieve every labour demand. This includes negotiations, conciliation, arbitration, and lastly strike.

11. Working Peoples Movement's
General Charter Of Demands

1. Political right to employees to contest elections.
2. To treat labour as a human capital and not as a commodity.
3. To end the subordinate position of work force to management by giving constitutional right to the people, including workers, of participation in the management/ administration.
4. Formulation of a proper government labour policy, which aims at achieving harmonious labour-capital (workforce/ management) relations by assuring equal status to workers and management.
5. Development of the capacities and capabilities of workers.
6. To demand withdrawal of government plans of developing a country's competitive equality through the route of anti-labour legislation.
7. To demand 1:5 difference of wages between the bottom and top.

12. Working Peoples Movement's
Particular Charter Of Demands

It will vary from union to union.

13. Working Peoples Movement's Work Style

a). Leadership should always remain accountable to the workers as well as the trade union movement in thought and action.

b). The workers and the management should be accountable to the people.

c). The charter of demands should be reasonable and prepared in consultation with the workers and be familiarised fully among the workers.

d). Trade union work should be carried out daily to maintain close contact with the workers and the social consciousness of the workers should be increased, while attending the trade union work.

e). Strictly uphold democratic norms in trade union functioning.

f). Patiently listen to every worker and strive to know his personal, family and office related problems.

g). Organise regular meetings of trade union"s general members.

h). Women be given due representation in trade union leadership.

i). Norms of environment promotion, equality, productivity, democracy and transparency to be observed by workers everywhere.

14. Working Peoples Movement's Organisational Task

An organisational form, stressing the need for maximum possible unity among the workers by acting on the principle of one undertaking-one union. Wherever one union is not practicable, immediate efforts should be made to unite all the existing unions into a united front on the basis of a common minimum programme.

15. Nature-Human Centric Development Model

Nature-Human Centric development model upholds two top priorities, i.e., environment and man and follows five basic principles, i.e., environmental promotion, fair equality (i.e., social security to every deprived and needy person and the rationalisation of irrational income differences in the proportion of 1:5), productivity (or growth rate), peoples-led democracy (empowerment of the people in place of corporate capital supported political parties and business circles) and all-sided transparency. This five-fold fundamental principle corresponds with the bio-social nature of humankind, i.e., it coordinates man's self-interest with his social interest.

Nature Human Centric development model represents the updated concept of development in contrast to the traditional national development models, i.e., the corporate-led and the government-directed. While the corporate-led development model singles out profitability or productivity (which ensures the interests of money-owners alone) as its sole aim, the government-directed one opts for socialisation (or nationalisation) of the means of production as its only goal (which serves the interests of ruling politicians and bureaucrats). Both these traditional national models serve only the self-interest of humankind contrary to his bio-social character, i.e., comprising both the self-interest and the social-interest. Again, they do not accord any priority to environment and any place to the upholding of democratic and transparent norms in the economic or growth process. Further, while the corporate model totally rejects the principle of equity (or social justice), the government-directed one fully ignores that of political equity or democracy.

Nature-Human Centric development model differs with both the corporate-led and the state-based development models on the issues of their purpose, management and style.

While the corporate model stands for developing the capital and capital owners and the state model advances the interests of its ruling politicians and bureaucrats plus the labour aristocracy, Nature-Human Centric one serves the interests of people and environment, in general, and the poor and deprived, in particular.

In management, while the corporate sector upholds the monopoly corporate management and control and the state sector supports the monopoly bureaucratic management and control, Nature-Human Centric development model stands for cooperative and democratic management and control of public limited companies.

In style, contrary to the authoritarian and secretive methods of corporate and state models, Nature-Human Centric development model stands for cooperative, democratic, transparent and accountable style.

Nature-Human Centric development model holds that both the corporate and the government-led development models be demonopolised by taking the following steps.

All shares in the public limited companies be made ordinary shares. No one be allowed to own more than 0.5 percent of these shares. However, the state may, in special cases, be allowed to own one-fifth of the ordinary shares. The rule of promoters shares (now prevalent in the corporate sector) be totally abrogated. Every ordinary shareholder will have one vote, irrespective of the number of his ordinary shares.

The management of the public limited companies be made fully democratic. In this respect, the ordinary shareholders be given two-third representation in the management board. The remaining one-third representation be reserved for the concerned labour of the given company. The labour representatives be elected by both the blue and the white collar workers, having the same rights as enjoyed by the representatives coming from the ordinary share holders.

The undertaking in which the government holds one-fifth of ordinary shares, the representation of ordinary shareholders and the concerned labour in the management board will be in the following order: ordinary shareholders 60 percent, labour 30 percent, government 10 percent. The management board will be elected for a period of three years.

The above-mentioned cooperative, democratic and equalitarian-egalitarian qualities of Nature-Human Centric development model will be far more productive (may be twice) in contrast to both the monopolistic corporate and the state run sectors. The reason for the former's (i.e., the democratic sector's) high growth rate (or rate of wealth production) lies in its (i.e., Nature-Human Centric model's) greatly developed human and environmental resources due to its ensuring of equitable incomes with only 1:5 difference and providing of social security to every one in all walks of life as fundamental rights; its fundamental principle holding people and environment as its main priorities; its adherence to global peace and security; its politics of peoples empowerment (particularly of women, farmers, workers and scientists-technologists) from the village to the UN level and all other economic, financial, and trading global institutions; its realistic and rational economy and its culture of human and environmental values.

As to the unviability of the government-led sector, it can be seen from the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the discarding of this model by the erstwhile socialist countries in the world. The ineffectiveness of the corporate sector can also be seen from the continuously rising graph of inequality, poverty, hunger, unemployment, houselessness, and above all, the continuing unsustainable crises (now occurring hither and then thither) of the corporate model the world over.

The increasing public demand for community (or public) control over the environmental and human issues shows the direction in which the human society is heading.

The corporate sector's newly adopted stance of the philosophy of social accountability and ethical behavior too reflects the unworkability of the corporate sector's fundamental theory of laissez faire, which despises every social consideration in the economic development process and whose sole purpose is to maximise profit.