

EIGHTH LECTURE

THE PARTY OF REVOLUTION

THE PARTY BRANCH

A party branch is the basic working unit of the party among the masses of the people. It is a *bridge* between the masses of the people and leading bodies of the party.

What is the condition of these vital links with the people? How do they function?

The Organisational Report of the 8th Congress has this to say about the branches:

“Branch functioning leaves much to be desired. Some branches do not even meet on their own. They meet when some organiser from the higher unit calls them. In this respect, town branches are generally better as they hold meetings more regularly and do their jobs effectively. In the rural areas, hardly one-fourth of the branches function. Most of the branches move when there is an important campaign or when some leading comrade from the higher unit comes.”

Functions of Branch:

The Party Constitution has laid down the functions of the primary unit of the party, namely the branch, in Article XXVI, in subclauses 3, 4, 6 & 8.

- 3) The branch shall be responsible for maintaining direct day-to-day contact with the masses and for organising party activity in its sphere.
- 4) The branch shall discuss all questions regarding its work and mass activity and take necessary practical decisions.
- 6) The function of the group (big branches may be divided into groups) shall be to distribute and check up the work of individuals. Where necessary for facilitating political

discussion in the branch, preliminary discussions may be organised in the groups.

8) Functions of the branch are:

- a) to carry out the directions of the higher committee;
- b) to win masses in its locality or sphere of activity for political and organisational decisions;
- c) to build up and participate in mass organisations in its locality or sphere of activity;
- d) sale of party journals and publications;
- e) collection of membership dues and levy and party finance;
- f) to draw in sympathisers and militants into the party and educate them and to help illiterate members to become literate;
- g) to help higher committee in day-to-day organisational and agitational work.

Multifarious are the functions of the branch. The primary unit or fortress of the party was changed into branch from cell so that it can give leadership to the locality or industry and take the initiative to lead the masses. It should keep in constant touch with the feelings and aspirations of the masses and report about it to the higher committee. The branch must evince great interest in the life of the people and organise them to solve their own problems. It should constantly carry out these tasks among the people and struggle for the fulfilment of such tasks. Only then can close relation between the masses on the one hand and the party and its leading bodies on the other be established.

With regard to the inner-life of the branch, it should have a clear idea of the history, political physiognomy, level of consciousness, strength and weakness of every one of its members and should make appropriate appraisal. It should take interest in his political aspirations and draw him in the political activities of the party.

How are we to overcome the present weaknesses of the party branch in order to fulfil such multifarious tasks with initiative?

First of all, in order to carry on varied and multifarious work simultaneously, the branch has to be divided into groups of

convenient size as provided by the Party Constitution as noted above. According to our Organisational Report, it is generally found that branches are not divided into groups at all. Formation of groups facilitates effective functioning. What are their functions?—(1) It is “to distribute and check up the work of individuals”; (2) To carry on “preliminary political discussions” for facilitating such discussions in the branch.

In this work the leadership of the branch committee is of a decisive nature. The branch secretary, who is in charge of the whole work, has to display initiative in this connection.

If branch secretaries lack training to provide leadership to the masses and party cadres at this level, branches must take the help of the higher committees to give regular training for party members through short-term schools. Branches must elect suitable cadres as proper secretaries and assistant secretaries.

Propaganda and Agitation

The party organ is the leader, agitator, propagandist and organiser and every branch should subscribe to the party organ. Branches getting party journals function better than those that do not get them. Every branch must have a branch library of party publications to help self-study and raise the political level of the cadres.

As we are all aware, generally the level of literacy among the members is so low that they learn more from the spoken word than from the book. More regular general body meetings of the area must be conducted and political reporting arranged. Those who report should take into account the digits of the members, their background and experience in the treatment of the subject. The reporting must be lively; illustrations must be vivid and living; the report must address itself to the doubts of the comrades, questions raised by members of other parties, and slanders in the press. Every member attending the reporting should be encouraged to raise questions, seek clarification. You should make sure that the general body meeting is successful, creates further interest in the member and inspires confidence in our political line.

But there is another weakness also in discussions. Party

members gather in the branch offices, go on discussing among themselves, ending up in a discussion group. Political discussion should help members to turn their faces to the people and take our policy to the people.

As the level of literacy among members is low, so it is among the masses. Agitation and propaganda by the spoken word has a very important role to play in our conditions. With Marxism-Leninism, communists ought to be the best agitators and propagandists on the political platforms. Unfortunately, it is not so today. Our agitation and propaganda leave much to be desired.

Agitation means speaking on a single issue, topical and hot, and rouse the people in support of it. But propaganda means explaining a political line, a policy or a platform or a system.

To be effective in agitation and propaganda, our comrades need certain equipment apart from the capacity of speaking from a public platform. The speaker must know the people sitting before him. What are their doubts? What is uppermost in their mind at that time? The speaker must begin with what is obsessing their mind and see that his treatment of the issue or subject supplies answers to their doubts. Since our people are accustomed to long speeches and all-night song-story narrations, the speech must be brightened by spicy stories, local anecdotes, ample parallels from our legends and epics. The best speech is one where the people do not say "Oh, his speech was wonderful!" but discuss the points of the speech heatedly and passionately as if no speech was made; the speech must not intrude between the speaker and listener. The idea must enter the listener's consciousness, acceptable or not. This must be the criterion.

For a party speaker to be equipped adequately for this purpose he should read the party pamphlets and the dailies, the big ones and the tabloid type publications of other parties. The evening edition of a tabloid paper might have screeched some sensational item and if the speaker is not aware of it and does not deal with it in his agitation that evening the people are disappointed. If one reads the editorials and columns of dailies, the generality of political doubts and questions will be covered. To make a propaganda speech without knowing what the other political parties have said on those subjects will not be satisfy-

ing to the audience. Over and above, our speakers must be well read in our legends and stories.

Party speakers will have to agitate more often than do propaganda. For campaigns, mass movements, struggles, agitational speeches are the food for the fighters as well as people. Any issue is taken up, it is attacked from all angles, everyone made to see the justice of the case. It is not a long narration, or cold argumentation but a rousing emotional appeal that has to move people to positions of determined battles.

But propaganda work is very weak in our party. As a matter of fact for years now propaganda for socialism is not done at all in the name of our immediate task of national democracy. But even our Programme, political resolution are not taken to the people from the public platform in a simple understandable way. A convincing coherent propaganda speech of our party policy is left to be done by top leaders whenever they happen to visit the place. But this will be more effective if it is done by a local speaker with a local appeal.

To do propaganda speech the party speaker has to digest his policy and handle it freely and render it for the people in a popular way. He will have to devote some thought as to how to pose the question for the given people. Mastering party literature, familiarising oneself with the literature of other political parties and thinking out and trying out popular ways of posing the question—these are the requisites for a party propagandist.

It is clear that art of political leadership consists in drawing the people into movements and enable them, through their own practice, to see the correctness of our policy. So agitation and propaganda by themselves cannot change the consciousness of the people; they aid the movement and enlighten their experience.

Lead Mass Struggles

So the branch has to lead the struggles of the masses in the given territory or factory. Struggles teach the masses more than anything else as to who is their enemy and who is their true friend. It builds the unity of the masses.

The leadership of the party to the mass struggles is often given through the mass organisations—trade union, kisan sabha, agricultural labourers' union, youth league, panchayat, cooperative, etc. Here comes the question of the proper and effective relationship between the party branch and the mass organisation. The mass organisation cannot be reduced to a subordinate subcommittee position to the branch. The independence of the mass organisation should be respected; members of various other persuasions are in the mass organisation. At the same time, it cannot declare complete independence of the party because it is the vanguard of the people. The party has to establish its authority on the mass organisation by the superiority of its ideas and energy and sacrifice and identification of its members working in that organisation. Sometimes the party on its own launches a campaign or struggles. The branch has also to do this kind of independent mass mobilisation.

The party branch or group must divide the responsibility among the individuals for various fronts. The comrade concerned should educate the branch on the problems and issues and take collective decisions. There must be regular check up on decisions taken and its implementation.

Preparation for Meeting

A branch meeting should be prepared properly. An unprepared meeting very often ends up in mere desultory discussion. Nothing is clinched in such a meeting. The help of the higher committee may be taken for the preparation. The secretary must initiate the discussions, place proposals, sum up the discussion and spell out the decisions. The members must go back with the feeling that the conclusions collectively arrived at were richer, fuller and all sided than the idea each one of them had before going to that meeting.

Proper records of branch committees should be maintained. The branch secretary should have the training to record the decisions of the meeting, not the minutes of the discussion only. Check up on the implementation of decisions is not possible, if proper record of the decisions is not kept by the branch.

Regular Written Reports

The party branch, basic unit closest to the people, is only one unit of an all-India party. The experience of the branch must be transmitted to the party. This can be done only if the branch arranges to send regular written reports of its activity to the higher committee; reports of the movement to the party journal; reports of the mass organisations to their central organisations. Very often a leader of the higher committee passing through the locality may gather oral reports and report back also orally to the higher unit. This will not do; for it does not become the knowledge of the party until it is put in black and white and becomes a party record.

Party secretaries generally find it difficult to prepare a good report of the multifarious activities. The art of reporting they can learn if they take pains to think out what all must be included in the report to give a full picture of the event or movement without requiring the author of the report to go personally to explain the details that are left out. Painstaking effort to tell the full story of what happens in your own locality and which is most real and concrete and living to you will definitely pay dividends. The failure to send reports is not so much because the branch secretary is illiterate or incapable of preparing a report, but mostly because of the lack of understanding of the importance of reporting. An experience that could otherwise become the knowledge of the party and its property is totally lost because of the failure to send the report.

What is more, mistakes never get corrected because the higher committee is not collectively seized of the activities of the branch. The branch continues the mistaken style of work so that all other mistakes continue. The branch as a whole must be enjoined to check up on the sending of reports to the higher committee.

Party circulars, letters, instructions, documents, etc. remain in the pocket or portfolio or office of the branch secretary. The practice of reading out communications from the higher committee in the general body meeting of the branch must be observed and regularised. If discussions are necessary and detail planning of the campaign is warranted, then the groups meet

and take it up. The branch committee must have discussed the circular and instructions, worked out general proposals for the locality for the implementation of same and report it to the general body meeting; for still more detailed planning, the groups take it up further.

Fractions

Every mass organisation will have a party fraction, different from the party branch of the factory. The party fraction concerns itself with giving leadership to the movement of the trade union. The fraction can call for a general body meeting of the branch and report on the particular campaign and move the whole branch on that. But the branch is concerned with other things: popularising party policy, collecting party fund, giving party education, enrolling new members, so on and so forth. It is very necessary to see that the functions of the two are not confused or mixed up or come into conflict with each other.

Panchayats and Cooperatives

With regard to panchayats and cooperatives, there is a tendency for the branch to consider that the party has no policy for those fronts and never bother to build up relations with members working in those institutions. On the other hand, the party leaders of the local panchayat and cooperatives think that the party has nothing to do with their work and they have no other party obligations other than their work as a panchayat member or director of a cooperative. Though our panchayats and cooperatives have better reputation comparatively, the fact remains that the party branch is not giving leadership to these institutions and rallying the masses behind these institutions. Party branches must discuss questions concerning panchayats and cooperatives, take collective decisions and help the comrades in those institutions to work better and in conformity with the aspirations of the masses as well as the line of the party.

Party Finance

All these proposals for the better functioning of the party branch will founder on the rock of party finance. Party

branches actively collect party fund for the elections and between two elections go to sleep. Most branches get crushed under the deadweight of loans raised during elections. Systematic collection of levy, donations from sympathisers and fund drives are not done, with catastrophic results to the branches. So this question does not require ramming home. It must become clear to us that we cannot build a mass communist party without increasing mass collections and sacrifices of PMs. The whole party has to be imbued with the understanding and led into overcoming financial difficulties by means of organising mass collections and encouraging personal sacrifices.

Recruitment

Party branches generally treat the membership enrolment and renewal of membership campaign as a formal affair. Once a year, the member is visited by the secretary or other leading members of the branch and asked to pay the rupee and his card is renewed; there is no systematic check up, and all are renewed unless the concerned member adamantly refuses to pay the one rupee asked for. The branch does not review as to who all refused to renew and why. Renewal of membership is a serious campaign of toning up of the quality and composition of the party. Formalism in this important organisational campaign is very harmful.

On the question of recruitment to the party, the dogmatic understanding of party building that is prevalent in the branches today should be consciously combated; party branches should be educated on the slogan of a mass party and wide recruitment especially from the workers and other toilers.

Annual Conference

The annual conference of the party branch is the stock-taking event of the year, assessment of the work done during the year and the drawing up of the plan for the next year. Party branches should prepare well for the annual conference, ensure the participation of the entire membership in the deliberations and draw fruitful lessons from experience and in line with the party's mass line. If branch conferences are not held

every year it will be difficult for the branch to do a proper review and do better work on the basis of check up.

Reading Material for Lectures Seven and Eight

1. *Constitution of the CPI.*
2. *Organisational Report of the CPI, 8th (Patna) Congress.*
3. *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism (Chapter on the Communist Party).*