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OF INDIA

SWAMI:

THE PEOPLE'S COMRADE

**E. BALANANDAN'S LEGACY
IN LABOR RIGHTS**

**IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE, TRUE
LEADERSHIP EMERGES NOT FROM
AUTHORITY, BUT FROM UNWAVERING
DEDICATION TO UPLIFTING THE
VOICES OF THE MANY**

In this compelling compilation, "Swami: The Peoples Comrade E. Balanandan's Legacy in Labor Rights," we journey through the transformative life of E. Balanandan, a towering figure of the working-class movement. Through heartfelt tributes from esteemed dignitaries, the book paints a vivid picture of a leader deeply committed to the empowerment of workers and the relentless pursuit of social justice. Discover how Balanandan's vision and tireless dedication shaped the trajectory of labor movements and inspired countless activists. This tribute serves as both a celebration of his extraordinary life and a source of inspiration for future generations striving for equality and dignity in the workplace.

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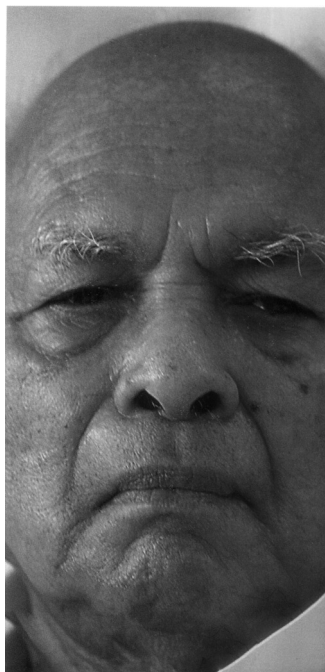
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The People's Comrade
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*O voice of labor, fierce and bold,
A beacon bright in red and gold.
From factory floors to union halls,
You stood unshaken, heard the calls*

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Preface

The period of 2024-25 stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Comrade E. Balanandan as we celebrate the centenary of his birth. This significant milestone beautifully aligns with the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI). As we gather for the 10th National Conference in Trivandrum on March 10th, 11th, and 12th, 2025, we are delighted to unveil this book—a tribute to a visionary leader whose life and work continue to resonate profoundly within the labor movement and beyond.

Comrade E. Balanandan was a luminary whose unwavering dedication to the cause of workers' rights shaped the landscape of the labor movement in India. His life was a testament to resilience, conviction, and an unyielding commitment to justice and equality. Through his strategic brilliance and inspiring leadership, he built bridges across diverse worker communities, fostering unity and solidarity in the quest for a fair and equitable society. His vision of a politically conscious and organised working class remains as pertinent and powerful today as it was during his lifetime.

This book is more than a collection of memories; it is a clarion call for action and inspiration. It seeks to ignite the passion of a new generation of cadres, urging them to embrace the transformative power of collective struggle and continue the noble fight that Comrade Balanandan championed so fervently. Through the insights woven into these pages, readers are offered a roadmap—crafted from his wisdom, the monumental battles fought under his guidance, and the victories that have paved the way for progress.

These pages are not merely a historical account but a living document that embodies his relentless spirit and visionary ideals. They call upon each of us to pledge our dedication to the principles he held dear, to strengthen our resolve in the ongoing struggle for workers' rights, and to champion the cause of social justice and equity. This publication aims to serve as a beacon of hope and guidance, inspiring action that aligns with Comrade Balanandan's legacy.

As we reflect on his monumental contributions, let us renew our vows to his ideals, ensuring that the torch of justice and equality he carried continues to illuminate our journey. This book aspires to be both an inspiration and a practical guide, empowering every reader to contribute to the creation of a society that honours the fundamental rights and dignity of every worker.

In solidarity and with deep reverence, we present this book to every worker, leader, and ally committed to the transformative power of unity and collective action. Let us pay homage to Comrade Balanandan not only through our words but through decisive action and unwavering commitment, as we steadfastly carry forward his cherished vision and relentless struggle for a better world.

Dignified Thoughts and Simple Life

By Pinarayi Vijayan

Comrade E. Balanandan was a communist who played an unparalleled role in building the working-class movement and the Communist Party in India. Balanandan demonstrated an extraordinary ability to explain matters based on Marxism-Leninism. He engaged audiences with well-researched content, presenting it in a unique style.

Despite lacking formal education, he educated himself through life's experiences. His early childhood was marked by hardship, and he had to become a casual labourer from a young age to sustain his livelihood. He joined as a worker in the aluminium factory at Elur, where he learned the basics of trade union activities. He played a key role in forming the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union and became its first General Secretary. This was the sixth trade union registered in Travancore. He was later suspended from the job for leading strikes to protect labor rights.

He then got involved in the Punnapra-Vayalar agitations and was terminated from the company, leading him to become a full-time participant in communist party activities. He became a member of the Communist Party in the Aluva cell. When CPI(M) was formed, he

served on its State Committee and was part of the Secretariat. In 1972, at the 9th Party Congress of CPI(M), he was elected to the Central Committee. In 1978, he was elected to the Politburo of the Party and served as a Politburo member for 27 years. In 1970, when CITU was formed, he became its first State General Secretary in Kerala. Later, he served as the Treasurer of CITU at the national level. He was elected President of CITU when BTR departed in 1990 and continued in that position until 2002. He played a significant role in making CITU an important organisation at the national level. Balanandan took a leading role in the working-class movement's agitations in India, forming a defence against globalisation policies. He carefully opposed both left and right deviations in the party. His stance against Naxalism and revisionism highlights this. He also played an active role as the editor of "Marxist Samvadam," a Malayalam theoretical magazine.

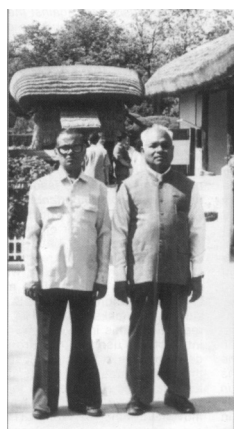
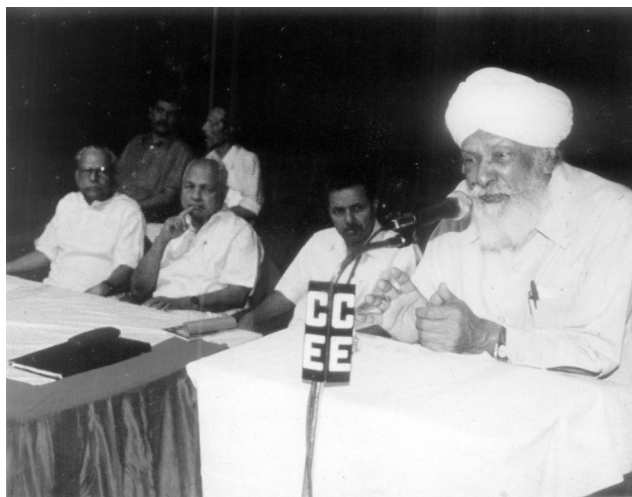
Balanandan was jailed for five years and was in hiding for four and a half years, enduring police atrocities several times. He earned the nickname "Swami" during his time in jail. He was elected to the Lok Sabha once and to the Rajya Sabha twice. He also served as the leader of CPI(M) in the Rajya Sabha. Additionally, he was a member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly once.

Balanandan was one of the prominent voices of the working-class movement in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. His role in bringing every issue of workers to the forefront in parliament was significant. He was diligent in observing and analysing every nuance and movement in the economy, always presenting issues based on these observations. Balanandan was instrumental in building the movement of electricity workers and led that organisation at the national level until his death. He was an ideal example of how collective bargaining is possible. His dignified thoughts and simplicity were his unique traits. The North Korean government awarded him the Gold Medal of Friendship in recognition of his versatile activities.

It was his style to stand firmly for what he believed was right. He was never lazy or late in providing sharp answers to criticisms from opponents. There was an incident where political adversaries challenged

the communists with some questions. Even though Balanand-an was in hiding at the time, he responded sharply to those issues without hesitation, leading to his discovery, arrest, and imprisonment.

Balanandan had a deep passion for party comrades and trade union activists, engaging with them in a heartfelt manner. His slightly humorous style of speaking left an unforgettable impression on anyone who spoke with him. He embodied simplicity. His contributions to the Indian labor movements as a valiant fighter in struggles will remain in history forever. His life serves as study material, offering numerous lessons for every student of politics on how he rose from an ordinary wage labourer to a leader of the organisation while steadfastly adhering to ideology without deviation.



Remembering Comrade E. Balanandan

By Tapan Sen

The Interlinked Challenges of Our Time.

We have to fight simultaneously both against the mounting attacks on our rights and the democratic structure, and against the communal divisive designs if we are to effectively confront the challenges of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation. All are closely inter-linked: the imperialist manoeuvres and offensives, the disastrous policies of LPG, attacks on trade union and democratic rights, and the communal divisive designs. We must have a comprehensive understanding of these issues in their entirety, and that is most important.

Personal Reflections on Comrade Balanandan

I came into personal contact with Comrade Balanandan when I started working at the CITU Centre in 1987. Prior to that, I used to see him speaking from the dais while I was in the audience at trade union meetings and conferences. There were also a few occasions of interaction with him in group discussions or question-answer sessions in seminar-type programs.

A Leader's Approachability and Wisdom

From the very initial days of working at the CITU Centre, I got to know him closely, and that was a unique experience. A soft-spoken person in the highest tier of leadership, always smiling and unfailingly patting on the back or gently pushing his finger on the chest, he used to address me and my contemporaries, and we never failed to feel the warmth of his deep comradely affection being showered on much junior comrades like us.

Encouraging Open Dialogue and Simplicity

In the meetings of the CITU Secretariat, he was always indulgent in debates and sometimes teased us if he found us not responding or reacting to any issue under discussion. I used to feel encouraged by my leader to speak out with a conscious approach to groom the junior comrades to take on the issues confronting the movement. I never felt hesitant in expressing myself frankly, even differing on certain occasions with him in the meeting, and in return, we all used to receive a patient analysis of the concerned issues from him, always with an indulgent and smiling face.

His Journey and Influence

Simplicity in approach and expression was his biggest attraction. I learned from his contemporaries and other leaders about how an electrical technician in his teens commenced the journey in the working-class movement, fighting against acute poverty and repression, and lived with and led the movement for six and a half decades. In that process, he became one of the topmost leaders from the working-class rank, leading both the working-class and the communist movements. I happened to have direct experience of only a small part of his eventful life. Probably, his way of life, full of struggle and sacrifice, with unflinching commitment to his class and class ideology, made him so simple and kept him so firm in his conviction, which attracted everybody who came into contact with him.

Illuminating Interactions

Interaction with Comrade Balanandan on any issue, either in the meeting or at times outside the meeting, had itself been always en-lightening. “Hey! You have to look into the matter with a class outlook, you see,” was a common sentence he used to utter in every interaction I experienced during my more than two-decade-long personal association with him. And while speaking, he invariably used to wave his fingers, sometimes both hands together, drawing a line or a circle in the air or signalling a direction, and that style had been integral to his forceful but intimate and convincing expression, directly touching the mind of those being addressed. That is still alive in our memory.

Guidance on Class Unity and Struggle

“The working-class outlook must guide us in all our activities,” he used to say, “and that is what should demarcate CITU from others and that is what can arm us in unifying the entire working class in common struggle despite there being extreme heterogeneity on so many things among them.” “Whenever you address, you must address the workers in general, not your own members alone, because the CITU is destined to unify the entire class, it is bound constitutionally to fight for the transformation of society, unifying the entire class. Whenever you speak or unleash a debate within the workers, focus on the issues and what is right or what is wrong and the reason therefore, but don’t start with ‘our union is always right and that union is wrong’—that will not help in bringing the workers with allegiance to different unions closer towards a common understanding, rather may create repulsion,” he used to say quite often both in meetings and informal interactions.

Emphasising Unity Across Divisions

He had always emphasised the task of unifying the entire class despite all hazards of the multiplicity of trade unions. He played an important role in shaping the CITU Centre’s initiative and intervention in broadening and consolidating the united platform of trade unions in the struggle against globalisation, both at the national and sectoral levels.

The Electricity Employees Movement

E. Balanandan’s Legacy in Labour Rights

In the electricity employees' movement, with which he was directly associated for decades together as the topmost leader of the Electricity Employees Federation of India, Comrade Balanandan played a crucial role in bringing all the unions of employees and officers of state electricity boards in most major states into joint struggle against so-called electricity sector reforms. And how could that broad unity of unions of different allegiances be achieved in the electricity sector? He articulated himself: "When we, the trade unions, oppose the power policy of the government, we are ridiculed as outmoded. And now, after the Enron revelations, after manifold increases in power tariffs, and still with no improvement in the economics of the electricity boards, muscle-flexing of the foreign power companies, etc., all are now reflecting the same views we had been ventilating from the beginning." (Concluding address to the 10th Conference of CI-TU, December 2000). That fight has still been continuing.

International Perspective and Influence

He used to follow with great interest the turn of events in the international arena and its linkage with and bearing on the developments in the country. "Capitalism is an international phenomenon, you see, and the working class is also an international class," he used to say, "and we must keep ourselves updated about the international developments and analyze their impact on the developments within." He used to share, at every available occasion, anything interesting he had come across. He would often say, "Hey, have you seen that article in Monthly Review or that study in The Economist? You will find something very interesting." I still remember, sometime in November 2000, while we were preparing for the documentation for the 10th Conference of CITU at the CITU Centre, he came there and told us, "Look, here is a nice expression about the impending capitalist crisis, that too from an American economist—we are now in the third act of a three-act play—look at the current issue of Monthly Review." In his Presidential address to the 10th Conference of CITU held in December 2000 in Hyderabad, he spoke on the same issue at length, pointing at the opportunities unfolding before the working-class movement to

unleash bitter struggle and expose the capitalist order as well.

Analysing Global Capitalism

In fact, his presidential addresses to CITU conferences and successive working committee and General Council meetings of CITU since he took over as President CITU from the Kolkata Conference in 1991 are treasures of in-depth analysis of the working of the world capitalist order, its reflections on the imperialist hegemonist strategies, and also on the response of the world community, including the working-class movement of different countries, to the onslaught of neoliberal economic policies and aggressionist hegemonism of the imperialist forces.

Warnings About Imperialist Strategies

When we are now confronting a situation where the Indian ruling polity enlists itself as a proactive partner of the strategic alliance sought to be forged by US imperialism, it is worth noting what Comrade Balanandan said back in the year 2000 in his address to the 10th Conference of CITU. He said, “In this framework, they (the US imperialists) want to rope in all the countries of the world through diplomacy, coercion, or by force. In this scheme, they give importance to India—the second biggest country in the world, next only to China... The Vajpayee government has almost fallen into the trap... The World Bank-dictated financial lever is being used to pressure India to align with US strategic objectives.” He could read the indications and trends in the strategy of US imperialism and the capitulationist inclination of the Indian ruling polity surfacing in the year 2000 itself, which has now become glaringly visible. He never failed to caution the working-class movement about its serious implications. Indeed, he played the role of a great teacher and visionary while piloting the working-class movement in the country.

Combating Communal and Divisive Forces

He most emphasised the need for preserving the unity of the class and the people in the face of attacks by communal and divisive forces. He considered the fight against divisive and communal forces inte-

gral to the class battle against capitalism and imperialism. In his own words, “We have to fight simultaneously both against the mounting attacks on our rights and the democratic structure and also against the communal divisive design if we are to effectively con-front the challenges of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation. All are closely interlinked: the imperialist manoeuvres and offen-sives, the disastrous policies of LPG, attacks on trade union and democratic rights, and the communal divisive designs. We must have a comprehensive understanding of these issues in their entirety, and that is most important.”

Organisational Vision and Concerns

Lastly, a few words about his concern and vision for organisation. “We have to broaden our base, must reach where we have not yet reached, particularly in the emerging areas, and we have to politicise our ranks and equip the organisation at all levels for these stupen-dous tasks,” he used to unfailingly repeat in all his interventions. With great interest, he used to inquire about developments in the states, particularly in weaker areas, and stressed the need for special attention in these areas. “How can you unify the trade union move-ment without a strong CITU, and how can we meet the challenge and avail the opportunity unfolding before us?” he used to ask, invaria-bly in organi-sational deliberations.

The Path Forward for CITU

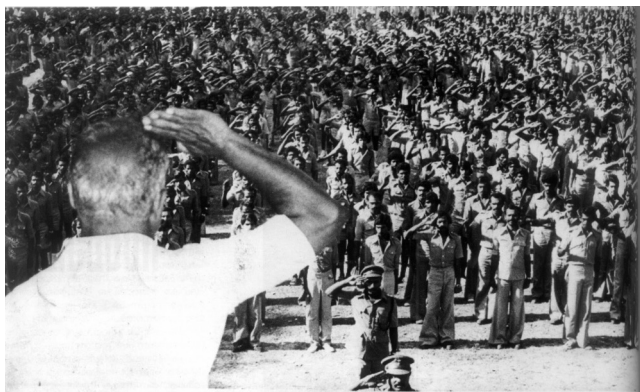
His vision and concern for a stronger organisation of CITU to meet forthcoming challenges and shoulder the tasks are best reflected in his concluding address to the 10th Conference of CITU in December 2000, which is still relevant. He said, “Yes, without unleashing ini-tia-tives at all levels from the top to the lowest end through meaningful, effective democratic functioning, creating a widest cadre base, we cannot discharge the stupendous task of intervening and widening the canvas of struggle to the broadest extent, as required, and consol-idate them in countrywide streams of actions. How do we politicise the workers without going through this process? There is no shortcut to this. If we are to discharge the tasks before us, if we are to avail the

opportunity unfolding before the working-class movement and meet the challenges, if we are to change the correlation of forces to-wards a viable alternative, and if we are not to miss the bus, we are to organise ourselves befittingly at all levels, to be able to exploit the potential and sharpen and widen the struggle of the entire toiling masses. I am sure, we will be able to do it—the future is definitely ours.”

Carrying Forward His Vision

We must organise, unify the class, widen the struggle, politicise ranks, and heighten the struggle further to elevate it from the fight against the impact and exploitation to the fight against the exploitative regime, and the struggle must go on. That was precisely his vision on the organisational-ideological task of a class organisation committed to the ideology of the working class. Carrying forward this vision and acting on the same with all seriousness and commitment is the best way of remembering a great leader like Comrade Balanandan.

As we observe the birth centenary of E. Balanandan and commemorate 40 years of EEFI's formation, a book in his memory is being published at its 10th National Conference held in Trivandrum. This publication will further immortalise his contributions and inspire future generations to continue the struggle he championed so passionately.



Swami : The People's Comrade

Militant Blue Collar

Factory Worker to President of CITU

By Swadesh Dev Roye

Comrade E. Balanandan (herein after EB) had been the legend emerged from grass root level struggles and sacrifices. His life is the tale of a militant factory worker adorned the top position of President CITU.

Different Distinct Roles

The life of Com EB can and should be discussed clustering into the different distinct Chapters of his journey starting as factory worker.

- The Kerala Chapter was the very take off point as a grass root level blue collar worker and a floor level trade union organiser eventually climbing to the height of the founder President of CITU Kerala State Committee and ultimately the National President of CITU.
- Proved his capability as a committed Communist Cadre coming from the rank of factory worker drew the attention of the then legendary of leaders of CPI (M) particularly AKG and EMS which had big bearing in his political life.
- The legislative life as MLA, MP Lok Sabha and MP Rajya Sabha.

- Life at the CPI (M) Central Office, New Delhi since early 1978.
- In the National Secretariat of CITU and ultimately occupying the pivotal position of the National President of CITU.
- President of KSEB Workers' Association
- President Electricity Employees' Federation of India.
- Next significant chapter of the life of Balanandan has been his election to the Central Committee of CPI(M) in the 9th Congress of the Party in 1972.
- In 1978 he was elected to Polit Bureau of the Party and was shifted to the CPI (M) Central Committee Office, New Delhi.

Grass Root Trade Union Organiser

As all of us know Balanandan was a blue-collar worker right from his early youth. In fact, this has been the basic trade union schooling for him. Starting as Daily rated worker, he worked in various industrial sectors and ultimately mustered electrical skills and became an Electrician.

It was surely a boon for EB that he enjoyed the distinction of organising trade unions with factory workers and got elected as leader by the fellow workers as one of them. Such trade union leader can communicate with workers at ease and more effectively and can understand the minds of workers with class instinct.

It is but natural that EB became the District Secretary of the united AITUC at a very young age. Obviously with the experience of factory level trade union work, he proved his leadership quality as the District Secretary at ease. When CITU was founded in 1970 Comrade EB was elected at the founder President of Kerala State Committee of CITU.

Member of Kerala Assembly and Member of Parliament

His legislative life began as an MLA in Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1967-1969 and again in 1970-1976. He also had the distinction

of getting elected as a Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha in 1980 and to the Rajya Sabha consecutively for twelve years from 1988 to 2000. It goes without saying that with his strong working-class background EB took up the issues of the toiling people in the Assembly and in Parliament with class conviction, courage and assertion.

Elected as National President of CITU

When Comrade Samar Mukherjee was elected as the General Secretary of CITU in 1983 in the Kanpur Conference, Comrade EB was elected as the National Treasurer of CITU. After the passing away of Comrade BTR Comrade EB was elected as the President of CITU in 1990 at the Kolkata conference and continued till 2002.

I resigned my public sector job in 1982 to become the Secretary of the Dibrugarh (Assam) District Committee of CITU and shortly after elected as one of the Secretaries of Assam State Committee. I was shifted to CITU centre, New Delhi in 1988.

So, I had the opportunity to work with Comrade EB for a long period of more than thirty years. Initially it was my easy accessibility to EB followed by closeness after he became the President of CITU and ultimately, I developed excellent repo with him after I was elected as the Working President of EEFI in 2003 at the Anpara conference. From my personal experience I can confidently say that EB's role as President of CITU shall be remembered for his working-class instinct driven devotion, class-oriented militancy and leadership with forth-rightness and farsightedness.

Guided by the legacy of Comrade BTR, EB provided the political ideological leadership to the organisation of CITU. He was deeply committed to the ideology of class struggle and firm believer of the leadership of the working class. In his addresses as President of CI-TU he always used to say CITU must act as leader of the entire toiling people. Such formulation emanates from Leninist understanding that working class not only fights for its own demands but fights for the entire toiling people.

Contribution of Balanandan in the Fight against Neo-liberalism

I am witness to the fact that without the initiative of Com EB the fight against neo-liberal policy shift announced in 1991 would have been halted after the CITU initiated nationwide strike on 26 November 1991. Other than CITU, all other Central Trade Unions including AITUC and HMS (INTUC and BMS were supporting the neo-liberal policies) and the Federations affiliated with them took a dogged stand that we have opposed with a token strike and no more. Our best persuasion could not convince them to continue the fight with more struggles and strikes.

It is at this crucial point Comrade EB took a strong stand that in view of the opposition of the other Central Trade Unions; CITU alone must carry forward the struggles against neo-liberal policies. A meeting of the Secretariat members at the CITU Centre along with some State Committee leaders were convened, discussed threadbare the situation and the proposal of EB and unanimously decided that CITU alone shall give call for another all India strike action preceded by massive countrywide campaign and agitation in preparation for the strike. It was only at the instance and insistence of Comrade EB series of booklets were written and circulated from CITU centre. The main booklet exposing the political-economic onslaught of neo-liberalisation was written by Comrade Pandhe. This booklet was translated in all the regional languages and circulated in lakhs. And there were more booklets written exposing the impact of neo-liberalisation on the core sectors of the economy. On Steel by Jibon Roy, on Railways by Kanai Banerjee, on Oil & Natural Gas and on Chemical Fertilisers by Swadesh DevRoye, on Unorganised Sector by P K Ganguly.

Significantly with the encouraging visibility of the huge response in the campaign and agitation preparing for another nationwide strike, AITUC, HMS and other Central Trade Unions got the message and proposed to sit together to decide the date for the next strike. Since time was short to conduct a strike in 1992, it was decided that the proposed strike shall be in 1993. In the meantime, it was decided to

go for a huge 'March to Parliament' on 24th November 1992. This is the background of the unforgettable historic 24 November 1992 Boat Club Rally participated by estimated ten lakhs' people. Worth recalling, with the front of that rally reached the Boat Club the backend was still in Red Fort ground. From boat club down entire Raj Path was thickly filled with people turning the entire area as a sea of people. The Government was so much shaken that rally at the boat club was permanently prohibited. No rally at Boat Club has been allowed after 24th November 1992.

From the above historical fact, we get a lesson how to steer united front tactics. The pre-requirements for compelling the class collaborationist trade unions in the track of struggle, the class-oriented forces like CITU must have the necessary political-organisational strength in the perspective of working class ideology. This strength would enable CITU to play the pivotal role and muster the decisive power to prevent the anti-struggle opportunist trade union leadership to disrupt or derail united struggles of the working class. And this is the path to achieve changes in the correlations of class forces in favour of the working class. And that was the emulative leadership quality of Comrade Balanandan.

Founder President of KSEB WA

Comrade EB's contribution to the power sector trade union movement in India is the Magna Carta in his lifelong trade union journey. With his background as a worker in electricity sector, it was obvious that he played leading role in founding the KSEB Workers' Association. It was but imperative that Comrade EB was elected the founder President of KSEB Workers' Association. Comrade EB played pivotal role in shaping the KSEB Workers' Association and sharpening the organisation to lead the struggles of the SEB workers. EB demonstrated excellent organisational skill, maturity and militancy centering the historic indefinite strike by KSEB workers at the call of the Workers' Association in 1978. The strike continued for 52 days and was called off only after Congress-CPI Government of Kerala surrendered to the valiant striking KSEB workers conceding their demands.

Founder President of EEFI

Under the leadership of Comrade EB KSEB Workers' Association along with COTEE led by D. Janakiraman (DJ) coupled with WBSE Workmen's Union led by Comrade Sukhomoy Pal played the pioneering role in founding the Electricity Employees' Federation of India in 1984. It was but natural that the founding conference was held at Trivandrum. It was rather the mute demand of the conference that Comrade EB was elected the founder President and Comrade DJ was elected founder General Secretary.

Comrade EB and Comrade DJ together led from the front the fight against the UPA and NDA Governments' policy of dismantling and privatising of SEBs. A landmark contribution of Comrade EB as President of EEFI, in close coordination with Comrade A B Bardhan, President of AIFEE, was his perspective capacity in uniting the organisations of workers, employees and engineers in the struggles against the attack on power sector.

United Front Tactics

By lunching the joint front between EEFI (CITU) and AIFEE (AI-TUC) prior to the Chandigarh conference of EEFI in April 2000, both Comrades EB and DJ deployed the masterly tactical skill of united platform of the left trade unions as a prelude to a broader platform.

The Chandigarh conference of EEFI in April 2000 deliberated and adopted the decision to launch a broadest platform of Power Sector Trade Unions and Engineers' Associations. In a joint convention at Jaipur on 30th April 2000 National Co-ordination Committee of Employees and Engineers (NCCOEE) was constituted to oppose Electricity Bill and the Ordinance. NCCOEE produced numerous well studied invaluable campaign documents rich with facts, figures and solid counter arguments and conducted massive campaign, propaganda including strike action throwing big challenge to the neo-liberal regimes of UPA and NDA led by Vajpayee and Narendra Modi.

Unity and Struggles against the Disastrous Power Policy

Beginning with 1992 Comrade EB and Comrade DJ jointly engineered a crusade scale campaign, propaganda, agitation and action against the disastrous power policy of the Government which shall be recounted as the golden period of EEFI. In order to develop powerful campaign materials exposing the disastrous power policy of the Government, Balanandan did an excellent act of bringing together many versatile power sector Experts and Economists and constituted Expert Study Groups. The Experts critically studied the policy documents of the Government and presented several reports countering the views of the Government with sound logic supported with facts and figures and people and workers-oriented recommendations.

The Expert Study Groups

The remarkable studies undertaken during the period are better traced in the National Working Group on Power Sector composed of N S Vasant, former Chairman of Punjab SEB as Chairman of the Committee, and the Members were Hiten Bhaya, Arun Ghosh former Members of Planning Commission, A N Singh M K Sambamurti, J K Bhasin, former Chairmen, the Central Electricity Authority. This Working Group presented its first document on 21.08.1996 under the caption: New Power Policy and Belied Expectation. The Report called the new power policy the Pursuit of the Ruinous Policy, ignoring all Warnings & demanded a White Paper on the power Policy. This Working Group presented another document in 1998 denouncing the Government for promulgating the Electricity Regularity Commissions Ordinance – 1998 undermining the Bill No.120 of 1997 pending with Parliament on the same subject.

The 3rd Report of the Group was presented on 2nd October 2001. It was a facts and figures based strong critique of the Electricity Bill 2001. This document drew a vivid comparative picture on the objectives and provisions of existing legislations and the objectives of the proposed legislation exposing the ulterior intention of the neoliberal Government. Some of the observations about the then proposed

legislation were: Statutory divorce between Policy, Planning and Execution and between urban and rural India; Making power available only to those who can pay for it; Private Corporate Sector to acquire the assets of the people at a throw price. Given the atrocious picture of power sector today, one can appreciate the depth, objectivity and farsightedness of Expert Group and their study reports.

There was an annexure to the Report dealing with 'The Enron Episode' revealing knee jerking facts of fleecing the country. The annexure noted, "In 1997, Enron doled out over \$850.000 in political contribution to Congress Party. In the year 2000, Enron upped the ante and gave over a million US dollars to federal and state election campaign." And there are more shocking facts of shameful surrender of the neo-liberal regimes to US big business giant at the cost of the people and sovereignty of the country. Another High Level Expert Committee was constituted by NCCOEE with Dr. Shankar Sen, former Power Minister of West, M R Srinivasan, former Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission & Member Planning Commission, Prof. Prabhat Patnaik, C P Chandrasekhar, Professors, JNU, K K Govil, former Chief Engineer, CEA, Sunil Goyal, Vice President, Organisation of Charter Accountants in SAARC countries, Sudha Mahalingam, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Policy Research.

This High-Power Committee conducted a comprehensive study on the adverse impacts of Electricity Act 2003 on all the three segments of electricity – generation, transmission and distribution; prepared an elaborate report exhaustively dealing with various destructive provisions of the Electricity Act 2003. The report of the committee was presented to the then Prime Minister on 7th December 2005 with a forwarding letter jointly signed by Comrade Balanandan and Comrade Bardhan.

Power Ministers Convened Meetings with NCCOEE

On the basis of the study groups reports very powerful massive propaganda and agitations were conducted. National and State level Conventions were conducted. March to Parliament and other forms

of agitations were carried out and an environment for strike action emerged, a notice for a 48 hours strike was served. In the meantime, the LDF Government of Kerala and also the Tamil Nadu and Himachal Chief Ministers strongly protested against the move to unbundle and corporatization of SEBs in the meeting convened by the then Power Minister Suresh Prabhu and attended by Prime Minister A B Vajpayee on 3rd March 2002.

In the face of the strike preparation then Power Minister, P. M. Sayeed invited the NCCOEE leaders for discussion on 2nd May 2005 and had to concede many demands. In his letter addressed to Comrade Balanandan and Comrade Bardhan the Minister conveyed that “Government would consider suitable steps to address the concerns regarding the provision of elimination of cross subsidies; Centre’s role in the rural electrification activities would be suitably provided through an amendment of Act. Another meeting was called by then Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinday and an agreement was signed stipulating that those states which need extension of Electricity Boards will be granted as and when the state Governments apply for it. The report prepared by the Expert Committee constituted by EEFI and submitted to the Prime Minister will be taken into account in the review process. Moreover, IIPA will discuss the matter with the leaders of NCCOEE.

Clearly the struggles, mobilisation and action could compel the Government of the time to sit with the leaders and accept certain demands and concerns. It is a different matter that the Governments backed out their commitments. Notably yielding the pressure of protest action by employees and engineers jointly Ministers inviting leaders of the movement and even entering into settlements is rare example.

The Current Challenges before Power Sector Trade Unions

With the passage of time the political and economic situation has changed for worst. Today the political dispensation in power is desperately handing over total energy assets created by the public

sector entities to private Capital favouring the monopoly capital cronies of the party in power. Today the challenges facing working class and trade union movement in power sector has distinct disastrous dimensions.

The main premise is the systemic crisis of capitalism and neo-liberalism discredited. Extreme rightwards shift in the polity and the economy both at national sphere and at international sphere. The power sector is undergoing revolutionary technological innovations. The country is witnessing galloping growth of renewable power generation capacity. The documents being presented to the conference of EEFI has elaboration and done objective analysis. However, the shine of growth and technological innovations is eclipsed by the devastation of red carpet welcome to private big businesses by the NDA Government under the grip of Oligarchy.

Path and Course of Struggles in the Changed Situation

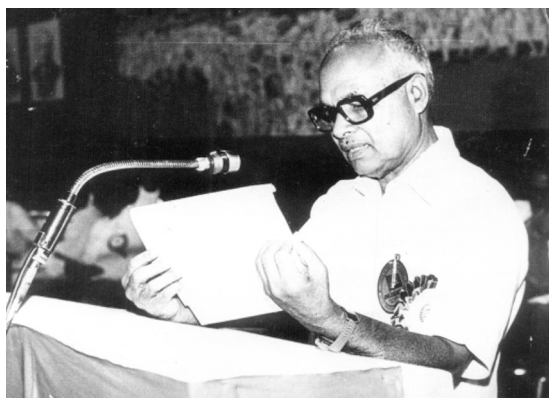
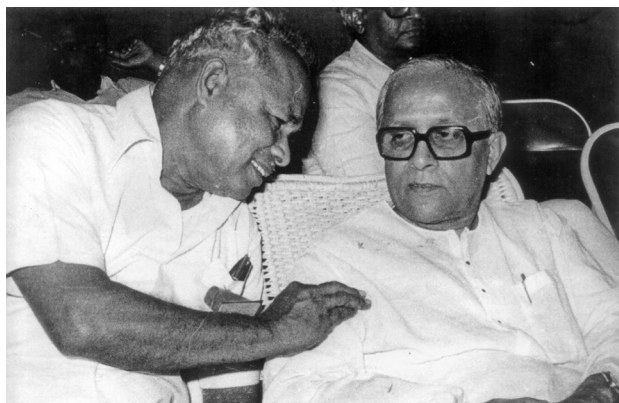
EEFI has certainly carried forward the rich legacy of unity and struggles planned and pursued by Comrade Balanandan. Erstwhile State Electricity Board Workers and Engineers under the banner of NCCOEE have earned an identity of distinction in conducting anti-privatisation struggles. A few of these struggles have become the flagship of anti privatisation struggles in India. The desperation of the Government of the day in aggressive privatisation of public assets warrants new slogan and new path of struggles. At the end of several rounds of divestment more or less 50% share of most of the profit making CPSUs in power has already been captured by market forces. Now Modi Government has been pushing various obnoxious instrumentalities of privatisation. Today privatisation is not in the old method. Current mechanism is deceptive. Government notoriously creates confusion that ownership remains in public sector. Actually the current mechanisms are more beneficial to private capital. It is ready made instant profit and more profit with no capital investment during gestation period.

Present privatisation onslaughts are in terms of Asset Monetisation, Outsourcing of various operations of CPSUs, O&M of non-fossil fuel focusing solar and wind power assigned to private sector, re-remote control of Electricity Regulatory Commissions by private business houses in power sector, power distribution sector restructured empowering private players to exploit the people with electric tariff shock. The ongoing move of continuous elimination of permanent workers and huge engagement of contract workers in permanent and perennial nature core operational jobs are also in effect an act of privatisation.

New Tactics and New Orientation to Our Struggles

In light of the complexity of the privatisation challenges today new orientation to our campaign, propaganda, agitation and militant action against these attacks has become urgent imperative. Change in tactics commensurate to change in situation is essential dialectic. Rejuvenation and revamping the organisation to meet the new challenges is certainly the priority task. Essentially the task of rejuvenation must begin with Political-ideological education of the young cadres and recruiting them into the leadership role.

Our tribute to Comrade Balanandan in his birth centenary year shall be best by implementing the resolve of EEFI to establish 2/3 Research Centres dedicated to the memory of Comrade Balanandan. These Centres must engage capable cadres to undertake studies on the complex techno-economic developments in power sector in all its segments and facets, their impacts in the energy economy and the people of the country. Based on the inputs from such studies, campaign and propaganda materials should be prepared and provide new direction to our organisation and struggles. This shall be truly emulation to what Balanandan did by organising the study groups and the struggles.



Com. E. Balanandan: A Life Devoted to the Cause of the Working People

By A. K. Padmanabhan

Early Life and Unyielding Principles

Comrade E. Balanandan's life was a saga of relentless struggle, un-yielding principles, and an unwavering commitment to the working class. Born in 1922 into a modest family in Kerala's Kollam district, Balanandan's early years were steeped in hardship. His life is a testament to the power of resilience and conviction in the pursuit of justice for the working class. Although much has been written about him, particularly during his birth centenary celebrations, there are still many facets of his life that continue to inspire.

From the Shop Floor to the Forefront of Struggle

From a young age, Balanandan faced the harsh realities of life, unable to complete his formal education due to financial constraints. This did not deter his spirit; instead, he turned to the workforce, where he experienced firsthand the exploitation of workers. This experience ignited his passion for justice and led him to join the trade union movement. Balanandan's entry into the workforce coincided with a turbulent period in India's labour history. The 1940s saw a surge in anti-colonial fervour and worker uprisings, and Balanandan, then a young aluminium factory worker, quickly emerged as a voice for the

voiceless. His first major test came as the founding General Secretary of the Indian Aluminium Company Workers Un-ion in Alupuram, where he organised against exploitative practices like arbitrary wage cuts and unsafe working conditions. Management retaliated with vindictive transfers, false criminal charges, and even physical assaults. Undeterred, Balanandan turned these persecutions into opportunities to deepen his resolve. During one imprisonment in 1948, he used his time to study Marxist literature, sharpening his ideological clarity.

The Spark That Lit a Movement: Electricity Workers Unite

His contributions to building up a powerful movement of Electricity Employees in the country will ever be remembered. Beginning as a contract worker in the Electricity Department of a factory, he became the much-respected leader of the Electricity workers in Kerala. Unifying the workers in the Electricity Board, under the banner of KSEB Workers Association, he led many struggles including the historic 52-day strike in the Electricity Board. In present-day situations, the 52-day strike may seem almost unbelievable, but with the support of the people, they could sustain the struggle. Comrade Balanandan always used to refer to Electricity as “Mother industry.” It was a usage to make the workers understand the strategic importance of the sector.

National Leadership and Unity Building

After shifting his centre of activities to the National centre, he took upon himself the task of building a powerful movement of the Electricity Employees. He was the founder president of the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI). Along with the unions affiliated to CITU, independent unions were also brought under the banner of EEFI as its affiliates.

EEFI, which was formed 40 years ago, took up the responsibility of unifying the electricity workers and Engineers all over the country. Com. Balanandan took the initiative and along with Comrade A.B. Bardhan, then president of All India Federation of Electricity Employees (AIFEE), laid the base for a countrywide united platform of all sections of electricity Employees and Engineers. The result was

the formation of the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEE) which is even now spearheading the struggles and movements against the so-called reforms in the Electricity sector. EEFI continues to be the leading contingent of this movement. The success of the struggles of Electricity Employees and Engineers in recent periods, both state-specific and national level issues, reminds us of the leading role played by Comrade Balanandan in building the movement.

A Distinguished Legislator and Leader

Com. Balanandan was one of the founders of CITU and was the first General Secretary of the Kerala state committee and a senior leader at the National level holding positions including that of President. As is well known, he was a Legislator of Kerala, Member of Lok Sabha, and also of Rajya Sabha. He distinguished himself by taking up various issues related to the working people and incessantly fighting against the anti-people policies of the ruling class.

Defining Moments: The Electricity Bill 2000

His notable battle against the Electricity Bill 2000 in the Rajya Sabha stands as a defining moment in his career. This bill was the precursor to many present-day reforms, and at that time, almost all parties, except the Left, supported it. As the leader of the CPI(M) group, he led a vigorous opposition by proposing amendments clause by clause to express his dissent against each provision he deemed harmful to national interests. His leadership during this period exemplified his commitment to defending the public good against widespread political support for neoliberal reforms.

Comrade Balanandan, alongside Comrade Jibon Roy, who was a secretary of CITU, continued the amendment process late into the night. For every clause, amendments were proposed, necessitating multiple votes in the house. At one point, the Chairman of the House asked Com. Balanandan to consolidate all the amendments, noting that each was receiving only a fixed number of votes. He refused, stating that he and his comrades wanted to record their opposition to each

and every clause they believed was against the country's inter-ests.

Championing Unity in Trade Unions

By that time, neoliberal policies were being implemented in the country, and he had assumed the presidency of CITU, succeeding Comrade B.T. Ranadive, the founder president.

Under his leadership, CITU played a crucial role in solidifying trade union unity, continuing a legacy of concerted efforts dating back to the organisation's inception in 1970. Despite the challenges posed by the neoliberal policies of the time, Balanandan's efforts fostered unity among central trade unions and independent national federations, creating a united front that persists in its advocacy today.

Philosophy of Grassroots Unity

A cornerstone of Balanandan's philosophy was the unity of trade union movements. In all his speeches and internal reports, he vocally championed that such unity must originate at the grassroots level, rather than just among leadership. He firmly believed that ordinary workers inherently grasp the spirit and importance of unity, and they play a crucial role in preventing leadership from deviating from unit-ed struggles. He emphasised that while unity is essential, the independent building of organisations is also critical. The strength of an organisation, grounded in ideological stability, empowers it to lead united movements without deviating from its goals of protecting labourers from ruling class exploitations.

Mentorship and Lasting Influence

I had the privilege of receiving his advice and guidance while I was working with the Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees (COTEE), which was a leading force in the electricity employees movement and an integral part of the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI). During this period, I witnessed firsthand Comrade Balanandan's strategic acumen and his ability to inspire and unify workers across diverse backgrounds.

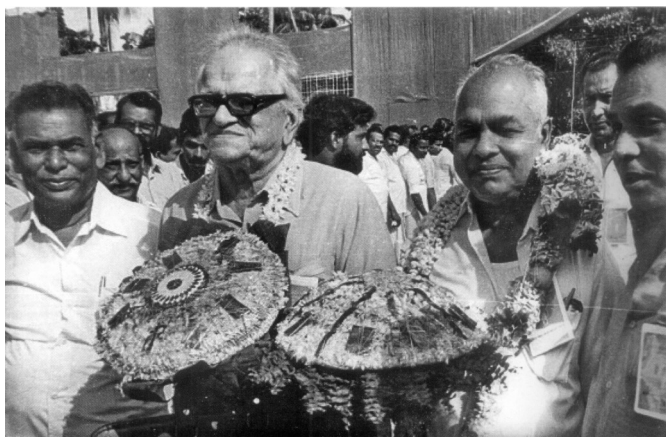
His insights were invaluable as we navigated through com-

plex challenges, particularly in organising and executing large-scale strikes and negotiations. His emphasis on grassroots unity and ideological steadfastness significantly influenced our approach, ensuring that worker solidarity remained at the forefront of our efforts. This mentorship continued beyond my time at COTEE. After 1991, when I was elected as a national secretary of CITU, Comrade Balanandan's guidance remained a cornerstone of my leadership. His unwavering commitment to the workers' cause and his profound understanding of the socio-political landscape imbued our strategies with clarity and purpose. Under his tutelage, I learned to balance grassroots activism with broader political engagements, always prioritising the rights and welfare of the working class.

Comrade Balanandan's ability to articulate complex ideological stances in a relatable manner was particularly impactful. He knew how to distil theoretical concepts into practical strategies that resonated with ordinary workers, empowering them to advocate for their rights effectively. His mentorship profoundly shaped my journey within the trade union movement, instilling values and skills that continue to guide my efforts to this day.

A Lasting Legacy of Ideology and Activism

Comrade E. Balanandan's unwavering dedication to working-class ideology and his strategic guidance in various struggles and movements have left an indelible mark on the history of labour activism in India. His life's work stands as a powerful testament to the strength and resilience required to champion the rights of workers in the face of systemic challenges. Through his leadership, he not only advanced the cause of unity among trade unions but also empowered countless individuals to advocate for justice and equality. The legacy of Comrade Balanandan will forever be etched in the annals of labour history as a beacon of hope and inspiration for future generations committed to advancing the cause of working people. His contributions serve as a guiding light for those who continue to fight against exploitation and strive for a more equitable society.



Comrade E. Balanandan: A Pillar of the Working-Class Movement & Marxist Leadership

By Prakash Karat

Comrade E Balanandan was an outstanding leader of the working class movement and he became the President of the CITU and a topmost leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). He served as a member of the Polit Bureau of the Party for a long time. E Bal-anandan had served the working class movement for over 65 years when he died on January 18, 2009. He began his journey in 1941 when, as a metal worker, he formed a trade union in his factory in Aluva. Before that, driven by poverty, he had taken itinerant jobs as a teenager. Balanandan played a notable role in building the trade union movement in Kerala. He was the first secretary of the Kerala state committee of the CITU when it was founded. Having joined the Party in 1943, he travelled the long and arduous road to emerge as a Communist leader with firm Marxist-Leninist conviction. He suffered beatings in jail and underwent the rigours of underground life.

Balanandan's life was epitomised by his work in the working-class movement. As a CITIU leader in Kerala, he was known for his stress on building united actions, for the broader unity of the working-class movement. Later in his long stretch as part of the all India CITU leadership, he constantly worked for the united actions of the work-ing

class. In his role as a legislator in the Kerala state assembly and later as a member of parliament, he used the parliamentary forums to raise working class issues persistently. Having been an electrician, he had a special affinity to the Electricity Employees Federation, of which he was the president for a long time.

It was his working class outlook which saw his revolutionary convictions being unshaken by the end of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in Russia. He was in no doubt that capitalism as an exploitative and predatory system can and must be overthrown. He never wavered in his belief that socialism is the only alternative.

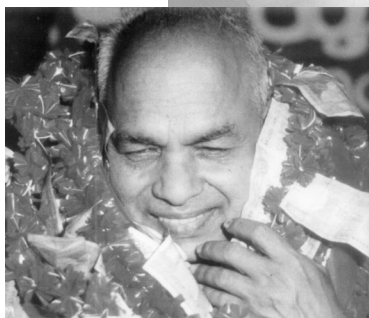
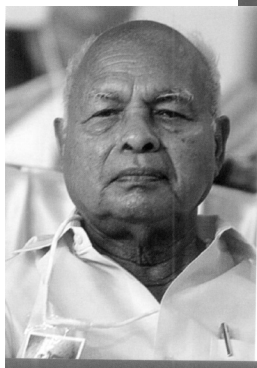
As the president of the CITU, in every speech to the general council, he would draw attention to the crisis-ridden nature of the world capitalist system and take heart from the working class resistance to the neo-liberal policies. Balanandan used the parliamentary forums effectively to voice the demands of the working class and all sections of the working people. As a member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly for two terms and as a member of the Lok Sabha and then the Rajya Sabha his behaviour and role was that of a communist leader.

Balanandan was elected to the Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) at the 10th Congress of the Party in 1978. In his quarter century of work at the Party centre, Balanandan belonged to the collective leadership which faced the ideological challenge thrown up by the setbacks to socialism in the 1989-1991 period. He stood for analysing the situation from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism. He contributed to formulating the Party's positions countering anti-Marxist ideas and efforts to dilute Marxist ideology. He did not fall prey to mere trade unionism and firmly believed in the Communist party's leading role in the working-class movement.

A remarkable lesson to be learnt from Balanandan's life as a Communist and working-class leader is how he equipped and educated himself. With little formal schooling, having dropped out at class VIII, he schooled himself through the struggles of the working

class and by self-study. His is an example of how a working-class leader emerges. Balanandan was known to all as Swami. He had the quality of endearing himself to all those who came in contact with him. His joviality and good humour made him a loveable person.

It is important for all cadres of the Communist Party and the work-ing-class movement to learn from the life and work of Balanandan. We have to emulate his many-sided qualities — his staunch belief in the revolutionary role of the working class, his uncompromising struggle against the bourgeois-landlord system and his ability to face all odds without vacillations and his unflinching faith in Marxism-Leninism.



Swami : The People's Comrade

Some Memories with great leader Comrade E.Balanandan

By Harbhajan Singh

Inception of EEFI and Comrade Balanandan's Vision. The first conference of EEFI was held in Trivandrum, Kerala, on January 13-15, 1984, marking the inception of EEFI with E. Balanandan at the helm. I was among the delegates from Punjab at that conference. It was the first time I witnessed and heard about his vision and mission regarding the power industry. During this conference, a roadmap was presented to improve salary structures, working conditions, and protect trade union rights. The plan aimed to organise and unite electricity workers across the country and collaborate with other sections of society to counter government policies detrimental to electricity employees and the weakening of the public sector.

The realisation of this roadmap owes much to Comrade E. Balanandan. He traveled to every state to organise electricity workers in their struggle. E. Balanandan played a crucial role in the formation of the NCCOEEE, bringing together various power trade unions and employee organisations to jointly oppose government policies threatening the electricity sector. The struggles undertaken to protect the public sector and the interests of employees by EEFI and NCCOEEE have only been possible because Comrade E. Balanandan and his com-

rades established a strong system for this purpose. This is his legacy, and we are committed to carrying it forward.

Organisational Support and Struggles

Comrade E. Balanandan also served as a Member of Parliament and held other responsibilities within the labor movement in the country. Despite these roles, he dedicated significant time and attention to strengthening the power movement. He frequently traveled to assist organisations associated with EEFI across states and guide the formation of a united movement. He visited Punjab many times for this work. Following his guidance, EEFI-affiliated organisations like the Technical Services Union and Ministerial Services Union took initiatives to create a Joint Platform of all Power Unions in Punjab. Initially, a forum named PSEB Employees Joint Forum was established, and now a Coordination Committee of PSEB Employees Joint Forum and EKTA Manch has been formed. Through these forums, nation-wide strikes have been successfully organised, allowing us to stage strikes of various durations for state-level demands, leading to significant achievements. This success is attributed to his personal visits to Punjab and the organisational support and guidance he provided.

I would like to share another instance of the organisational support and guidance given by Comrade E. Balanandan. In December 1987, although I don't remember the exact date, he expressed a desire to hold an extended meeting with comrades from Punjab. At that time, Punjab was experiencing severe terrorism, making it difficult to carry out democratic movement activities. Despite the challenging situation, we arranged the meeting in Jalandhar, where around 100 comrades from across Punjab participated. Comrade E. Balanandan discussed little about the organisation's activities amidst the serious situation in Punjab. We thought he would speak about the power industry, but he addressed the terrorist movement and communalism threatening national unity and attempting to divide the labor movement along religious lines. Comrade S.S. Kunar, a LIC Trade Union leader, translated his speech. He gave a clear message that comrades must fight with the spirit of sacrifice against terrorist, separatist, and

communal forces to strengthen the power movement. Following this, TSU and MSU organised a Peace March across Punjab with the slogan 'Na Hindu Raj, Na Khalistan, Jug Jug Jive Hindustan' (Neither Hindu Raj, Nor Khalistan, Long Live India). This sent a positive message to the entire population of Punjab. However, terrorists reacted negatively, ordering TSU state leadership to leave the organisation and confess their mistake at the Gurudwara Golden Temple Amritsar. Despite the threats, no leaders left the organisation or apologised. They continued their activities for electricity workers' demands and peace in Punjab, undeterred. Comrade H.S. Minhas, General Secretary of TSU, worked under security. Comrade E. Balanandan's guidance was a major contributor to these efforts. In the current communal atmosphere under BJP's rule, we need to fight with this determination as well.

Legacy and Simplicity of Comrade Balanandan

The fourth conference of EEFI was held in Chandigarh from April 7-9, 2000. The electricity workers of Punjab were responsible for organising the entire conference. During this time, I and other comrades from Punjab had the opportunity to closely interact with Comrade E. Balanandan. At that time, under the economic liberalisation policy of 1991 and before the passing of the Electricity Act 2003, the Central Government introduced the Electricity Amendment Bill 2000 to unbundle the State Electricity Board and privatise generation, distribution, and transmission. This policy would have negatively impacted electricity employees' salaries, working conditions, and employment. The government started implementing this policy even without passing the Electricity Act. Issues like the contractual system, temporary jobs, and low wages were also significant concerns before the conference. All such issues were discussed at the fourth conference, and it was decided to expand and strengthen EEFI and NCCOEEE for a massive fight on these issues. In this conference, we became familiar with Comrade E. Balanandan. He interacted personally with almost all the prominent leaders from Punjab, including Comrades H.S. Minhas, Raghbir Singh, Amarjit Singh Sodhi,

Joginder Singh Jindu, Ranjit Singh, Harbhajan Singh, Kuldeep Singh, Dev Raj, and Kewal Krishan. My duty at this conference was to organise the press conference and cultural program. I observed Comrade E. Balanandan preparing and presenting every issue with great clarity, leaving no room for confusion.

Comrade E. Balanandan's lifestyle was extremely simple. In 2008, an EEFI meeting was held in Kochi, Kerala, but Comrade E. Balanandan could not attend due to health issues. Comrades B.S. Meel, G. Secretary EEFI, Amarjit Singh Sodhi, Ranjit Singh, Kewal Krishan, and others, including myself, visited his home to inquire about his health. We were surprised to find an ordinary, small two-room house in a modest neighbourhood in Aluva, Kochi. Despite being a long-serving Member of Parliament, there were no servants in his house. His wife maintained the household herself and served us tea with her own hands. Comrade E. Balanandan was delighted to see us, and we cherish that moment. Whenever I look at the album from that conference, and the photograph of him addressing the gathering, Comrade E. Balanandan seems to instil in us a renewed zeal to work. After this conference, I had the opportunity to work continuously with him. I served as the Secretary of EEFI and currently contribute to CPI(M)'s monthly organ, LOK LEHAR. It feels as if I am still working alongside Comrade E. Balanandan.



Honouring Comrade E. Balanandan: A Pillar of Hope and Resistance

By Elamaram Karim

In the current global and national climate, characterised by economic instability, geopolitical tensions, and growing authoritarianism, the legacy of Comrade E. Balanandan shines brightly as a source of hope and a guide for transformative resistance. As India faces its challenges with the NDA in power for a third term, the need for strategic resistance, innovative policy-making, and upholding democratic principles is more pressing than ever. Comrade Balanandan's life and contributions continue to inspire movements for equitable growth and social justice across the nation.

Comrade E. Balanandan: Architect of Worker Solidarity and Visionary Leader

Comrade E. Balanandan stood as a formidable figure in the landscape of Indian labor and political activism, known for his unparalleled contributions to advancing worker rights and strengthening the communist movement across the nation. Emerging from humble beginnings, his early life was a testament to his tenacity and drive for justice. Born into circumstances that demanded resilience, Balanandan honed his skills and knowledge through close observation and participation in the daily struggles of working individuals.

His introduction to organised labor began in the industrial heart of Kerala, where he became actively involved in union activities. This involvement laid the groundwork for his future as a pioneering leader who understood both the plight and the potential of the working class. Notably, his leadership in the movement to organise labourers led to the creation of one of Kerala's first formal trade unions. His role in this historic endeavour highlighted his commitment to empowering workers and his ability to navigate the complexities of labor rights advocacy.

Balanandan's induction into the Communist Party was fuelled by his passionate belief in collective action as a vehicle for societal change. Through the Aluva cell, he engaged with political ideologies that would shape his career, eventually rising to a prominent position within the CPI(M). His tenure as a Politburo member for nearly three decades exemplified his strategic vision and his steadfast dedication to the principles of communism.

A pivotal chapter in his life was his instrumental role in strengthening the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). As its inaugural State General Secretary in Kerala, followed by his service as national Treasurer and President, Balanandan's leadership was crucial in transforming CITU into a powerhouse for worker representation. His strategic insight and relentless advocacy underscored his lifelong mission to fortify worker empowerment and promote equitable labor policies.

Opposing Neoliberal and Authoritarian Pressures

During a time when economic inequality and labor exploitation were rampant, Comrade Balanandan's steadfast opposition to globalisation and neoliberal reforms was impactful. His advocacy extended beyond immediate worker benefits to safeguarding the dignity and future of the working class. By opposing both leftist and rightist deviations, including Naxalism and revisionism, he kept the movement focused and united. His editorial contributions to "Marxist Samvadham" reflected his commitment to ideological clarity and public education, solidifying his status as a thought leader.

As the NDA government pushes for labor codes and privatisation via the National Monetisation Pipeline, Balanandan's call for a united front against such policies remains vital. His vision of community-based worker organisation and collective action serves as a guide for current movements resisting the corporate-communal nexus. By advocating grassroots mobilisation, he anticipated the power of local movements in addressing systemic injustices and fostering societal change.

A Legacy of Commitment and Bravery

Balanandan's leadership was defined by his unwavering dedication to justice and his inspirational ability to rally others. His bravery in facing political challenges, even while in hiding, exemplified his dedication to worker rights and socialism. Despite facing imprisonment and police brutality, he persevered, earning the nickname "Swami" for his resilience and intellectual depth, which characterised his activist and leadership style. His tenure in parliament as an advocate for the working class and his efforts in strengthening the electricity workers' movement highlight his lasting impact on India's socio-political environment. Internationally recognised for his contributions, Balanandan was awarded the Gold Medal of Friendship by North Korea, acknowledging his championing of universal values.

Guidance for Future Activism

In today's context of communal tensions and widening economic disparities, Comrade Balanandan's life offers critical lessons. His commitment to collective bargaining, community-based resistance, and ideological steadfastness continues to inspire new generations of activists. The current socio-political climate demands a commitment to building an equitable society where every voice is valued. By channeling the growing public consciousness and resistance into organised movements, we honour Balanandan's legacy and strive for a future that prioritises equity and justice. Reflecting on Comrade E. Balanandan's legacy reinforces our resolve to dismantle oppressive systems and create a society where every voice matters. His contributions to the

labor movement and his firm stance for democratic principles will be remembered as a testament to the power of collective action. His life provides a blueprint for addressing today's challenges, advocating systemic change while upholding solidarity and inclusivity.

Charting a Path Through Today's Challenges

In light of India's current economic and political hurdles, the strategies envisioned by Comrade Balanandan are more pertinent than ever. The deepening socio-economic disparities require a cohesive and strategic response. Just as Balanandan resisted globalisation and prioritised workers' rights, contemporary movements must focus on equitable policies that address the roots of inequality and empower the marginalised. The rise of authoritarian governance and communal tensions further underscores the need for robust democratic frameworks and inclusive politics—principles that Balanandan championed. Building alliances across communities and strengthening grassroots organisations can form a resilient front against oppressive regimes, advocating for societal justice.

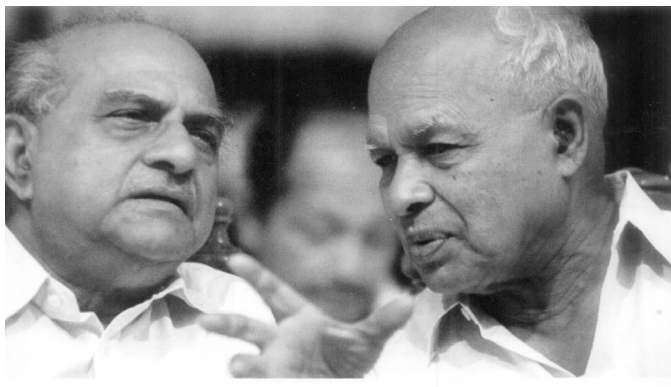
Strategies for Mobilization and Change

Comrade Balanandan's focus on grassroots mobilization and empowering marginalized communities is especially relevant now. He championed collective action and community-based resistance as tools for dismantling systemic injustices. By organizing in residential areas and promoting long-term socio-cultural initiatives, he laid the foundation for enduring movements capable of enacting significant change, aiming not just to react but to build a foundation for equity. With increasing privatization efforts and labor reforms, there is a pressing need to reinforce solidarity among workers across sectors. Balanandan's call to unite diverse groups like agricultural workers, peasants, and urban labourers highlights the power of intersectional alliances in challenging corporate and communal agendas. Moving beyond solidarity to engage in tangible actions on local issues can consolidate the working class's power.

The Enduring Spirit of Resistance

Comrade Balanandan's legacy is not just a reflection of past accomplishments but a call to action for future generations. His life serves as a poignant reminder that the struggle for social justice and equality requires ongoing dedication, courage, and innovation. By upholding his principles and strategies, we can strive to create a world that honours the dignity and potential of all individuals.

In conclusion, Comrade E. Balanandan represents the enduring power of organised resistance and the transformative potential of solidarity. His vision for a society free from exploitation and inequality continues to inspire and guide our efforts towards a more equitable future. As we confront today's challenges, we do so with the belief that, like Balanandan, we have the power to enact meaningful change through unity, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to justice.



Comrade E. Balanandan

By Dr. Hemalatha

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has decided to observe the birth centenary of Comrade E. Balanandan, a founding leader and former president of CITU, and a stalwart of the working-class movement in our country, during 2024-25.

Balanandan was an exemplary leader of CITU who educated cadres more through his actions than through his words. His simple lifestyle, easy accessibility, and childlike smile endeared him to everyone. Throughout his life, he was a steadfast communist, committed to the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideology and class struggle.

Balanandan served as the president of CITU in 1991 when neo-liberal policies were officially introduced in India. He played a crucial role in ensuring a proper understanding within the organisation of the adverse impacts of these policies on the masses of workers, and in initiating joint struggles against them, even when several central trade unions had misconceptions about the benefits of neoliberalism. His role in organising electricity employees, the formation of EEFI, and his personal guidance in leading a unified movement of electricity employees is well known.

Although I did not have the opportunity to work closely with him, I always remember an incident that illustrates his readiness to help ca-dres develop the organisation, particularly among the unorganised and poorer sections of the working class.

In united Andhra Pradesh, CITU formed a state-level union of beedi workers, and I was given the responsibility of general secretary of the state committee. While attending a meeting of the All India Working Committee of CITU, he inquired about my work and showed interest when I mentioned that I was working among the beedi workers. During that conversation, I discussed developing ca-dres among the beedi workers and our plan to organise trade union classes for them. I asked if he could help me with this. He immediately agreed to attend a class. At that time, he was not only the president of CITU but also a member of the Rajya Sabha and the leader of CPI (M) in Parliament! He traveled all the way to Warangal, where around 30-35 activists of the beedi workers' union had gathered for the class. He told me that it was the day a session of Parliament started, and he was supposed to be in Delhi attending Parliament. I cannot imagine anyone else in that position skipping Parliament to attend a class for such a small group of beedi workers' union activists. That was the importance he gave to cadre development.

Balanandan was also instrumental in my joining the CITU centre. Along with Dev Roye, the national secretary of CITU, he attended the third conference of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH) held in 1998 in Bhopal. I was the general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union and also one of the national secretaries of AIFAWH. During the conference, there was a proposal from the CITU centre for me to take up the responsibility of general secretary of AIFAWH. I was quite hesitant, particularly because I was not expecting it and had not discussed it with the CITU state leadership. Besides, I had responsibilities in the state, including being one of the state secretaries of CITU. But Balanandan insisted and said that he would discuss and convince the state leadership. Ultimately, I had to agree, and later that year, I

moved to Delhi to join the CITU centre.

Born into a poor working-class family, Balanandan did not have the opportunity to pursue his studies. He had to start working at a very early age to earn and support his family. However, wherever he worked, he took up the issues of workers and organised them, despite being victimised and dismissed from jobs several times due to his trade union activities.

Despite not having the opportunity for higher education, Balanandan studied Marxism-Leninism and applied it in organising the working class and mobilising them in the struggle against capitalist exploitation. He dreamed of an exploitation-free socialist society and, until his end, strived for the achievement of such a society through class struggle.

It is fitting that CITU has decided to observe 2024-25, the birth centenary of Balanandan, by focusing on trade union education and cadre development. While several state committees and federations of CITU have conducted classes on this occasion, these efforts need to be extended further to the grassroots level.



Reflections on Comrade E. Balanandan: A Legacy of Clarity & Unity

By Dr. M G Suresh Kumar

Development and Environment

During my college years, I was deeply involved with Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad and actively participated in various environmental conservation movements. Studying in Palakkad placed me at the heart of the heated debates surrounding the Silent Valley issue, a pivotal environmental concern of that era. The names of Comrades E. Balanandan, K.O. Habeeb, and others were familiar to us, as we often engaged in formulating counter-narratives to their arguments supporting the Silent Valley hydroelectric project. At that time, I often pondered why trade union leaders so passionately advocated for large-scale projects that seemed environmentally destructive.

Initially, my impression of Balanandan was that of a politician and trade unionist endorsing environmentally damaging projects. However, as I immersed myself in reading and listening to Balanandan and his contemporaries while critically evaluating their positions, I began to realise that my initial arguments had their own set of flaws. It became evident that viewing environmental issues through a broader lens was imperative. We consistently argued that all creatures of nature have the right to coexist, and the planet is not solely for human

use. Yet, in our steadfast advocacy for ecological conservation, we often overlooked that humans, too, deserve to live with dignity. While developed nations exploit natural resources with little regard—resulting in per capita carbon footprints significantly higher than India's—people in India and other developing countries struggle to survive and seek education, employment, and dignity.

Utilising natural resources becomes a necessity, with the vital need to ensure ecological balance to avoid disastrous consequences. Our push for eco-conservation sometimes veered into conservatism, ignoring that change is inherent in nature. Ecosystems are dynamic; managing their dynamics in the context of social development is crucial. A dam, for instance, becomes an ecological unit, providing habitat and resources during dry spells while also supporting human needs like electricity, irrigation, and drinking water. It fosters new equilibria in flora and fauna. Conducting thorough ecological impact assessments and implementing mitigation measures are vital. This balanced perspective, championed by trade unions from their deep understanding of social realities, taught me to continually follow leaders like Balanandan. Their insights on human development resonate profoundly, shaping my and my peers' engagements with socio-environmental issues.

KSEB Officers Association

When I began my journey with the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) in 1998, I also became a member of the KSEB Officers Association. By 1999, I had advanced to become a central committee member of the association. Around this time, discussions were underway about affiliating the Officers Association with the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI). This sparked debates among us, given that EEFI was primarily a trade union federation, raising questions about the appropriateness of an officers association joining its ranks.

I vividly recall a pivotal meeting where a group of us from the Officers Association visited Comrade E. Balanandan in Trivandrum. During this visit, the internal controversies within our organisation

inevitably surfaced. In response, Balanandan posed a thought-provoking question: “Who is a worker?” He elaborated that a worker is anyone who earns their livelihood by selling their labor power. This labor power, he explained, could be either physical or intellectual. Essentially, anyone relying on their working capacity to earn a living is a labourer at heart. It became clear that the Officers Association, in many ways, functions as a trade union, despite the restrictions imposed by service rules which prevent KSEB officers from formally joining a trade union. This very restriction necessitated the formation of the Officers Association as a distinct entity, separate from general trade unions. Nevertheless, the Officers Association eventually affiliated with the EEFI, and it now plays a leading role in elevating the organisation to greater heights.

Anpara Conference of EEFI

The 5th national conference of the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI) was held from August 30 to September 1, 2003, in Anpara, Uttar Pradesh. This was the first EEFI conference I had the privilege of attending. At that time, Comrade Balanandan served as the president of EEFI, a position he held since the federation’s inception in 1984. He was re-elected as president during the Anpara conference. The conference took place shortly after the enactment of the Electricity Act 2003 in June of the same year. The primary focus of our discussions revolved around this Act and its far-reaching implications. The Act proposed major changes, including the unbundling of Electricity Boards and the introduction of trading as a functional operation in the electricity sector. It also sought to de-license electricity generation to attract private investment. These topics sparked extensive debate and analysis throughout the conference.

Comrade Balanandan reiterated the significance of a united struggle under the platform of the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEEE), which he had helped establish. He emphasised the dual importance of building EEFI’s independent strength while also engaging in united strug-

gles. Bal-anandan was vocal about the necessity of collective action to mobi-lise all worker sections, while also recognising that independent struggles were essential to ensure the joint movement remained aligned with workers' rights. He cautioned that without independent initiatives, there would be a tendency for other unions to drift from their goals under the influence of capitalist forces.

Comrade Balanandan's Lasting Impact

What captivated me about Comrade Balanandan's speeches was their unique quality. Known for his soft-spoken demeanour, he effectively emphasised key points through subtle yet powerful inflections. Listening to his speech without seeing him might not convey the full spirit of his message, as he often completed sentences with expressions and gestures rather than words alone. This combination of verbal and non-verbal communication delivered his message with striking clarity. Attending Balanandan's speeches was not just an auditory experience but also a visual one. To truly appreciate his oratory, one had to focus intently on him, absorbing both his words and his expressive delivery. His speeches offered a holistic experience that communicated his message compellingly.

I had the opportunity to visit Comrade Balanandan at his office in BTR Bhavan, New Delhi, on several occasions. I often found him seated behind a desk cluttered with books, papers, and files stacked haphazardly. Despite the apparent disarray, he possessed an uncanny ability to locate any document relevant to the subject at hand, whether it was a government order, old meeting minutes, or a book, with remarkable ease and without delay. Once, I offered to help organise the materials into a more orderly fashion. He declined, explaining that he had a mental map of where each document was located within the chaos. He humorously added that imposing order might actually hinder his ability to find things when needed. This interaction highlighted not only Balanandan's formidable memory and organisational skills but also his unique method of managing information effectively within his own system.

Though Comrade Balanandan is no longer with us, his teachings, memories, and organisational style continue to guide us. Today, the central government is pushing through numerous so-called reforms under the banners of consumer choice, Make in India, and combat-ing global warming. However, these measures often serve the inter-ests of capitalist groups, driven by profit motives. As India aligns closely with imperialist powers like the United States, our national dignity seems compromised. Despite the government's rhetoric on national pride, Indian citizens are being handcuffed and sent back to India as illegal immigrants, without any strong governmental re-sponse. Meanwhile, there is an effort to promote religious national-ism, aiming to divide the united struggles of workers and farmers along religious and communal lines. In these challenging times, the spirit and principles imparted to us by Balanandan are crucial. His legacy inspires us to persevere in our struggles, uniting workers and farmers to resist divisive tactics and uphold the dignity and rights of the working class.

Power Sector Reforms and Their Risky Consequences

By E Balanandan

Electricity is fundamental to countless essential activities in daily life. However, improper management can lead to significant risks. Unfortunately, authorities at both the central and certain state levels sometimes fail to manage the power sector with the required diligence. This negligence can result in severe consequences, compromising reliability, safety, and overall efficiency.

Access to electricity is crucial for a decent quality of life and economic progress. The focus should be on ensuring an adequate and affordable electricity supply as quickly as possible. In a nation of over a billion people like India, achieving this requires a strategic and efficient approach. The Central and State Governments are tasked with developing the necessary infrastructure and policies to achieve this goal. India is endowed with abundant energy resources, including water, coal, lignite, and natural gas, which can be effectively harnessed to meet the country's growing energy needs.

India has developed the capability to build nuclear power plants and manufacture world-class power equipment, making them cost-competitive in the global market. Beyond technological

advancements, India boasts a highly skilled workforce, including experienced engineers and technicians—valuable assets in the energy sector. If managed with precision and strategic planning, achieving the national goal of ‘Electricity for All’ is well within reach. Reliable and affordable electricity can be made available to all. However, a lack of political will has hindered progress, undermining this goal. Our early planning experts understood that rapid electricity development was essential for a self-reliant development model. They established robust institutional and legal frameworks, leading to the creation of the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), Regional Electricity Boards, and State Electricity Boards (SEBs). Despite criticisms, their contribution to national development remains significant.

India’s energy sector has achieved an annual growth rate of up to 7%, enabling electricity to be provided to farmers at some of the lowest rates—often even free—thereby supporting the Green Revolution and ensuring food self-sufficiency. This access to affordable power has also played a crucial role in establishing India as an industrially self-reliant nation within developing countries. While there were shortcomings in various areas, the overall scenario remained largely positive until 1991.

New Path of Reforms

In 1991, India embarked on a new path of economic reforms under the guidance of the World Bank and the IMF, marking a fundamental shift in policy. Central to their recommendations was the privatisation of the power sector. Facing severe economic challenges, then-Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao accepted these conditions to stabilise the country’s financial situation. Rather than analysing these policies in detail or their far-reaching consequences, I will focus on their direct impact on the common man.

The Government of India introduced a new policy to attract private investment in the power sector while reducing public sector involvement. To incentivise private entrepreneurs, both domestic and foreign investors were assured a 16% return on equity, and the

depreciation rate was raised from 3.5% to 8%. Additionally, several other financial incentives were offered to encourage private participation. As a result, many private companies signed MoUs with the government. However, a significant number failed to secure the necessary funds for investment and eventually withdrew from the sector. One notable case was the Dabhol Power Project (1,440 MW), for which Enron Corporation had initiated discussions with the Narsimha Rao government. Due to certain technical hurdles, an agreement was not reached. However, during its 13-day tenure, the Vajpayee government granted Enron the necessary approval.

I won't delve into Enron's story in detail, as it is well known. The Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB), which generated power at ₹2 per unit, was forced to purchase electricity from Enron at a rate of ₹6 to ₹7 per unit. However, with consumers unwilling to bear such high costs, demand plummeted, leading to the shutdown of the Dabhol power plant—a closure that remains in effect to this day. Enron, once the world's most powerful multinational in the energy sector, collapsed abruptly, sending shockwaves through the global capitalist system. Its downfall was driven by an unprecedented accounting fraud, in which financial statements were manipulated to deceive shareholders. A corporation that entered the market with immense fanfare ultimately met a spectacular and catastrophic end.

The privatisation of the power sector in Odisha also ended in failure. Experience has shown that these reforms were entirely unsuccessful. A committee appointed to evaluate the performance of private players identified severe setbacks across multiple areas. Rural electrification was completely disrupted, arrear collections did not improve, power theft surged, and transmission losses remained unchecked. Most alarmingly, electricity prices soared by 367%. Private distribution companies were unable to pay the price of the electricity they purchased from the public sector entity, Gridco, further exacerbating the crisis. The reforms failed on every front, forcing some private players to abruptly exit Odisha. Now, the review committee has recommended an additional infusion of ₹3,240 crore to salvage the

reform process.

The recent privatisation of the Delhi Electricity Board has drawn in-tense criticism. Under the agreement, private distribution companies purchase electricity from the public sector entity, Transco, at ₹1.32 per unit but sell it to consumers at an average rate of ₹4.16 per unit. Meanwhile, the public water authority is charged ₹6.52 per unit, and municipal corporations pay ₹6.92 per unit for street lighting. The basis for these rate calculations remains unclear, yet privatisation has imposed an unbearable financial burden on Delhi's residents.

Under pressure from the central government, states are implementing one reform after another, leading to unbearably high electricity tariffs. Industrial electricity tariffs in India, once below international standards, have now reached high levels. Consequently, new investments have stalled in the industrial sector, especially in manufacturing. Even Indian industrialists, traditionally known for their patriotism, are increasingly establishing new ventures abroad, where electricity tariffs are significantly lower.

The power sector reforms have led to rising electricity tariffs for agricultural use across all states. This, in turn, threatens food self-sufficiency and pushes farmers into financial distress. Ultimately, such policies risk undermining the very foundation of the nation's stability and prosperity.

Energy Sector

Let's assess the state of India's power sector using the Planning Commission's data. As of March 2002, India's installed power capacity stood at 149,017.1 MW with the following breakdown:

- Hydropower: 25.03%
- Thermal power (coal): 59.22%
- Gas power: 10.64%
- Nuclear power: 2.25%
- Diesel and wind power: Remaining share

During the Eighth Plan, the target for increasing installed capacity was 30,538 MW, but only 16,422 MW (53%) was achieved. The Ninth Plan set a higher target of 40,245 MW, yet the actual addition was just 19,015.1 MW—less than half. The primary reason for this shortfall was the private sector's failure to meet its commitments in both plans, resulting in a 50% gap in installed capacity. For the Tenth Plan, the target is set at 46,939 MW. However, despite previous shortcomings, a significant portion of this expansion has once again been entrusted to the private sector. As of March 2002, India faces a 7.5% overall electricity deficit, with an even higher 12.6% shortfall during peak evening hours.

Over the past Jupiter cycle, the average electricity price in India has risen from 108.8 paise per unit (1990–91) to 350 paise per unit (2001–02). The Planning Commission highlights that India has the highest electricity tariffs for industrial and commercial use among developing countries. Furthermore, frequent load shedding by several electricity boards has forced industries to install their own generators, resulting in a decline in industrial electricity consumption during this period.

Renowned economist Ashok Desai, in an article published in *Business Standard* on October 8, highlighted how high electricity costs are driving industries to relocate abroad. For instance, Tata sources iron ore from India but processes it in South Africa, where electricity costs are lower. This trend extends beyond Tata, as major industrialists are increasingly hesitant to set up new enterprises in India. The same applies to international investors, further exacerbating the issue. This alarming situation signals a shift away from industrialization in India.

Kerala's experience serves as a clear example. The rising electricity rates have pushed many industries in the Kochi industrial area into crisis, forcing several to shut down. Now, consider the figures from the Central Electricity Authority on per capita electricity consumption. In 1996–97, it was 334 units. In 2002, it may have been 350 units—still one of the lowest in the world. The average for developing countries is 757 units, with China at 746 units. In developed nations, per capita

consumption ranges from 6,897 units at the lower end to 8,675 units at the top, while the global average is 2,074 units. These figures speak for themselves—India's per capita electricity consumption is just half that of China, highlighting the country's economic backwardness and the continued lack of electricity access for the majority of its population.

Conclusion

It has been proven beyond doubt that the electricity law currently being implemented is not conducive to the progress of our country. The increasing privatization of the power sector has contributed to a serious power crisis in India. While this note does not provide a detailed alternative policy, I would like to offer a suggestion. The power sector should be kept mainly in the public domain. Electricity should be made available to everyone within the shortest possible period. Priority should be given to the development of the agro-industrial sector. The agricultural sector receives significant subsidies worldwide, including in developed countries. High subsidies to the agricultural sector should continue with the aim of food self-sufficiency in the country. Electricity tariffs for industry should also be adjusted to suit industrial development. Electricity should be made accessible in even the most remote parts of the country. The electricity generation, transmission, and distribution system should be designed to minimize reliance on petroleum fuels while achieving these objectives at the lowest possible cost. Private sector participation should be considered only if tariff structures remain viable and fair.

The current share of hydropower in electricity generation needs to be revised. Hydropower should account for at least 40% of total electricity generation. China serves as a strong example—its ability to provide electricity at relatively low rates is largely due to its heavy reliance on hydropower.

It has been unequivocally proven that the current electricity act is not conducive to the country's progress. The path of privatization has pushed India into a severe power crisis. Both national and inter-

na-tional experiences have demonstrated that privatizing the power sector does not safeguard public interests. This sector has unique characteristics—electricity cannot be stored, and consumption must always match production. Private producers, driven by profit maximization, often conflict with consumer interests, which go beyond just securing the lowest rates. Rather than dismantling the existing framework of the Central Electricity Authority, local Electricity Boards, and State Electricity Boards, efforts should focus on addressing its shortcomings. By leveraging the expertise of engineers, technicians, and workers, these institutions can be strengthened to serve the public more effectively. The future of India's power sector depends not on weakening Electricity Boards, but on reinforcing them to ensure reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity for all.

(A translation of an article written by Comrade E. Balanandan in Malayalam in 2003, following the enactment of the Electricity Act 2003, reflects his long-standing vision on the sector.)



E. Balanandan : An Unparalleled Revolutionary Genius Emerging from the Working Class

K. Chandran Pillai

A Reflection on E. Balanandan's Legacy

At this auspicious moment of the birth centenary of E. Balanandan, instead of writing something new, I wish to recollect what I had written about him in the tribute published in memory of him in 2011. Yes, the situation has changed a lot, including the rise of the BJP-led government by the fascist RSS and aggressive steps by them to dismantle all democratic structures. They aim to create division among the people, including the working class, along religious and communal lines, and are trying to snatch every right of labour through various steps, including labour reforms through labour codes. Balanandan's memory remains a guiding torch for the struggle, and I believe the words of memory I wrote in 2011 are still valid.

First Impressions and Early Encounters

I first met Comrade E. Balanandan in 1972 during the historic fifty-one-day strike at FACT. It was a pivotal moment, shaking the entire industrial sector. Everywhere you turned, there were CRPF personnel and barracks of police from other states, creating an atmosphere filled with tension and potential conflict. Worker families faced

hunger, and more aid committees for the strike emerged. At that time, C. Achutha Menon was the Chief Minister, and K. Karunakaran was the Home Minister.

The Thrissur Ramanilayam Conference called by K. Karunakaran ended inconclusively. The FACT Employees Association, CITU, and HMS unions decided to continue the strike. The next morning, the factory gate turned into a battlefield. The beloved K.N. Ravindranath was beaten by the police. News of this spread like wildfire, prompting workers from other companies to leave their factories and rush to the FACT junction. Within hours, thousands gathered. Armed police and determined workers faced off. It was a situation where firing and mass casualties could occur at any moment. There, standing unflinchingly, commanding this army of workers, was E. Balanandan. That was the first time I saw him. S.C.S. Menon Sir was also with him. I was in tenth grade at the time. That memory will never fade.

From that day on, I looked upon him (Comrade Balanandan) with reverence. The trade union scene in the industrial area of Eloor and Aluva had been my passion since childhood. Being born to a worker and growing up in a workers' colony might have been the reason for this.

Leadership and Unwavering Commitment

During the Emergency (1975-77) and continuously afterward, I had the opportunity to interact with him. From the early days of the complex and challenging industrial sector, Swami (Balanandan) lived like a karma yogi, a worker among workers. His method of scientifically approaching and analysing problems was attractive to everyone. What made workers see Comrade E. Balanandan as one of them was the simplicity he maintained until the end of his life. His curiosity and vigilance in learning and understanding things were extraordinary. Remember how effortlessly Swami, who had only formal education, handled issues like electricity, environmental science, and the challenges facing water resources. This was a rarity that incited envy in others.

It was the depth and breadth of his knowledge that enabled Swami to engage with bureaucrats, insurance and bank managers, for the benefit of workers and the nation, with humility yet authority.

During the time he lived in hiding, through hard work, he mastered the English language so attractively used in the workers' revolutionary movement. I cannot mention anyone else who used language this way. Intellectual circles, political adversaries, and industrial management recognized and respected Comrade E. Balanandan's unparalleled leadership abilities.

Championing Workers' Leadership

Comrade Balanandan was not only a worker himself but also passionately nurtured workers in various positions within CITU and the Party. He firmly believed that organizations could tread the correct path only when real workers with genuine work experience were at the helm of leadership. With this conviction, he consciously recruited and developed cadres from among the workers for the CITU movement as well as the Party. His vision was to ensure that workers' voices were truly represented and heard at every level of decision-making. This commitment to cultivating leadership from the grassroots underscored his dedication to empowering the working class and ensuring that their interests were genuinely prioritized within both the union and the political spectrum.

Legacy of a True Worker Leader

In April 1994, the Kerala High Court ordered the demolition of two ammonia tanks at FACT in Kochi's Wellington Island. The management proceeded to implement the court order without regard. Implementing the order would have resulted in the closure of the company. At this juncture, the Save FACT Action Committee decided to march to court against this illogical and impractical judgment. The company also came forward with technical arguments to implement the verdict, creating considerable confusion. Could one march to court? Could slogans be shouted against the court? Would it not provoke? There was a suggestion not to shout slogans during the High

Court march. Yet, an argument emerged that marching without slogans would not suit the workers' militancy. Swami was in Delhi then. He proposed a foresighted decision to march in silence to the court, ensuring that workers' enthusiasm was not diminished and that the court was made aware of the situation. Swami always had an answer to everything, and it was always a practical, logical answer.

The central government drastically reduced the import duty on caprolactam in the 1992-93 budget, leading to significant protests. During discussions with MPs from Kerala seeking help on the issue, a confrontation arose when an MP began speaking in support of the government's decision, raising his voice against a labour leader explaining the need to reduce the import duty. At this point, E. Balanandan, present there, intervened firmly. I can never forget that scene. Swami's question to the MP about whom he was supporting—standing against workers from a people's standpoint—made the MP cease his argument and align with Swami.

Comrade E. Balanandan was fundamentally a worker. It was through him that a worker reached the CPI(M) Politburo. He was always vigilant about raising worker cadres. Swami always showed the courage to address young cadres by name from the podium, inspiring memories.

Conclusion

Without faltering, unperturbed, Swami departed in the midst of creating warriors for the liberation of the oppressed class. The warrior who mapped out the paths he walked and passed on has also pointed out the paths ahead for us. I hope that the memories of Comrade E. Balanandan will remain a light until the end of life. His legacy of perseverance, leadership, and dedication to the working class serves as an enduring beacon of inspiration. I believe that this is the sentiment of every worker and activist associated with him. As the struggles continue and evolve, his spirit and teachings remain relevant and potent, guiding new generations in their quest for justice and equity.

*To the tireless hands that build our world, and
to the voices that refuse to be silenced may the
legacy of E. Balanandan continue to inspire
generations to rise, unite, and prevail.*