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CAPITAL

AND LABOUR

IN THE JUTE

INDUSTRY



INDRAJIT GUPTA



ALL-INDIA TRADE UNION CONGRESS

THE AUTHOR

The author of this study, *Capital and Labour in the Jute Industry*, was elected General Secretary of the Bengal Chatkal (jute) Mazdoor Union in 1952.

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CAPITAL AND LABOUR
IN THE
JUTE INDUSTRY

by

INDRAJIT GUPTA

General Secretary, Bengal
Chatkal Mazdoor Union

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P R E F A C E

The present study was presented as a report to the Convention of the All-India Trade Union Congress held at Calcutta in May 1952. It has been brought up to date for publication this year.

The booklet does not claim to make a detailed economic analysis of the deepening crisis of this major national industry except in so far as it has a direct bearing on the conditions, demands, and movement of the 300,000 jute workers. It is primarily an attempt to pose the main problems facing the workers and trade union organisers in conditions which are becoming increasingly common to a number of important industries.

This booklet is the first in the series "T.U. Publications", sponsored by the All-India Trade Union Congress.

Secretariat,

A.I.T.U.C.

Chapter I

A WORLD MONOPOLY

THE JUTE manufacturing industry of West Bengal comprises nearly 100 mills situated along a 60-mile stretch on both banks of the Hooghly. It is one of the largest single concentrations of any one industry in any part of the world.

The mills in West Bengal account for 98% of the entire jute industry in India. They employ about 260,000 male and 42,000 female workers. They own a total of 65,266 looms (hessian and sacking) out of a total of 68,452 in all Indian mills put together. The balance of a little over 3,000 looms is distributed between 4 mills in Madras, 3 each in U.P. and Bihar, and 1 each in M.P. and Nepal.

The Indian jute industry may be legitimately described as the world's producer of jute goods. Its 68,500 and odd looms constitute 57% of the world's total loomage. Its nearest competitors in 1940 (the position since then has not materially altered) were Germany with 8%, Great Britain with 7.1% and France and South America with a little over 5% each. The number of looms in the U.S.A. was 2,750, or 2.3% of the world total.

With all their looms working a full 48-hour week, the Indian jute mills have a productive capacity of about 100,000 tons per month. Prior to 1946, there were several occasions when the industry worked 54 and even 60 hours a week to meet the huge overseas demand. But, as we shall see later, since 1949 the industry has been working almost uninterruptedly at between only 75 to 80% of its installed capacity, with 12½% of its looms sealed and a 42½-hour week. This deliberate restriction of output is also no new feature in the industry's history. Sealing of looms upto 15% of the total and reduction of hours to as little as 40 or 45 per week have taken place in 1929-32 and again in 1937-39 to cope with a "depressed" market.

Not more than 10% of the total annual production of jute goods is accounted for by Indian domestic consumption. The remainder is exported to markets throughout the world, for jute is the cheapest, best, and strongest packing material yet invented by man.

The jute industry is far and away the leading export industry of India and its manufactures are the principal item in our country's foreign trade. In 1949-50, jute goods constituted 27.5% of India's total exports to all countries. Cotton textiles and tea were next with 15.7% and 15.6% respectively. Out of Rs. 77.7 crores worth of Indian exports to the U.S.A. in that year, jute manufactures alone accounted for over Rs. 30.8 crores, or 40.2%.

If one takes the export figures of only those articles which are wholly or mainly manufactured in India, the decisive position of jute is even more strikingly revealed.

TABLE 1

	(a) Value of total exports of ma- nufactured arti- cles (Rs.)	(b) Value of exports of Jute goods. (Rs.)	Ratio of (b) to (a) %
1948	2,30,70,45,799	1,51,56,25,917	65.6
1949	2,16,12,75,591	1,26,54,74,717	58.5
1950	2,37,96,70,487	1,19,32,05,585	41.4

The proportional decline in the value of jute exports has been due to: (a) the restriction of production since 1949 and (b) the phenomenal rise in the value of exports of cotton yarn and cloth—from Rs. 36.91 crores in 1948 to Rs. 49.35 crores in 1949 and Rs. 115.56 crores in 1950. But this does not detract in any way from the leading position of jute as the principal item of export to the major consuming countries.

This industry therefore earns more foreign exchange than any other, and is responsible for nearly 60% of all India's dollar earnings. In 1950, Indian exports to the U.S.A. were valued at 259.1 million dollars, of which 76.6 million dollars was the value of jute goods; in 1951, the corresponding figures were 296.5 million and 90.5 million dollars.

The jute industry contributes more to the state revenues than any other industry. Out of the total export duties col-

lected in 1949-50, 48.9% or Rs. 8.67 crores came from jute manufactures alone while tea was second with 19.7%. In 1951-52, the export duty on jute goods brought in the record sum of over Rs. 59 crores, or nearly seven times the 1949-50 figures.

The above few facts are enough to demonstrate what a *key* sector in India's economy is occupied by this industry, and what immense value it has as a medium of international exchange.

At the same time it has to be noted that the overseas market has been historically developed in such a way that it is almost entirely orientated towards a handful of principal customers, among whom the U.S.A. is predominant, with the Argentine, Britain and Australia bringing up the rear. It can be said that between 60 to 65% of all hessian exports are taken by the U.S.A., 30 to 35% by South America and British Commonwealth countries, and the balance by all other countries combined. In the case of sacks or bags, Australia leads with about 28% and a number of other countries within the American or British orbit of influence account for another 50%.

But it is hessian which constitutes the most important and valuable product, and 65% of the mills' looms are busy manufacturing it. If the Indian industry can be said to hold the virtual world monopoly of its output, it is also true that the U.S.A. has come to exercise an equal degree of monopoly over its consumption. If the American purchaser cannot do without Calcutta's burlap the latter also cannot do without the U.S. market. The Indian mills have thus acquired a completely one-sided and unbalanced dependence on a restricted market for the disposal of their goods.

The Indian Central Jute Committee's *Report on the Marketing of Jute and Jute Products* (1941), which contains a detailed country-by-country survey of markets, does not even mention the Soviet Union, while it says of the Balkan countries: "Only nominal quantities of hessian of standard sizes are taken for general utility purposes" (p. 129). The Report records that China (ten years ago) imported "substantial" quantities of bags but little hessian.

Any survey of export trends in the post-war period would show that the Balkan countries and China have, due to their internal political changes, been included with the Soviet Union among the "absentees" from the list of countries with

whom trade is considered desirable. Thus, exports of Indian jute goods are virtually sealed off from the vast potential markets of China, Russia, and South-east Europe; and dependence on the American consumer has become even more overwhelming than in pre-war years.

Though exact figures of the value of jute goods exported to the U.S.S.R. are not at hand, the approximate position can be gauged from the fact that out of a total value of over Rs. 500 crores of India's annual exports since 1950, only Rs. 6.6 crores or 1.3%, accounted for exports to the U.S.S.R. When it is remembered, further, that the exported goods valued at Rs. 6.6 crores included, besides jute manufactures, commodities like tea, shellac, and tobacco, it is obvious how infinitesimal must be the quantity of hessian and sacking compared with the vast exports to the U.S.A. and sterling bloc countries.

Chapter II

WHO HOLDS THE MONOPOLY?

THE LOGIC of capitalism has driven the jute mill employers to take steps for (a) consolidating their advantage of world monopoly, (b) minimising internecine competition, (c) maintaining profits at a high and stable level, and (d) doing all these for as long as possible with "cheap" labour, old machinery and antiquated technique. It was with this purpose in view that the Indian Jute Mills Association (I.J.M.A.) was formed in 1884.

In West Bengal today only 4 mills—Ludlow, Gagalbhai, Prabartak and Victory Jute Products, with a total loomage of 1800, remain outside the I.J.M.A. All the others are members—which means that in questions relating to working hours, general labour conditions, sealing or unsealing of looms, etc., they are under obligation to follow a uniform, centralised policy based on agreement. The advantages of this organisation to the employers are obvious, and particularly so to the biggest and most resourceful among them.

But the I.J.M.A. itself is dominated by certain firms which control the managing agencies of important groups of mills. The leading groups are as follows:

TABLE 2

Managing Agency	No. of Jute Companies	Total Loomage
Andrew Yule	8	5747
Bird-Heilgers	9	7955
Jardine Henderson	6	9388
McLeod & Co.	6*	2865
Thomas Duff	4	6334
Macneill & Barry	4	4500
TOTAL:	37	36789

* Including 2 in Madras.

It will be seen from the above table that only six managing agency firms control a total loomage of 36,789, or 54% of all the looms in the I.J.M.A. member mills. This overwhelming preponderance of managerial control concentrated in the hands of the above-mentioned British firms must be kept in mind when we study present-day trends in the industry's capital ownership.

Capital Investment and New Trends

According to the Indian Central Jute Committee's Report on the Marketing of Jute (1941), the total subscribed capital of 82 companies in 1929 was Rs. 23,75,49,285, and total reserve funds amounted to Rs. 10,16,44,322. However, many companies had been over-capitalized by large-scale issues of debenture shares from time to time, and in depression periods they were compelled to write down their capital by big percentages.

A survey made in September 1946 on the basis of published figures for 54 mills showed the following position:

TABLE 3

Total paid-up capital (Preference & Ordinary) ..	Rs.	18,64,69,160
„ Reserve & Other funds	Rs.	17,45,78,332
„ Cash & securities in hand	Rs.	10,05,04,139

Although these figures relate to only about 60% of the total number of mills in the industry, they reveal the striking fact that by the end of World War II the accumulated reserve and other funds were almost equivalent to the total invested capital.

A more recent study of figures published in *Capital* for 62 jute companies gives the following results:

TABLE 4

Managing Agents	No. of Companies	Paid-up Capital (in Rs. — ,000)*	Reserve & Other Funds
British	48	15,71,17	22,48,93
Indian	14	2,47,62	5,06,80
TOTAL	62	19,18,79	27,55,73

* 3 are sterling companies for which conversion into rupees has been made.

These figures are even more remarkable. They show that while paid-up capital has remained fairly constant, there has been a huge addition to the tune of about Rs. 10 crores in the reserve funds during the last 5 years.

Since 1948, these gigantic reserve funds have been drawn upon to issue bonus shares liberally, and by this method tremendous capital appreciation of jute shares has been effected. For example, in respect of the 8 mills of the Andrew Yule group this appreciation has been by about Rs. 55 lakhs between 1948 and 1950.

On the eve of World War II, although Indian capital had started entering the industry since the 'thirties, it could be categorically stated that capital and other investments' ownership was still about 50% in British hands. After the war, however, and more so after the 1947 transfer of power, a radical shift in the balance has taken place. This trend is described in the following words by the *Survey & Directory of the Jute Industry* (1951) issued by *Capital*:

"Not only has Indian capital increasingly entered the industry, but at the same time there has been an increasing merging of Indian and British capital. Substantial war orders between 1939-45 swelled the liquid capital in the hands of Indian investors. With machinery imports uncertain and severely restricted in quantity, and the consequent difficulty of embarking on new enterprises, there was a strong propensity for Indian capital to buy up shares in British owned concerns." (P. 21.)

The two salient factors at work were (a) the huge accumulated funds in the hands of big Indian businessmen due to war-time profiteering and black-marketing, and now seeking investment; and (b) the "uncertainty" felt by many British investors regarding their future in post-1947 India, and hence their willingness to sell out, partly at any rate. Of course, they dictated their own prices which were often fantastic. For example, according to the Employers' Association,

"today it may be stated that about 40% of the jute mills is under Indian management and 75% of the capital is Indian. This transfer of jute ownership from British to Indian hands has not been without sacrifice. The cost paid for acquisition of such foreign interest was much

more than the share capital. The extra cost might be accounted at Rs. 75 crores." (*Role of Private Enterprise in India*, p. 15.)

Very recently, the press announced that Messrs. Kettlewell Bullen & Co., managing agents of the Fort William Jute Company, had sold their holdings of ordinary and preference shares in the latter company at a price of Rs. 400 and Rs. 185 per share respectively. The purchases are known to have been made on behalf of Bangur Bros. who offered to pay the same prices to other shareholders desirous of selling out. This is an example of the sort of terms on the basis of which such transactions have been taking place.

According to the *Capital* publication quoted above, 32.7% of the shares in 45 jute companies were in British hands, and 67.3% in Indian hands, in 1937. In 1944, the respective proportions of share ownership in 41 companies had changed to 13.4% and 86.6%. The article admits, however, that this estimate probably "exaggerates" the extent of the change-over.

According to the Reserve Bank's *Census of Foreign Assets and Liabilities* (1948), British ownership of ordinary shares only in the jute manufacturing industry amounted to Rs. 2.55 crores, or 14.9% of the total value. "Portfolio" ownership in British hands accounted for another Rs. 4.88 crores.

However, there is no doubt that direct Indian ownership of capital has increased very substantially and now accounts for over 75% of the total.

The change which has taken place is also reflected in an analysis of directorships in the jute companies.

According to *Capital*, an investigation in 1943-44 showed that 58 British directors held 164 directorships, while 85 Indian directors held 171 directorships. Another survey is quoted as follows :

TABLE 5

	No. of Directors (1939)		No. of Directors (1949)	
	Indian	European	Indian	European
13 companies	Nil	49	19	44
21 "	35	52	63	35

It is obvious that Indianisation is taking place very rapidly in this particular field.

Another important trend, though here the change-over is still proportionately much less, is towards the sharing-out of managing agencies of the British by the Indians. It is not generally known, for example, that 49% of the managing agency shares in Macneill and Barry are now held by Tatas. Business circles have been buzzing with rumours that the bulk of shares in McLeod's managing agency are about to be acquired by Soorajmull Nagarmull.

It is known that two of the McLeod managed mills—Waverley and Alliance—have very recently virtually passed into Soorajmull Nagarmull's hands, though certain legal hitches have yet to be overcome. Some other notable cases of managing agency rights changing hands in recent years are:

TABLE 6

Mills	Original Managing Agents	Successors
Hastings	Andrew Yule	Bangur Bros.
Soorah	McLeod & Co.	Hindusthan
Clive	Bird & Co.	Bajoria's firm
New Central	Andrew Yule	Dalm.a's firm
Albion	Andrew Yule	Dalm.a's firm
Fort William	Kettlewell Bullen	Bangur Bros.

However, it has to be remembered that the change in management lags far, far behind the changes in capital ownership and directorship holdings. *In the managing agency sphere, the British still rule supreme* and this is still their most jealously guarded preserve. The Reserve Bank Survey of 1948 reveals that out of a total of 65 jute companies, no less than 80% in number and 89% in respect of capital investment were managed by the British.

The octopus-like hold of the British monopolies through the managing agency system is strikingly revealed by the following table compiled on the basis of figures published in the *Investors' India Year Book, 1952*:

TABLE 7

British Managing Agents	No. of Jute Companies	No. of Looms	Capital (Issued & Subscribed) Rs.
Andrew Yule & Co.	8	5,747	2,51,86,000
Bird-Heilgers Ltd.	9	7,955	4,12,44,180
Jardine Henderson Ltd.	6	9,388	3,91,07,500
Macneill & Barry Ltd.	4	4,498	2,34,61,600
McLeod & Co. Ltd.	6	2,865	1,23,55,000
Thomas Duff & Co.*	4	6,334	2,87,00,000
Mackinnon Mackenzie & Co.	2	2,084	1,68,95,200
Kettlewell Bullen & Co.	1	1,884	42,00,000
Gillanders Arbuthnot & Co.	2	1,330	30,95,000
Anderson Wright Ltd.	1	1,530	63,00,000
Duncan Bros.	1	2,561	89,20,700
James Finlay & Co.	1	1,400	59,16,400
GRAND TOTAL :	45	47,576	21,53,82,580

* The capital figures for the Thomas Duff group do not include those relating to one of its members, viz. Angus Jute Co.

The above figures show that 12 British managing agency firms between them control over 72% of the total loomage of the I.J.M.A. member mills, and their total issued and subscribed capital amounts to over Rs. 21.5 crores. Thus, not only is the real control decisively in British hands, but it is fully exploited to grab the lion's share of the profits. Apart from enjoying the managing agency commissions which run into lakhs annually, all these firms hold large blocks of shares in the individual companies within their control. In this way, under various heads, the managing agents pocket a substantial chunk of the net profits, and it is calculated that during the war the British managing agencies grabbed as much as 54% of the net profits earned by the jute industry.

It is by virtue of this strategic position that the British interests exercise their actual control over the industry and its affairs. It is this which enables them to dictate I.J.M.A. policy and to exert powerful pressure on the Government, while using the Birlas, Jalans, and others as their official mouthpieces.

With Indians predominating in capital ownership and Britishers in management control, the jute industry today presents a picture of, in the words of *Capital*, "a striking measure of understanding and cooperation... between Indian

and British interests . . . which have become closely interlinked in the course of the last 15 years" (*Survey & Directory of the Jute Industry*, 1951).

* * *

The history of the Jute industry during the past 25 years presents a baffling picture of alternate lengthening and shortening of working hours, sealing and unsealing of looms, raising and lowering of jute prices, retrenchment and new recruitment of labour, etc. This seeming madness of the employers certainly has always had a method behind it. For our present purpose, viz. to chalk out the path of the jute workers' trade union movement, it is necessary to trace the main developments of I.J.M.A. policy in recent years without going back into the more distant past.

The immediate post-war period, 1946 to 1948, brought a sharp upswing in the demand of the foreign markets for jute goods. These markets had been cut off during the war years (mainly owing to shipping difficulties) from jute supplies and their accumulated requirements were therefore abnormally high. In fact there existed a world shortage of jute goods and the employers naturally exploited this opportunity to the full. The I.J.M.A. exerted powerful pressure during this period to keep raw jute prices down, to get export controls lifted, to secure exemption from the newly-introduced 48-hour week, etc. Production and profits were high. But the employers realised that this post-war "boom" could not continue indefinitely.

Chapter III

PARTITION AND AFTER

THE LAST three years, commencing from May 1949, have witnessed an unbroken policy of restricted production and deliberate "freezing" of the industry's output far below its installed capacity. This has taken the form of (a) sealing up of 12½% of the looms; (b) keeping all mills closed for one week in four; and (c) the latter step was replaced, from December 1949, by the 42½-hour week which has continued uninterruptedly except for a temporary reversion to the 48-hour week between December 1951 and April 1952.

For our study, the years since 1949 can conveniently be divided into more or less distinct periods which clearly illustrate the *main trend* of I.J.M.A. policy in the midst of deepening world-wide capitalist crisis.

May 1949 to June 1950

The slackening of the post-war demand for jute goods had already commenced when Partition sharply raised a new problem, viz. how to ensure uninterrupted supplies of adequate and cheap raw jute from Eastern Pakistan to the mills of West Bengal. The monopolists on both sides were keenly conscious of their bargaining strength; they knew that eventually a compromise was inevitable, since neither could survive without the other, so closely interdependent are they. But both the I.J.M.A. and the raw jute dealers of Eastern Pakistan drove a hard bargain, each trying to beat the other down to favourable terms, and thus a prolonged war of attrition, of pressure and counter-pressure set in during 1948-49.

While Pakistan threatened to cut down raw jute exports to India drastically, to find better customers elsewhere, and to start her own jute mills, the Indian Government launched a much-publicised plan for intensive cultivation of raw jute on Indian soil. The I.J.M.A.'s contribution to this game of

pressure tactics consisted in the planned reduction of output which commenced with sealing of 12½% of the looms in May 1949 and went on to the closing down of all mills for one week every month.

In September came the devaluation of the Rupee, making Pakistani raw jute a still more expensive commodity, while prices of jute manufactures in the U.S. market tended to decline. Faced with this adverse turn of events, the I.J.M.A. announced that from December 1949 the 48-hour week would be abandoned in favour of a 42½-hour one. This was (and still is) in addition, of course, to the 8,500 sealed looms (out of a total loomage of 68,000).

Of course, this does not mean that there was no real difficulty with regard to raw jute supplies. Seventy-five per cent. of the production of the raw material lay within the borders of Pakistan, which sought to exploit her own advantage by imposing a high customs duty on all exports to India, supplying inferior qualities of jute with a high moisture content, and slowing down the actual rate of despatch. Nevertheless, the I.J.M.A.'s drastic restriction on output in the mills and consequently, on purchase of Pakistani raw jute at Pakistan prices was, basically, a weapon of pressure tactics which produced results. By April 1950, the Pakistan Government made a barter agreement for the supply of 8 lakh bales of raw jute in exchange for Indian coal and gunny bags. This helped to tide over the immediate shortage.

I.J.M.A. policy in this phase can, therefore, be summed up as follows:

a) Pressure on the Pakistan Government to force it into a favourable contract for supplies of raw jute to the Indian mills. This was attempted by declaring, as it were, a "strike" of production and consequently smaller purchases of jute at the prevailing prices by the mills. The I.J.M.A. prohibited its members from buying raw jute at more than certain maximum prices.

b) Pressure on the Indian Government to tighten the price control on raw jute coming into this country from Pakistan. The climax of this was the Government's appointment of the I.J.M.A. chairman himself as the Jute Controller!

c) At the same time, curtailment of production which would help to keep up prices of jute goods in foreign markets which had now largely recovered from their immediate post-war shortage.

d) Simultaneously with this, the I.J.M.A. began a planned *rationalisation* drive to cut down the mills' cost of production. Three main methods were pursued:

- purchase and installation of new labour-saving machines in the various preparing departments;
- increase of job-load of the workers;
- speed up, particularly in the roving and spinning departments.

Leading spokesmen of the industry made it plain that they must "rationalise or perish", the only guiding caution being against hasty or sweeping measures likely to "provoke" serious labour discontent.

June 1950 to December 1951

This was the period in which, according to the then Chairman of the I.J.M.A., J. R. Walker, "the picture was entirely altered by the Korean War. Governments and manufacturers the world over competed to create a strong demand for jute and jute goods to fulfil current needs and also add to stocks held by them."

Despite the tremendous fillip to the price of jute goods particularly in the U.S.A. which embarked on an all-out programme of rearmament and stock-piling for war purposes, the I.J.M.A. continued to operate the 42½-hour week and to keep 12½% of the looms sealed. So great was the demand for hessian that even with this restricted production, enormous profits were raked in by the mills. This is strikingly illustrated by the fact that the I.J.M.A. made a very mild protest indeed when Government raised the export duty per ton of hessian from Rs. 750 on October 20, 1950 to Rs. 1,500 a month later. This increased duty meant an approximate extra burden of Rs. 20 per 100 yards of 10" hessian; but in the same period, the corresponding selling price in the U.S. market rose by about Rs. 60 per 100 yards.

Another most favourable factor for the employers was that the long-drawn-out battle with Pakistan over raw jute finally turned in their favour, and the Karachi Trade Pact with Pakistan in early 1951 ensured that this aspect of the crisis was more or less solved for the time being. The mills would henceforth be certain of getting at least 50% of their annual requirements at agreed prices from Pakistan.

The remaining 50% (30 to 35 lakhs of bales) could come from Indian soil.

This was the result of the Government of India's planned policy of helping the I.J.M.A. by diverting cultivation from food crops to raw jute, as a result of which raw jute acreage in India increased from 834,000 in 1949 to 1,449,000 in 1951.

With raw jute supplies assured and a sellers' market based on rearmament and the 'rosy' prospects of a prolonged and extending war in Korea, the I.J.M.A. succeeded in March 1951 in getting the Government to decontrol all jute prices. The last check on unrestricted profiteering was removed.

But shorter hours and restricted output, and the drive for rationalisation, continued steadily.

December 1951 to April 1952

Towards the end of 1951, the I.J.M.A. was convinced that the "demand for manufactured goods is not likely to fall off in the near future, for most of the rearmament drive has still to come" (*Capital, Indian Jute Survey and Directory, 1951*).

Banking on this estimate of the international situation, the I.J.M.A. at last ventured to abandon partly its short-time working and announced resumption of the 48-hour week from December 1951. Note that even at this stage there was surprisingly little protest against the hessian export duty whose burden was evidently more than compensated for by the higher, uncontrolled selling prices in the U.S. and other markets.

However, as often happens, the capitalist analysis of the international and military situation crashed to the ground within two months of its formulation. The failure of U.S. imperialism either to conquer Korea by the sword or to disrupt the truce talks at Panmunjon and spread hostilities in the near future, brought about a shift in American policy which is now common knowledge. Its immediate impact on the world market was to depress the demand for stock-piled commodities which had been feverishly bought up since 1950 and to create a panic of general price recession.

The price recession in India and for Indian exports caught the I.J.M.A. napping. Resumption of the 48-hour week had increased production considerably since December and large stocks of unsold goods had accumulated in the

mill godowns. As prices began to decline, the U.S. buyers also held off from the market in the expectation of a further fall.

Once again I.J.M.A. policy, subordinating everything else to the need for maintaining the profit rate, worked up terrific pressure on the Government for (a) lifting of the hessian duty of Rs. 1,500 per ton and (b) permission to curtail production again until overseas demand improved.

On February 18th the Government announced 50% reduction in the export duty, and at the end of March the I.J.M.A. reverted again to the 42½-hour week.

April 1952 to April 1953

Under continued pressure, Government announced on May 6th, a further cut in the export duty from Rs. 750 per ton to Rs. 275 (hessian) and Rs. 350 per ton to Rs. 175 (sacking).

These are drastic concessions indeed and have been unreservedly welcomed by spokesmen of the industry. The Government was no doubt persuaded by the I.J.M.A. to take this step so promptly in order to attract the annual U.S. orders which are customarily received during the purchasing season of May-June. The Financial Correspondent of the *Statesman* (the mouthpiece of British business) felt confident that the jute industry is now in a "strong competitive position" and "stands a good chance of winning back lost ground before 1952 is out" (12-5-'52).

The I.J.M.A. itself has been forced to admit that shorter working hours and the steep scaling down of export duties have already produced a "healthy" reaction in the market and have checked the price recession which threatened to go lower and lower in February-March.

It is true that prices are tending to stabilise at a level considerably lower than that prevailing during the inflationary boom after the outbreak of the Korean war. Nevertheless the demand for jute goods in preference to substitutes has been maintained. This is clearly reflected in the comparative figures for jute exports. In 1951-52, the dollar areas purchased 254,000 tons for Rs. 87.30 crores and the other currency areas took 553,000 tons for Rs. 183.08 crores. In 1952-53, on the other hand, 304,600 tons were sold to the dollar area for only Rs. 57.93 crores and 405,200 tons to the other areas for Rs. 71.67 crores.

* On April 9, 1952, a gigantic order of 51 million sandbags for the US Army was secured by the Indian mills which underquoted their nearest foreign competitor, Osnaburg cloth (a type of cotton bag).

* Exports of jute manufactures to Britain in the first quarter of 1952 were already £6.3 million more in value than in the corresponding period in 1951.

* Mr. Gordon M. Garrie, Chairman of the Director's Board, Samnuggur Jute Factory Co. Ltd., speaking at Dundee on 6-6-'52 said, "As regards the future of the jute industry in India, I have no hesitation in saying it is now in a better position to meet competition than it has been since the partition of India." (*Statesman*, 13-6-'52).

But the monopolists of the I.J.M.A., determined to make maximum profits at the cost of the workers, the public and the state budget, continued to impose rationalisation and wage cuts on the workers and high prices on consumers and to demand relief from taxes or subsidies.

In November 1952, an I.J.M.A. Mission returned from a "good will" tour of the U.S.A. and announced that the hessian market in that country could be retained only provided the Indian mills could offer high-quality goods at "competitive" prices. The Central Government promptly sanctioned an unasked-for grant of 25,000 dollars to the I.J.M.A. for its publicity campaign in America.

At the same time, the I.J.M.A. spokemen took the opportunity of repeating that without "modernisation" of the mills and rationalisation no long-term security for hessians could be guaranteed. At a meeting of the Export Advisory Council in December 1952, the I.J.M.A. Chairman, after expressing his gratitude for Government support, said his "only request" now was: "Place no obstruction in the way of our imports of jute machinery." To which, according to the Press, the Commerce Minister immediately replied: "None whatever" (*Statesman*, December 5, 1952).

It is worth noting here that from August 1952 onwards, the average monthly consumption of burlap in the U.S.A. had already risen to 82 million yards as compared with 41 million yards in the corresponding period of 1941. For the present, it was "all quiet on the hessian front".

But now it was the turn of sacking! During the last 3 or 4 months the I.J.M.A. has been creating a public uproar over a new and sudden "crisis" in the Australian market for

gunny bags. Demand has fallen off sharply and big stocks, amounting to about 100,000 tons, are reported to have accumulated with the mills. The reasons for this slump, according to the employers, are increased import restrictions in Australia, the development of substitutes and bulk handling, and the heavy stocks accumulated at the time of the Korean crisis.

Be that as it may, the I.J.M.A. lost no time in applying for and getting favourable concessions from the Government. The first target of attack was the continuing export duty of Rs. 175 per ton of sacking; this was claimed to be the major obstacle to a revival of overseas demand. In his Budget presented at the end of February 1953 the Finance Minister, Deshmukh, obligingly announced a cut of Rs. 95 per ton. But now it seemed that the "crisis" was much deeper than the employers had imagined! The Australian market did not respond immediately to the lower duties; hence, the industry must be helped in other ways to tide over its difficulties. The Government took the following steps.

First, despite unanimous protests from the growers, balers, and traders in raw jute, the Government rejected the demand for statutory fixation of *minimum* prices for the Indian-grown fibre. This led to the ruin of thousands of peasant families in Eastern India, who were encouraged by Government propaganda to grow jute at the cost of food.

Second, a new trade pact was signed with Pakistan on March 19, 1953, whereby Pakistan agreed to reduce the export duty on her raw jute and to abolish altogether the "discriminatory" licence fee of Rs. 2-8 per maund on all raw jute exported to India. These provisions "ensure", in the words of the I.J.M.A. Chairman, G. J. Gardner, "to the industry adequate supplies of all the jute necessary for the retention and expansion of its world markets." The hapless tools and victims of this cold war have been the peasants on both sides of the Indo-Pak border, now left to their fate.

Third, the Government is reported to have assured the I.J.M.A. not only of some direct financial assistance during the coming year in order to meet the high cost of purchasing new "labour-saving" machinery, but also of its good offices in securing loans from the American-dominated World Bank for this purpose.

The employers' scheme aims at complete modernization of machinery in the jute mills during a period of 10 to 15 years at an estimated cost of Rs. 50 crores, i.e. more than double

the total paid-up capital invested in the industry. The I.J.M.A. Chairman, Mr. Moncur, has stated that the number of workers likely to be retrenched as a result "would not exceed 40,000"!

Has the existing equipment suddenly become obsolete? Mr. Moncur was anxious to remove any such impression, "but new machinery will give us additional competitive power", he explained (*Statesman*, 3-7-52). Even if Mr. Moncur's conservative estimate of 40,000 potentially "surplus" workers is accepted, a rough calculation shows that on the basis of a 42½-hour week this retrenchment would mean an annual saving of Rs. 3½ crores to the employers.

That the I.J.M.A.'s sudden craze for "modernization", which has received the blessings of the Planning Commission, does not reflect any corresponding desire for more production is evidenced by the output target for 1955-6 agreed upon at the New Delhi conference, viz.: 1,200,000 tons. However, as has been pointed out by the Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union, "actual production in 1945-46 with the same old machinery was 1,140,200 tons." This figure could be exceeded even today by restoring the 48-hour week, unsealing the sealed 12½% of looms, and if necessary working a double shift. Such is the bogus nature of the Five-Year Plan as applied to manufacture of jute goods.

The truth is that the proposed new equipment and machinery will consist overwhelmingly of labour-saving devices only, aimed not at stepping up output but at displacing tens of thousands of workers and thus increasing profits by drastic cutting down of the wages bill. The trade union movement has to make it clear to the Government that no such modernization scheme should be entertained unless it is accompanied by a water-tight scheme for absorption of all retrenched workers into alternative jobs and for adequate unemployment benefits.

Fourth, the West Bengal Government has made it clear that it does not consider the present moment "opportune", in view of the industry's difficulties, to appoint a new Tribunal to adjudicate upon the workers' demands in general and the issues of basic wages and dearness allowance in particular.

These developments of the last six months, briefly narrated above, afford a classic example of how modern monopoly struggles, in the midst of an insoluble crisis, to earn maximum profits by resorting more and more to planned restriction of production as its main weapon of survival, and subordinates

governmental machinery to its own class interests. At the same time, these developments lay bare the basic connection of the monopolists' "crisis" with the economic militarisation of the Anglo-American war bloc.

The market for Indian hessians receives a boost every time the prospect of U.S.-initiated hostilities in Korea and the Far East increases. So it was when, for example, Eisenhower assumed Presidential office and openly encouraged Chiang Kai-shek to attack the Chinese mainland, jute mill shares immediately rose; the stock exchange "brightened" up; and even today it is "big" news when the U.S. Corps of Engineers announces its intention to buy 22 million yards of burlap in order to manufacture over 40 million sandbags for military requirements!

But as the forces of peace gather strength and the warmongers get a rebuff in their schemes of spreading the Korean war, the monopoly circles hatch new schemes to attack the workers' wages in order to keep up their maximum profits. That is why Mr. Moncur warned his audience at the Annual I.J.M.A. Meeting that the "long-term position is still a critical one", and why the 48-hour week has not been restored despite the huge hessian sales since August 1952.

It is not a little ironic that monopolist circles should now be openly discussing a possible outlet for the accumulated sacking stocks "if a political settlement could be worked out in Korea and trade with China expanded in consequence" (*Statesman*, April 14, 1953.) These thoughts, reluctantly impelled by the pressure of circumstances, reveal at the same time that trade with China in jute goods is not considered possible while hostilities in Korea continue. Why not? Does it not imply that someone regards jute primarily as a strategic war commodity and therefore frowns upon its export to China? Does it not let the cat out of the bag regarding an unseen and unwritten U.S.-dictated embargo operating in practice against our country's biggest export industry?

One thing, however, is clear. The Indian jute industry, because of its peculiar dependence on overseas markets, has already developed conditions of chronic crisis—an inevitable reflection of the deepening economic crisis in the imperialist and capitalist countries which are its principal customers.

Chapter IV
PROSPERITY AMID "CRISIS"

IT WOULD be appropriate at this stage to take a brief look at how the millowners have fared, financially speaking, during the years of the "crisis" about which they complain so loudly.

On behalf of the I.J.M.A., Sri M. P. Birla submitted the following figures to the second Jute Industrial Tribunal, 1951:

TABLE 8
Profit and Loss (—) in —,000 Rupees

Year	Gross	Net
1945	10,09,67	2,46,31
1946	7,95,07	3,15,11
1947	8,12,49	3,59,85
1948	5,50,24	2,10,50
1949	— 1,00,98	— 1,83,05

It was claimed that these figures cover all mills which are members of the I.J.M.A. Accepting them at their face value, it is seen that in the *four* years 1945-48, the mills made a total profit of Rs. 11,31,77,000 which certainly does not compare unfavourably with the net profit of Rs. 15,14,95,834 made during *five* wartime years, 1940-44. It is well to remember that in five pre-war years, 1935-39, the total profits fell short of Rs. 7 crores.

However, this unbroken record of high profits from 1940 to 1948 did not deter the I.J.M.A. from pointing to the "losses" of 1949 and thereby claiming that the industry was now in the grip of a severe crisis, that its very existence was at stake, etc.

Nobody denies that 1949, with its acute shortage of raw jute supplies, the sealing of 12½% of the looms, reduction of working time to 3 weeks per month and later to the 42½-hour week, resulted in a steep fall in production at a time

when the post-war record demand had also passed its peak and begun to decline. It is, therefore, no wonder that several mills showed losses in their balance sheets for the year, and Sri Birla was able to prove that the industry as a whole had suffered a net loss of Rs. 183 lakhs.

However, to conclude from this that "disaster" had overtaken the industry, as the I.J.M.A. has been trying to do for the last three years, is quite absurd.

Firstly, taking even the available published balance sheets as correct, we find that out of 58 companies, no less than 23, or 40%, actually showed profits in 1949.

Secondly, out of the remaining 35 companies which officially declared losses, quite a number managed to pay dividends to their shareholders at rates varying between 5 and 10%! This amazing phenomenon is, of course, nothing new for those who know the industry's history. The huge accumulated reserve funds have always been used during the lean years (notably in 1923-25 and 1929-34) to guarantee the shareholders' dividends despite formal losses.

Thirdly, spokesmen of the I.J.M.A. generally preserve a discreet silence over the fact that from 1950 onwards, as a direct result of boom conditions created by the Korean war, unprecedented profits were once again raked in with both hands, so much so that even mills which showed a loss in 1949 showed record profits in the subsequent year.

A few examples to illustrate this remarkable recovery are given below :

TABLE 9*

Mill	(Rs. lakhs) Net profit/loss in 1949	(Rs. lakhs) Net profit in 1950
Albion	— 0.83	3.36
Alexandra	— 4.88	3.29
Anglo-India	— 37.01	20.56
Bengal	2.98	5.80
Birla	21.70	35.40
Budge Budge	1.02	9.16
Kamarhatty	— 4.95	5.83
Standard	— 0.61	3.41
Samnuggur	— 1.93	9.93
Victoria	— 1.54	12.44

* Compiled from the Investors' India Year Book, 1952 (yearly and half-yearly net profits of jute companies).

Such examples can be multiplied.

On the basis of figures for 62 jute companies published in *Capital*, we get the the following over-all picture:

TABLE 10

Managing Agents	No. of Companies	Net Profits (1950-51) (Rs. -,000)
British	48	6,03,35
Indian	14	2,09,23
TOTAL :	62	8,12,58

According to one investigator, the *peak* year of jute mill profits was 1928 when net profits amounted to Rs. 769 lakhs (Sarma, *Foreign Investments in India*). But this figure has been exceeded by Rs. 43 lakhs in 1950-51 according to the above data.

Thus all mills have been making record profits during 1950-51 and in the majority of cases the profits have been higher than in any single year since 1945. The "losses" of 1949 have, therefore, been more than amply compensated for.

Fourthly, no published figures can ever disclose the huge secret profits which have become a traditional source of income to the jute companies and managing agencies and are freely talked about in business circles. It is well known that these firms have made lakhs of rupees through various speculative transactions, black-market dealings during the period of price control, and illegal sales and purchases of raw jute and jute goods.

A recent example of such practices came to light in the McLeod scandal, leading to the resignation of J. R. Walker. Lovelock and Lewes, the firm's auditors, disclosed in an extraordinary report to the shareholders how by means of false entries in the accounts of the Waverley and Alliance Jute Companies, the directors misappropriated over Rs. 25 lakhs on account of fictitious purchase and sale of raw jute, thus cheating the Government and their own shareholders!

This disclosure created a sensation in Clive Street, for it is the first time that the auditors mustered enough courage to expose such unsavoury dealings (especially of a British firm) which are known to have been going on all the time.

Fifthly, we have to take into account the huge sums taken annually as managing agency commissions from the jute industry, over and above the net profits of the individual manufacturing companies. Figures for 12 to 15 firms show the following:

TABLE 11

Year	Managing Agency Commissions (Rs. -,000)
1945	22,10
1946	25,51
1947	30,93
1948	46,62
1949	46,87

It is thus clear that the employers' "crisis" bogey based on the peculiar circumstances of 1949 is something quite unrelated to their profits. Incontrovertible figures go to show that before 1949 as well as after it, the mills have been making big money. According to an unpublished Government report,

"gross profits between 1945-48 amounted to nearly 180% of the industry's paid-up capital and net profits to 72% of paid-up capital. During this period, as has been mentioned earlier, bonus shares were issued liberally, and their value varies between 2 to 3 times their face value. Taking it as 3 times, the shareholders have received Rs. 2.3 crores by way of bonus shares, plus Rs. 4.1 crores as dividends (1945-48), or a total of Rs. 6.4 crores on a paid-up capital of little over Rs. 18 crores in 1945."

According to the same report,

"even taking 1936 (a year of exceptional profits in the pre-war period) as the base year, statistics show that the period 1941 to 1948 has been a period of very exceptional profits, the level being 3 to 4 times the 1936 level. Net profits during the post-war period (upto 1948) have been at a higher level than in the war period."

The above report was no doubt prepared before the statistics for 1950, 1951 and 1952 were available to show that in these three years a new record in profit-levels has been reached.

The I.J.M.A. bosses have again raised a hue and cry over the trade "recession" which took place early in 1952, but enough has been written to show that though the industry is indisputably in a period of crisis—a crisis of markets which is a part of the deepening world-wide capitalist crisis—there has as yet been no crisis of profits. The monopoly magnates of the I.J.M.A., their directors and shareholders, their managing agencies and investors—British and Indian alike—have come through unscathed.

The powerful monopoly position of the I.J.M.A. has enabled it to bolster up its profit rate by the ruthlessly planned, organised, and Government-backed policy of "freezing" production and cutting down on production costs at the expense of workers, peasants, balers, traders, and other less well-organised sections of the community. Recently-published balance sheets of 18 leading companies (Kamarhatty, Kanknarrah, Cheviot, Delta, National, Budge Budge, Belvedere, Agarpara, Megna, India, Auckland, Dalhousie, Kinnison, Landsdowne, Lawrence, Northbrook, Standard, and Union) show that *over 1952 as a whole* profits were well maintained. On the basis of two half-yearly accounts taken together, 14 of these companies made a total net profits amounting to Rs. 97,25,063.

It is mainly on to the shoulders of the 3 lakh jute workers, the starving peasants, and the long-suffering tax-payers of our country that the burden of the crisis has been transferred.

Chapter V

HOW THE WORKERS HAVE FARED

THE EMPLOYERS' drastic methods of the last 3 years more or less coincide with the Awards of the two industrial Tribunals set up by the West Bengal Government—the first published in September 1948 and the second in November 1951. Let us see briefly what has been the net effect on the workers' earnings, volume of employment, and conditions of work.

a) *Earnings*

Prior to the first Tribunal Award, the wage-level in the jute industry was proverbially low. Abundant evidence of this is available in the Rege Committee's Report (Deshpande Report), 1946. At the time when the first Tribunal commenced its proceedings (1948) the position was as follows:

Minimum basic wage	Rs. 18 per month
Dearness allowance	Rs. 28 " "
Total minimum emoluments	Rs. 46 " "

The overwhelming majority of workers in the Winding, Weaving, Beaming and Sewing departments are, however, employed on piece-rates, and the vagaries of I.J.M.A. policy subject them to wide fluctuations of actual earnings from week to week. Taken as a whole, it may be said that the *average* wage (excluding D.A.) in the jute industry prior to the first Tribunal Award was approximately Rs. 24 per month.

There were no other emoluments whatsoever in the way of bonus, house allowance, etc.

In his Report published in 1946, S. R. Deshpande stated that since 1939 "there has been no important change in the basic wage structure in the industry." At the time of this investigation, the D.A. (then known as "amenity allowance") was Rs. 2/- per week. *This means that during the entire period of World War II, 1939 to 1945, when the cost of living*

rose by at least 300 points, the 3 lakhs of jute workers secured practically no addition to their pre-war earnings.

The first Tribunal was undoubtedly influenced by this shocking state of affairs, by the standards laid down a year earlier in the Central Pay Commission's Report, by the obvious signs of a growing movement among the jute workers, and by the fact that more or less united demands were put forward by the A.I.T.U.C., I.N.T.U.C., H.M.S. and other unions appearing on behalf of the workers.

Taking 325 as the cost of living index prevailing about the middle of 1948, the Tribunal calculated Rs. 71 per month as the total cost of living as against the existing total minimum emolument of Rs. 46.

However, the tremendous pull exercised by the I.J.M.A. and its Chairman, M. P. Birla, produced its effects. The published Award (September 1948) rejected the figure of Rs. 71 as immediately impracticable and arbitrarily granted the following:

Minimum basic wage	Rs. 26-0-0 per month
Dearness Allowance -	Rs. 32-8-0 " "
Total minimum emoluments	Rs. 58-8-0 " "

The workers were thus cheated out of a minimum of Rs. 12-8 per month which was their due on the basis of the Tribunal's own calculations. This represented an annual gain of Rs. 4½ crores for the employers. At the same time, the existing and complicated structure of piece-rates (which varies from mill to mill) was retained practically intact by the Tribunal which expressed the pious wish that the earnings of the piece-rated workers ought also to increase in proportion to the increase in the minimum time-rated wage provided they worked with diligence and skill! Finally, the D.A. (excluding Rs. 2/- per week which was specifically in lieu of cheap ration concessions) was linked with the workers' attendance and thus belied its very purpose, viz., compensation for dearness.

This linking of the workers' wages and D.A. with attendance is the key to understanding the utterly shameless fraud perpetrated on them in the name of successive Tribunal Awards. In an industry whose last 25 years' history shows that changes in working hours and number of operating looms have taken place on no less than 25 or 30 separate occasions (apart from stoppages due to coal shortage, etc.), the linking

of wages and D.A. with attendance means that the worker is left with no safeguard whatsoever against violent fluctuations in his income. The ceiling to these fluctuations is now fixed by the 48-hour maximum week, but where is the floor?

What this meant concretely to the workers in the intervening period between the Awards of the first and second Tribunals (1949-51) is best described in the unemotional words of the second Tribunal itself :

“As a result of the reduction of the weekly working hours in the mills working for 42½ hours per week the minimum basic wage for a manual worker was reduced to Rs. 23 per month and the dearness allowance proper was reduced to Rs. 21-1-3 per month, the value of food concessions remaining unchanged. The total minimum wage was thus reduced to Rs. 52-12 for a month of 184 hours. We hope, however, that the reduction of weekly hours will be lifted and the former working hours resumed by the mills in the near future. In this award all decisions as to basic wages and dearness allowance will be made on the basis of a 48-hour week, being the same as a month of 208 hours, which was the normal working period for the mills.” (November 1951.)

In other words :

—the first Tribunal calculated as minimum cost of living of a worker	-	Rs. 71- 0-0
—it actually awarded (Sept. 1948)	-	Rs. 58- 8-0
—the worker actually received (since 1949)		Rs. 52-12-0.

The second Tribunal was spared the embarrassment of reopening the basic wage question which was altogether excluded by the Government from the issues for arbitration! On the issue of D.A. the Tribunal based itself on a cost of living index of 355 (i.e. 30 points higher than the figures adopted by the first Tribunal) and awarded an increase of Rs. 4-14-0 per month bringing the total D.A. to Rs. 37-6-0 per month of 208 hours. The *whole* of this allowance was now linked with hours of work, and no distinction was made in respect of that part which had previously been earmarked as cheap ration concession.

Thus, as from November 1951, the minimum total emoluments were fixed as Rs. 26 basic wage plus Rs. 37-6-0 D.A., i.e. Rs. 63-6-0. From December, when the 48-hour week was

resumed, the workers began to be paid accordingly, but the hopes of the Tribunal were short-lived indeed. In April 1952, as narrated earlier, the I.J.M.A. once again reverted to 42½-hour working, and once again the actual minimum earnings were reduced to Rs. 23 (basic wage) and Rs. 33-0-8 (D.A.) or a total of Rs. 56-0-8 *per month*.

For all practical purposes, therefore, the minimum earnings have remained *unchanged* since December 1949 with the exception of a brief 4-month interval! It is not difficult to see at whose expense the I.J.M.A. has weathered the "crisis" about which they shout from the housetops day in and day out.

It should also be noted that in Andhra where two I.J.M.A. member mills—Chitavalsah and Nellimarla—are situated, the management (McLeod & Co.) have refused to implement the awards of the West Bengal Tribunals in respect of wages and other amenities. As a result, the basic minimum wage in the Andhra mills is still Rs. 19-8 per month and the D.A. is only 15 as. per day!

The condition of the piece-rated, relatively more skilled categories of workmen, particularly in the Winding, Weaving, Beaming and Finishing departments is infinitely worse than that of the lowest paid categories, though it is not possible to translate their conditions into precise figures.

As has been stated above, the first Tribunal virtually ordered maintenance of the *status quo* in respect of piece-rates. In any case, the system of piece-rates is so complicated, so closely guarded a secret of the employers, so varied from mill to mill and from one managing agency group to another, that it serves as the most effective weapon in the managements' hands to exploit the workers ruthlessly. The overwhelming majority of piece-rated workers got negligible or no increases in their earnings as a result of the first Award. Since then, it may be said that the general trend of piece-rate earnings has been declining.

This is because the piece-rates are rendered illusory by the actual conditions of work imposed on these workers, particularly the Weavers. For example: apart from the general fall in earnings due to the restricted output policy of the I.J.M.A., these workers have been badly affected by the inferior quality of raw jute increasingly used by many mills (due to mixing it with *mesta* and *bimla*); by adulteration of batching oils; by inadequacy and generally poor quality of mill stores; by periodical shortage of beams; etc.—all of which adversely

affect the speed and efficiency of work and lead to a fall in earnings. The second Tribunal, however, refused to take these realities into account and rejected the demand that piece-rated workers should be entitled to a guaranteed minimum wage.

The position of two other important categories—*mistris* and clerical staff—is equally bad, though their wages were included as an issue before the second Tribunal.

The first Tribunal put the overwhelming majority of clerks in two grades :

Grade I: Rs. 70—4—130

Grade II: Rs. 55—3— 85

The second Tribunal, three years later, maintained Grade I intact and extended Grade II to Rs. 55—3—85—(E.B.)—4—105. That was the sum total of the new award! Four higher or “special” grades ranging from Rs. 90 to Rs. 260 have been “left to the discretion of the individual employers.”

As for *mistris*, the first Tribunal sanctioned the following increases in their basic wages (their rates are on an hourly basis):

Upto Rs. 45 p.m.: an increase of 3 as. per rupee

Between Rs. 45 and Rs. 75 p.m.:
an increase of 2 as. ” ”

Over Rs. 75 p.m.: an increase of 1 an. ” ”

The second Tribunal was called upon to lay down standardized wages for various categories of *mistris* in all the mills. This it did by the simple expediency of taking the I.J.M.A.'s existing scheme of wage rates and grades, describing it as generally “satisfactory”, and granting a few niggardly increases of less than one pie per hour! “Efficiency bars” which did not exist previously were now introduced.

It will be noted from the above that the first Tribunal's Award was, relatively speaking, more favourably inclined towards mill clerks and *mistris* than towards other categories of workers in respect of wages. The reason was that these two sections formed at that time the main organised base of the I.N.T.U.C. unions in the industry. The second Tribunal Award has, however, reflected fully both the stiffening attitude of the employers, their adamancy towards further concessions, and general disillusionment of the clerks and *mistris* regarding the Congress and the I.N.T.U.C.

This is an important factor, creating, for the first time, the objective basis for uniting the *mistris* and clerks with the mass of factory manual workers in a single joint front of action against the growing I.J.M.A. offensive.

b) *Employment and Work-Load*

Mr. W. A. M. Walker, the then I.J.M.A. President, said in June 1949:

“Faced by rising costs of labour, the industry has now been forced to examine the possibility of increased and more up-to-date mechanisation, with consequent retrenchment of workers.” (Speech before the Royal Society of Arts Council.)

The *Indian Jute Survey & Directory* published in July 1951 by *Capital*, says:

“The scope for technological improvements is indicated by an estimate that the Indian mills employ nearly four workers to every one employed by Dundee. . . . There can be little doubt that a determined beginning has to be made in the matter of renovating plant, improving technique, and raising labour productivity. This is one of the first tasks facing the industry in the struggle to maintain its export markets. Opposition from labour must be expected to any drastic rationalisation measures and it is not yet known how far employers will be protected by law in effecting retrenchment.” (P.21.)

Writing on “Problems of Jute Mill Labour” in the same issue, a retired Government Labour Commissioner asserted that

“the present standard of one weaver one loom is wholly uneconomic. But labour is wedded to it and resists any attempt to increase the number of looms per man. . . . On the spinning and preparing sides there exist already post-war improvements in machinery, generally of much higher speeds, which would enable the labour required to be cut down by from forty per cent to sixty per cent.” (P. 31.)

The above examples of the employers' viewpoint, particularly since 1949, are adequate to indicate the process of rationalisation which has actually been taking place with gathering momentum in the post-war period.

Unfortunately there are no statistics available as to the extent of new mechanisation already achieved or planned for the immediate future. Nor is it possible to compile with accuracy the total number of workers actually displaced or retrenched from various mills due to the introduction of labour-saving machines. But the process has been going on in every important mill more or less uninterruptedly for the last 3 or 4 years, though in a piecemeal manner, one department at a time, and with precautionary measures (by the managements) to avoid retrenching very large numbers of workers at the same time.

It is certain that the majority of the mills under the principal managing agency groups have introduced new preparing and spinning machinery on a considerable scale. In 1946-47, the total value of imports of jute mill machinery into India was about Rs. 95 lakhs, whereas in 1948-49 the value had risen to Rs. 268 lakhs.

A typical example of this continuing process is available from the recent public announcement (*Statesman*, 7-5-'52) by the Naihati Jute Mills Co. Ltd., of an issue of debenture shares to the value of Rs. 13 lakhs. The Company's statement of objects says:

"It is proposed to expend the proceeds of the issue upon the installation of modern slip draft preparing and spinning machinery in the Sacking Warp section of the Company's mill at Naihati, the installation of additional slip draft preparing and spinning machinery in the Sacking Weft section of the mill and the electrification of the mill. From experience gained at other group mills it is expected that this will result in increased efficiency and substantial savings in production costs."

Thus it is clear that the rationalisation drive against the workers is in full swing.

Several thousand workers of the Breaker, Drawing, Carding, Roving, and Spinning departments have been retrenched since 1949. This is in addition to the thousands of weavers (not less than 8 or 9 thousand) who have been either retrenched, or "laid off", or reduced to the "badli" list, due to the sealing of 12½% of the loomage. According to the official *Indian Labour Year Book, 1949-50*, employment in jute mills fell by "about 7000" in 1949 as compared with 1948. And on

top of all this, of course, is the partial unemployment of the entire labour force which has become a chronic and recurring feature of the restricted output policy.

According to the reports of the I.N.T.U.C., about 10,000 workers have been retrenched through rationalisation in 1952.

It should also be mentioned that certain groups of mills have been making repeated attempts, by means of manipulation of working hours, new shift systems, cutting down of overtime, etc., to increase the pressure of work on the *mistris* with a view to declaring a section of them "surplus".

As for the anxiety of the I.J.M.A. regarding "how far employers will be protected by law in effecting retrenchment", ample protection has been ensured for them by the State Government.

In the first place, the second Tribunal was authorised to arbitrate, not on the pros and cons of retrenchment as such, but only on the issue—"procedure of retrenchment". This was indirect recognition of the I.J.M.A.'s contention that "the principle of retrenchment is accepted and the subject for decision is the method to be adopted in selecting the persons to be retrenched." (*Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary*, 12-11-'51, p. 1676.)

Further, Unions appearing before the Tribunal, other than A.I.T.U.C. unions, drove an additional nail into the workers' coffin by admitting that "the employers' right of retrenchment for legitimate reasons may be conceded". (*Ibid.*)

The overwhelming majority of decisions given in individual cases of dismissal by the State Tribunals and Appellate Tribunal have proved that the arbitration machinery is heavily loaded in favour of the employers in interpreting these "legitimate reasons" for retrenchment. There is no case in which the courts have rejected the employers' plea that retrenchment has become inevitable due to the presence of "surplus" labour and the need for rationalisation.

If additional "protection" is required by the managements in cases which are to be decided outside the courts, it is always available in the shape of the West Bengal Government's steadily expanding police force. Mass resistance to retrenchment is only too often countered by show of armed might, by lathi-charges and tear-gas, by arrests and victimisation of leading workers but the workers continue to resist.

c) *Some Other Conditions of Work*

Security of Service:—The first Tribunal (1948) laid down model standing orders to be adopted by all mills. These Standing Orders defined a “permanent” workman as one who had satisfactorily completed 3 months’ continuous service on a job which was not temporary by nature. Such permanent workers were to have proper, individual service books recording their particulars, and were to be eligible for such benefits as provident fund, gratuity, paid leave etc.

In actual practice, however, it is found that almost all managements violate these provisions directly or indirectly, and act according to their whims: Since no Tribunal has yet ventured to fix the normal cadre complement of various departments on the plea of “technical difficulties”, the employers naturally try to facilitate their retrenchment plans by depriving as many workers as possible of “permanent” status. Thousands of workers who have been in continuous service for even 2 or 3 years or longer are still not classified as permanent, and repeated representations on their behalf have been of no avail.

Another very widespread complaint is that of false entries and manipulation by the mill labour offices in the workers’ service records. Generally, the date of joining employment, absence periods, etc. are manipulated in such a way that many old workers find their periods of continuous service broken and tampered with. These false entries (which can sometimes be “corrected” by bribing the labour office staff) result in many workers being deprived of their due quantum of pension, gratuity, and annual paid leave.

Another big weapon against the workers’ security of service and one to which the employers are increasingly resorting is the provision in the Standing Orders of all mills for “disciplinary action for misconduct”. The definition of “misconduct” covers everything from “negligence” and participation in a strike to “subversive” activities, insubordination and disobedience; the prosecutor, judge, and executor in all cases being, of course, the management itself. These provisions are being used on a wide scale (a) generally to harass the workers by means of warnings, fines, suspensions and dismissals, and (b) particularly to victimise and sack leading workers who are either known as union activists or who take a prominent part in voicing the workers’ grievances.

Dozens of workers have been victimised in this way over the last three or four years.

Medical facilities:—With a steady deterioration in the workers' health due to years of malnutrition and a declining standard of living, the problem of adequate medical facilities has become even more acute in the last ten years than it ever was in the jute industry. No arrangements exist for treatment of really acute and serious maladies. Pre-natal and ante-natal treatment is unavailable. The *Indian Labour Year Book (1949-50)* admits that an examination of 700 women workers revealed that 11% of the conceptions resulted in vital losses. For the same group of women before their entry into the jute industry, the figure was 4.2%.

The existing system of mill dispensaries is inadequate, inefficient and riddled with corruption and graft. This, coupled with the poor diet of the workers, has virtually destroyed their powers of resistance to fatal diseases of the lungs, chest, and stomach, not to mention less serious ailments on a mass scale.

Virtually no improvement in medical facilities has taken place in the last 20 years. It is incumbent on the trade unions to take up this vital issue and fight for effective measures of relief.

This is particularly urgent in view of the proposed application, from July 1, 1953, of the Employees' State Insurance Scheme to the industrial areas of Calcutta and Howrah.

The jute workers must be mobilised to ensure that a really adequate and efficient medical organisation, based on the voluntary "panel" system of doctors, and free of corruption, is established. This will not only provide better facilities than at present, but will put an end to the hardships suffered by the workers as a result of the employers' refusal to recognise any sickness certificates other than those granted by the mill doctors.

The jute workers, while cooperating with the beneficial features of the State Insurance Scheme, must at the same time carry on ceaseless agitation for extension of medical facilities, to the workers' families for adequate hospitalisation facilities, and for a substantial reduction in the workers' contributions in view of their low wage levels and poor living standards.

Housing:—The ghastly picture of housing conditions in the jute industry painted by the Report of the Royal Commis-

sion on Labour (1931) holds good in the main today despite the interval of 20 years. Deshpande in 1945-6 asserted that "as compared to the pre-war period the position in regard to housing...has not materially altered." Even the first Tribunal (1948), though it skilfully avoided making any award on this issue, was compelled to admit that "the conditions of housing...are positively deplorable and most of the houses either within the mill compounds or in the outside *bustees* where the majority of the jute mill labour manage to live, are unfit for human habitation." (P. 81.)

According to the latest survey made by S. C. Aggarwal (*Industrial Housing in India*, 1952), the percentage of jute mill workers provided with quarters by the employers varies from 7.9 to 100, and the total floor-space available per worker varies from 29 to 79 square feet—"which is hardly adequate for an adult, far less for a whole family". It can be said that at most 40% of the total labour force finds accommodation on payment of rent in these back-to-back tenements with primitive sanitation and no ventilation facilities. The rest are condemned to live in the privately-owned *bustees* where horrible conditions prevail.

"The Indian Jute Mills Association is one of the most powerful organisations of employers in this country," says Aggarwal, "and has been able to take concerted action regarding the hours of work, sealing of looms, etc. In regard to the housing of the workers, however, it has not so far made any serious effort."* (P. 202.)

Housing in the jute industry lags far, far behind even the modest standards won by workers of other comparable, major industrial concerns in the Greater Calcutta area. Nor are the jute workers given any partial relief in the shape of house-allowance. At a time when the Government of India is talking big about plans for industrial housing and is offering subsidies (however limited) to employers as part-expenses for new housing, the jute workers must be mobilised to win at least some advance from their present, degraded conditions of habitation.

While not dealing in detail with a number of other grievances and demands connected with issues like old-age benefits, leave and holidays, etc., a brief reference must be made to certain positive concessions (however limited and unsatisfactory)

which were won by the workers in these directions as a result of the struggles of 1946-47. The generally explosive character of the working-class movement in that period, coupled with widespread unrest and agitation among the jute workers, compelled the bourgeoisie to yield some concessions through the two Tribunals of 1948 and 1951. Though the motive of the bourgeoisie was to throw a sop to the workers in the shape of minor concessions and to sow illusions regarding the machinery of arbitration, nevertheless it was a step forward for the workers.

Whereas formerly the mills had their own pension system which made a niggardly grant of Rs. 10 per month to the worker who was fortunate enough to show 30 years' continuous service (25 years' in the case of women), the Tribunal awards introduced a uniform contributory Provident Fund system, and a system of retiring gratuity applicable in respect of years of service put in prior to 1948 at the rate of half a month's wages for every year of service. This gratuity was made payable in all cases of "retrenchment" also, as from 1951.

Whereas formerly the jute workers enjoyed no annual privilege leave, no sick leave with pay, and only six festival holidays, the Tribunal awards made compulsory a minimum of 10 days' annual leave with pay (circumscribed, of course, by the onerous conditions laid down in Section 79 of the Factory Act), 15 days' sick leave on half-pay, and 9 days festival holidays in the year.

Other concessions gained included a *khoraki* allowance of Rs. 2 per week to all registered *badliwallas* during periods without work. Compensation for involuntary unemployment at the rate of 50% of basic wages and dearness allowance payable for a maximum period of one month only, was really a retrograde step in comparison with the war-time practice of compensating the full period of unemployment.

We have endeavoured to depict the *main* problems facing the mass of jute workers as connected with their, (a) earnings, (b) employment, (c) work-load, (d) security of service, (e) health and (f) housing. *It is these six major issues which, in their totality, constitute the growing CRISIS in the workers' daily life and the trade union movement must base itself primarily on them.*

Chapter VI

WORKERS RESIST

EVER SINCE the I.J.M.A. launched its post-war offensive of rationalisation, the workers have stubbornly resisted it. The fact that this resistance could not assume the shape of a general struggle, drawing the workers of all the mills into an organised and united movement for common demands, the fact that resistance was conducted for the most part in an unorganised and spontaneous way by workers of one individual mill at a time, the fact that the overwhelming majority of these struggles ended in retreat or defeat due to their isolation and the superiority of the forces mobilised by the employers with Government help—none of these admitted facts can minimise the high level of militancy displayed by the workers in their refusal to take things lying down.

In 1949 itself—the year which heralded in the sealing of looms and restriction of working time, as well as first attempts to instal labour-saving machinery and retrench workers—20 strikes (or lock-outs arising out of disputes) took place. The total number of workers involved was 55,656 and the total number of man-days lost was 5,63,341.

The immediate issues on which the workers fought varied widely from mill to mill but, generally, it can be said that the most common issues of dispute were retrenchment, dismissals, or victimisation in some form or other. The fear of retrenchment has become widespread among jute workers over the last three years, and so also has the determination to resist it. *Every other issue, however important, is subordinated in the workers' consciousness to the issue of retrenchment.*

The last three years have witnessed a number of forms of action employed by the workers to resist retrenchment—mass *gheraos*, stay-in strikes, physical obstruction to installation of new machines, and so on.

Had the workers taken this attack lying down, had numerous actions and demonstrations of protest not taken place on various issues in the various mills (e.g. Hukumchand, Naihati, Kanknarrah, Alliance, Megna, Kamarhatty, Bengal, Naskarpara, Budge Budge, Fort Gloster, Hastings, Victoria etc.), it is certain that by this time the bosses' plans of retrenchment and heavier job-load would have been executed on a far wider and more drastic scale.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that these struggles have been, at best, only isolated and unorganised skirmishes. They provide valuable evidence of the workers' growing spirit of united resistance; but they only serve to emphasise the absence of a centralised, united and strong trade union movement drawing the masses of the three lakhs of workers into a single joint front of action on the basis of common demands.

Without such a movement it is impossible to organise effective resistance to an offensive which is planned and ruthlessly executed by the powerfully organised I.J.M.A. Partial struggles in individual mills on specific issues have always been, and still continue to be, waged by the workers. But they can never halt the centralised policy of retrenchment, rationalisation, arbitrary fixation of working time, wage cuts, and intensified labour which is imposed simultaneously and in a uniform manner on nearly 100 mills.

A recent development in the direction of united industry-wide action requires mention. Nearly 20,000 workers of different jute mills have signed a joint anti-retrenchment petition addressed to Pandit Nehru. Not a single worker who was approached refused to sign, and only the organisational weakness of our unions prevented the achievement of much bigger results. The petition has put forward the following main demands and suggestions:

- 1) Retrenchment to be stopped by ordinance pending thorough investigation into the conditions of the industry by a tripartite committee with wide terms of reference;
- 2) Immediate governmental action to establish trade relations with all countries willing to take jute goods, and in particular with the U.S.S.R., China, and East European countries;
- 3) Modernisation of machinery not for "labour-saving" purposes, but for manufacture of new types of pro-

ducts, other than hessian and sacking, for which a large domestic market can be created; (there is plenty of expert technical evidence advocating scientific use of jute for making numerous varieties of cheap consumer goods);

- 4) Registration of all retrenched and unemployed jute workers, and their absorption, as a matter of priority, in the various construction projects, public works, etc. visualised under the Five-Year Plan;
- 5) Pending re-employment, all unemployed and retrenched workers to receive unemployment benefits equivalent to two-thirds of their normal wages.

The above mass petition was duly submitted by a deputation to Pandit Nehru and was referred by him for detailed discussion with the Ministers of Labour and Commerce. The Government was forced to admit that the I.J.M.A. has no justification for further sealing of looms or restriction of working hours and to promise an early investigation into the conditions of the industry with special reference to the problem of retrenchment. Of course, even these assurances will remain on paper unless the movement is further broadened and developed.

Chapter VII

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY

FROM THE workers' point of view, by far their biggest handicap *vis-a-vis* the employers and Government, is the disunity in their own ranks.

To overcome this disunity, to wage a conscious, systematic, prolonged and stubborn battle against the various factors making for disruption, to forge a united front of the workers throughout the vast jute belt—this is the paramount task facing our jute unions today. It has to be realised that without building up workers' unity, not a single major step forward can be taken.

How does the prevailing disunity express itself concretely?

(a) *The National Question*

The jute proletariat in West Bengal is multi-national in composition. The majority of the workers (about 65%) come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Between 25% to 30% are Bengalis. The remainder are Oriyas, Andhras and people from Madhya Pradesh with a sprinkling of Nepalis, Punjabis, etc.

The Hindustani-speaking workers of Bihar and U.P. have by tradition found employment mainly in the mills situated in Barrackpore, Hooghly and the Shibpur-Ghusuri areas of Howrah. The second biggest national group, the Bengalis, is concentrated in the mills of Budge Budge and the Bauria-Chengail areas of Howrah.

The national problem confronting the trade union movement expresses itself, briefly, as follows:

(i) The Hindustani workers constitute the majority of the jute workers. All their ties of birth, land, culture, language, social consciousness, etc. are with the villages of Bihar and U.P. which they have been forced to leave in search of employ-

ment but which they visit from time to time. Hence, they naturally do not feel strong fraternal ties with the Bengali people, amongst whom they feel strangers.

(ii) This attitude of the Hindustani worker is matched by his Bengali counterpart—from the opposite end.

In the mills where the Hindustani workers are a majority, the Bengalis are mainly clerical staff or *mistris*, a large number of whom come from the lower middle class strata. They consider themselves superior to the Hindustani manual workers and often regard the latter with contempt. Clerks often appear as agents of the exploiters when doing wage accounts, time-keeping, etc. Hence, in the specific conditions obtaining, this only adds to the “national” dislike of the Bengalis on the part of the Hindustani workers.

In the Bengali-majority mills, the few Hindustanis there work as mill *darwans*, guarding mill gates, making searches of workers and appear as agents of the employers and are regarded as the managements’ policemen. Hence, in these mills, the Bengali workers regard the Hindustanis as a reactionary force and forget the latter’s problems and develop dislike for them.

(iii) As far as the other national groups (Oriyas, Andhras, etc.) are concerned, their position is even more difficult. The language barrier between them and local trade unionists (either Bengali or Hindustani) has hitherto proved a major stumbling block, which isolates them from any contact with their cultural, social and other problems. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Oriya workers who predominate in the spinning department, have on numerous occasions participated in local struggles against oppression.

But the central feature of the national problem presents itself as:—

- a) the gulf between the two major sections, i.e. Hindustani and Bengali workers;
- b) the relative isolation of the militant trade union movement from the Hindustanis, who are the majority of the total labour force in jute; and
- c) the general predominance, in the consciousness of all the minority groups, of the “national” as opposed to the class outlook.

(b) *The Communal Question*

A very large portion of the weavers in the jute mills have always been Muslims from Bihar and U.P. They are descendants of families which traditionally practised the rural handloom craft and were gradually uprooted by the advent of mechanised industry. The original highly-skilled tradition of weaving has been handed on from father to son, and we find generation after generation coming to the jute mills for employment in the weaving department.

Prior to the partition of the country, these Muslims workers were a big part of the militant vanguard of the trade union movement. Being skilled workers in the majority of mills, and with a higher proportion of literacy among them than among any other section of non-Bengali workers, they constituted a decisive force from the point of view of the working class movement.

The situation was radically changed after the Bengal and Bihar communal riots of 1946-47 and Partition and the subsequent riots of 1950 which particularly affected the jute mill areas of Barrackpore, Hooghly and Howrah.

Without elaboration, it is enough to say that the Muslim jute workers are today victims of all the fears and resentments which are common to the Muslim minority in the Indian Union. In a word, they have been transformed from the active militant vanguard of the working class into its most hesitant, terrorised section. Of course, this does not mean that they will always lag behind when they see the non-Muslim workers coming forward actively to lead the movement.

Thousands of Muslim workers with their families were physically evicted from their *bustee* homes during the 1950 disturbances. The majority of them are unable even today to return to these homes which were occupied in the meanwhile by Hindus. Thousands more, who temporarily fled for their lives and were compelled to remain absent from work for perhaps 3 or 4 weeks, returned to find either their jobs handed over to Bengali refugees from E. Pakistan, or their services terminated so that, even if they were re-employed, they were deprived of their claim to gratuity, etc. Quite a number migrated permanently to Pakistan.

Hence the Muslim jute workers today live in a constant atmosphere of apprehension, particularly in the worst riot-affected areas. The majority of them are bitterly anti-Con-

gress in their hearts but too scared to admit it openly. The Congress bourgeoisie has, of course, exploited to the full this feeling of panic and helplessness in order to threaten with dire consequences those Muslim workers who support the All-India Trade Union Congress unions.

The real gravity of this communal disruption lies in the latent anti-Muslim sentiments which have been fostered among the non-Muslim workers (especially Biharis and Bengalis) by the poisonous anti-Pakistan propaganda carried on by the reactionary leaders of the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha, which is further encouraged by the bitter plight of the Hindu refugees coming from E. Pakistan. There is no doubt that many Hindusthani jute workers participated in the anti-Muslim pogroms of 1950. And though it is true that active communal hatred is no part of their normal day to day consciousness, yet they are always liable to be provoked and incited by communal reactionaries into regarding their Muslim fellow workers as enemies.

Until the trade union movement can destroy this virus which infects the non-Muslim majority of jute workers, until it can make them see through the communal game and realise the supreme unity of their class interests irrespective of religious differences, a strong united trade union movement capable of unitedly resisting the ruling classes cannot take effective shape. While persistently striving by all possible means to allay the fears of the Muslim worker and to gradually restore his confidence, *primary* attention has to be paid to fighting the communalism of the Hindu worker who alone can give his Muslim fellow-worker the assurance that he needs.

(c) *Trade Union Disunity*

The third major factor preventing the development of a united jute workers' movement and organisation is the existence of so many rival unions competing with each other to secure the workers' allegiance.

This is, of course, not a new phenomenon. Even in the days when the A.I.T.U.C. was a united organisation embracing Congress, Socialist, Communist, Forward Bloc and other Left labour workers, the affiliated unions retained their separate and individual existence. A sort of territorial division of "spheres of influence" also existed, with a parti-

cular leader exercising, as it were, "zamindari rights" in his particular trade union area.

In the course of the general strike of 1937 the ground was laid for the formation of a single, centralised union (Bengal Chatkal Mazdur Union) but it never functioned as such due to the political differences of the leading groups concerned. But the tremendous galvanizing influence of a united platform was revealed when on July 29, 1946, 300,000 jute workers carried out a complete one-day strike in support of the postal workers.

From 1947, the organised disruption of the working class movement by the Congress and Socialist leaders was launched and produced its full repercussions among the jute workers too.

The position, as it stands today, is briefly as follows:

I.N.T.U.C.

The boom period for the I.N.T.U.C. was 1947-48. Unions were formed in every jute mill without exception with the active assistance of the managements and the supervisory staff. Their central slogan was "Join the Congress union and win your demands through the Tribunal which the Congress Government has set up for you." Workers in general were inclined to follow this advice and see what came of it.

The purpose of the I.N.T.U.C. was, first and foremost, to insulate the jute workers against the infection of the surrounding mass discontent of other sections of the workers, expressed in the great strike waves of 1945-46-47; to divert them from the path of mass action to that of arbitration; and, by exploiting the then prevailing infatuation with the Congress for having won "freedom", to set up separate unions which would politically disrupt the workers' urge for unity.

The general pattern of the I.N.T.U.C. unions was (a) organisational leadership in the hands of the clerks, *mistris*, and *sardars* and (b) a broad and loose mass following of Congress-minded workers—which meant the overwhelming majority of Hindusthanis from Bihar and U.P.

But even the I.N.T.U.C. could not set up a single central Congress-led union because of the rivalries of the different groups within the West Bengal Congress itself. The result was that their individual unions (area-wise, mill-wise, and even more than one in the same mill) remained as the "zamindaris" of different leaders and groups, and all were loosely put to-

gether into the Jute Workers' Federation, with Dr. Suresh Bannerjee as President and Sri Phani Ghosh as Secretary.

It should be mentioned, however, that even in its hey-day the I.N.T.U.C. could penetrate only with great difficulty into a section of the Bengali workers in the mills of Budge Budge, Bauria, Chengail, etc. The glamour of the name of the Congress never succeeded in making the I.N.T.U.C. a real mass force in the Bengali-majority mills.

The gains of the first Tribunal, however limited, were substantial enough to maintain I.N.T.U.C. prestige. But from 1949 onwards, the steadily intensifying offensive of retrenchment, wage-cuts, and heavier work-loads, began to cut the ground from under the I.N.T.U.C.'s feet. Its role as the agency of the employers and the Government became increasingly clear; the indignant workers, expecting it to come to their rescue, soon began to be disillusioned by the unfruitful slogan of more and more tribunals.

Without going into details, it is possible to assert that this process of disillusionment has gone on steadily, though unevenly, since then; it has only been accelerated by the ridiculous farce of the second Tribunal; and today the influence of I.N.T.U.C. unions has declined considerably among the mass of workers, the majority of whom no longer believe that the I.N.T.U.C. is capable of defending their interests. The role of many of the I.N.T.U.C. leaders as *dalals* and strike-breakers has been exposed before those sections of workers who have directly participated in the struggles of the last two years.

However, it would be incorrect and dangerous to conclude from this that the I.N.T.U.C. no longer exists as a force to be reckoned with. It is true that its organised base in the mills has become narrow; that the majority of the workers who earlier enrolled themselves as members of the I.N.T.U.C. unions now refuse to pay their subscriptions; and that even the *mistris* and lower-paid clerks are increasingly looking for an alternative leadership.

Nevertheless the I.N.T.U.C. unions continue to enjoy all sorts of facilities and rights (meetings inside mill premises, negotiations, representation of grievances etc.) which are denied to the A.I.T.U.C. unions by the I.J.M.A. and the Government's Labour Department.

The recent split in the Bengal Committee of the I.N.T.U.C., however, has laid bare before the workers the increas-

ing difficulties of the I.N.T.U.C. leadership in their attempt to make the trade unions a political tool of the Congress bourgeoisie. While the Praja Socialists want to make the trade unions a tail of their party politics and factions, the Congress leadership wants them to be the tail of their political party manoeuvres. The split has totally exposed their claim that they are building a genuine trade union movement, while the A.I.T.U.C. makes the unions serve "ulterior political" motives. The split, the intervention of Nehru and Dr. B. C. Roy in the squabbles of the big bourgeoisie in Bengal standing behind the two wings of the I.N.T.U.C. leadership as to what bloc of speculators and profit makers should control the Bengal I.N.T.U.C., show how big are the stakes involved, how acute have become the contradictions in the bourgeois camp, and how alarmed they are if the A.I.T.U.C. call for a united trade union movement, united against the exploiters, irrespective of political differences, begins to secure the support of the workers.

Hence, the A.I.T.U.C. unions must pursue united front work with the I.N.T.U.C. workers in the factories and make persistent efforts for unity with the I.N.T.U.C. unions.

Socialists:

The activity of the Socialists is limited to the Shibpur-Ghusuri Salkea areas of Howrah. They have one central union—the Howrah Zilla Chatkal Mazdoor Union which has no organisational form. Its activities revolve entirely around the person of Sri Sibnath Bannerjee, whose claim to renown rests on his long years of labour activity in Howrah. It is out and out a one-man show.

Among a section of Hindusthani workers in the mills of Shibpur, Sibnath Bannerjee still retains some influence despite his crushing defeat in the elections. He has a few active militants who follow him, through whom he is able to intervene frequently in disputes affecting the workers. Such occasions are used by the Socialists for raising funds, displays of *satyagraha* and negotiating deals with the management behind the workers' backs. Nor are the Socialists any more reluctant than their I.N.T.U.C. counterparts to resort to the worst forms of provincial and communal chauvinism in order to divide the workers.

However, the fact remains that Sibnath Bannerjee, by displaying considerable personal initiative and exercising direct leadership, is still able to rally the workers on certain occasions. During the prolonged struggle in the Bengal Jute Mill he succeeded in temporarily gaining the workers' confidence. The fundamental identity of role of the H.M.S. and I.N.T.U.C. leaderships (the central core of which are united within the I.C.F.T.U.) is still masked from the workers, including those who support the H.M.S., by the "anti-Congress" fulminations and the apparently "militant" tactics of the Socialist leaders.

U.T.U.C.

For all practical purposes, the U.T.U.C. means the Bengal Provincial Chatkal Mazdoor Union led by the Bolshevik Party.

This union, too, does not function organisationally. Its activities, like those of the majority of jute unions, consist of occasional mass meetings, sporadic collections of subscriptions and attempts to intervene in local disputes. It is limited to the Barrackpore belt and in particular to Titagarh, Jaggadal and Naihati. It has very little independent mass influence but has a number of active militants in four or five mills. In the eyes of the mass of workers, they are indistinguishable from the "Red Flag" workers of the A.I.T.U.C. and are generally taken to be the same.

The possibilities of close co-operation and united action with the U.T.U.C. are naturally greater than with any of the other organisations. From time to time, the unions of the A.I.T.U.C. and U.T.U.C. have organised joint anti-retrenchment conferences, campaigns and meetings, but there is as yet no continuity of work along this line.

Independent Unions

There are a small number of unions not affiliated to any of the central T.U. organisations. Most of them are limited to a specific mill and some of them exercise considerable influence over the workers of the mill concerned. In some of them (e.g. Naskarpara) trade unionists of different political views work jointly. In others, the basis of the union is a sectional or craft one, i.e., it is predominantly a *mistris'*, or a clerks', or a weavers' union (e.g. Shamnugger, Naihati, Bansberia, etc.).

The origin of these independent unions, on the basis of a particular mill, often lies in the desire of the workers concerned to keep their organisation aloof from political and other extraneous activities. This is, in fact, an inverted reflection of their urge for class unity on a purely economic basis. It is not surprising that such unions often have a very narrow and parochial outlook as far as the general movement of all jute workers against the I.J.M.A. is concerned.

Where such unions command wide influence, even on a local scale, it is the duty of the A.I.T.U.C.-led movement to adopt a fraternal attitude towards them, to help them patiently to realise the necessity of acting unitedly with workers of all other mills, and to draw them increasingly into the common movement. Not to do this means that these independent unions objectively act as yet another obstacle in the path of unity.

A.I.T.U.C.

It is a regrettable fact that, like the I.N.T.U.C., the A.I.T.U.C. too cannot boast of a single centralised jute union under its banner. It has not even formed a federation of its affiliated unions which number about a dozen. Of course, one of these is the Bengal Chatkal Mazdur Union which was first formed after the 1937 general strike and which has branches in Budge Budge, Shibpur, Rishra, Kamarhatty, Titagarh, and half a dozen other centres.

The A.I.T.U.C. unions are spread out over the four districts in which the jute mills are located but their mass influence and level of organisation are very uneven indeed. Generally speaking, it may be said that at present their strongest bases are in the Bengali-majority mills of Budge Budge, Chengail and Uluberia and the weakest in the vast Hindusthani-majority belt. In the latter, one or two islands of A.I.T.U.C. mass influence stand out, notably at Kamarhatty and Gondalpara.

Another serious weakness is the fact that A.I.T.U.C. activity is very limited or even non-existent in three of the *key* centres of jute mill concentration—Jagaddal, Titagarh, and Champdani-Bhadreshwar. The mills situated in these areas have traditionally been the advanced guard of the Hindusthani workers' struggles. Approximately 75,000 workers are employed here in 16 mills among which are some of the biggest single units in the industry such as Khardah, Kinnison, Angus,

Samnugger, Titaghur, Anglo-India, Megna and Alliance, each of them with over 1000 looms. A.I.T.U.C. weakness here is a fundamental drawback of the movement.

With one or two exceptions, the organisational structure of our unions is also most unsatisfactory. The pattern of activity is one common to jute—periodical mass meetings and *bustee* or gate propoganda, irregular collection of subscriptions, and very nominal office work.

On the credit side, it can be said that the A.I.T.U.C. unions command far wider mass influence and prestige than is reflected either in their organised membership or in their practical leadership of concrete struggles. There is no doubt that the workers in general, including those who are Congress-minded, regard the A.I.T.U.C.-led unions as the most consistent and militant fighters against the bosses' *zoolum*. They have seen the concentrated fire of repression against us, in striking contrast with the facilities offered to I.N.T.U.C. leaders and unions by the employers and Government alike. They have seen how the A.I.T.U.C. unions were physically excluded from the first Tribunal by Government repression and denied representation before the second Tribunal by an arbitrary "legal" decision. They are increasingly expressing their conviction that "Only the *Lal Jhanda*, and no one else, will do anything for us."

The deepening crisis affecting the workers' life in every way is the surest objective basis for anticipating that mass support for the A.I.T.U.C. unions will go on increasing, provided they adopt correct tactics and pursue them with resolute energy. Over the industry as a whole, only two organisations and two movements, one led by the I.N.T.U.C. and the other by the A.I.T.U.C., are of material consequence; and there is no doubt about which of them is declining and disintegrating and which is growing and being strengthened. It is the task of all sincere trade union workers to hasten this process.

(d) *The Unorganised Majority*

Among the major obstacles in the path to broad-based unity of the jute workers is the harsh reality that the *overwhelming majority* of them, perhaps 95%, are not organised in any trade union. The membership figures of the I.N.T.U.C. unions are, as everyone knows, highly inflated and bear no relation at all to their real influence. Membership of the

A.I.T.U.C. unions, on the other hand, remains low and stagnant due to the failure to translate their growing mass influence into organisational terms. The net result is a vast unorganised mass, exploding into local spontaneous actions every now and then, lacking any continuity of movement or consciousness, and victim of all sorts of fissiparous tendencies and disruptive propaganda.

No healthy tradition of trade unionism has yet developed among the jute workers. Trade union consciousness among them is lower than among any other section of industrial workers with the probable exception of tea-plantation and colliery workers.

It is true that in the post-war period, the tremendous working class upsurge of 1945-47, the pressure of the intensifying crisis of recent years, the examples of workers of neighbouring industries who have organised new unions, etc. have had considerable effect on the jute workers' consciousness and have also secured for them some gains.

It is clear that if the majority of workers remain unorganised as at present, there is absolutely no possibility of checking the I.J.M.A. offensive. Of course, organisation must mean something more than mere formal enrolment of union members. The I.N.T.U.C. with all its admittedly large-scale (though often forcible) collection of membership dues in 1947-48, can hardly be said to have organised the workers. The point is to function the unions democratically, to develop and educate a union leadership consisting of rank and file workers themselves, to make the workers, through their own experience, regard and cherish the unions as their own instruments of class struggle, instead of as outside agencies which are only prepared to give them legal assistance in return for financial support.

Nevertheless, it is true that the first step towards our goal does consist in conscious and planned extension of membership. This must be realised by the A.I.T.U.C. jute unions because they have grossly neglected this task hitherto, although they enjoy much greater mass influence than is reflected in their membership registers. *World Trade Union Movement* (No. 2, 1952), fortnightly review of the World Federation of Trade Unions, lays particular stress on this point:

“One of the most effective ways of defending and safeguarding trade unions is to increase their membership.

Recruiting members should be no temporary objective—it should always have a prominent place in the programme of union activities.... Large groups of workers are not trade union members because there is no local or national organisation helping them to get organised or showing them the way.”

For all jute unions, therefore, “*Organise the unorganised*” is a key slogan for realising the unity of the workers within a common class organisation and a common movement.

Chapter VIII

THE PROBLEM OF ORGANISATION

WE PROPOSE to indicate briefly here only one or two problems of union organisation which have a vital bearing on the all-important task of forging unity and developing a united movement.

a) *The problem of how to adjust the present low level of the movement and of the workers' consciousness with the urgent need for more centralised and unified organisation:*

As stated earlier, there are a number of separate unions affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C. alone, quite apart from the numerous non-A.I.T.U.C. unions. Only one of these, the Bengal Chatkal Mazdur Union, has the organisational form of a centralised union with branches in different mills or localities. All the other A.I.T.U.C. unions are confined to a particular mill or mills in a specific area.

It is generally agreed that the slogan "One union in one industry" must be widely popularised among the workers as part of our battle for unity. But it is also true that this slogan loses much of its effectiveness when the workers see that while we sincerely preach the necessity of one union, yet we ourselves retain a dozen separate unions in contrast to the H.M.S., U.T.U.C. and even the I.N.T.U.C. (which can at least boast of a "federation")!

As against this, and in consideration of the supreme task of developing workers' united action as distinct from formal organisational unity, we have to allow for the *existing* level of mass consciousness. The strong sense of localism which unfortunately still prevails among wide sections of the workers is often reflected in their attachment to mill-wise unions, and their reluctance to merge the separate identity of their *own* union with a larger organisation.

In all such cases, we have to judge very carefully whether the unity of the workers of the particular mill concerned is

likely to be strengthened or weakened immediately by proposing that their union should become a component of a bigger, centralised body. Not formal unity but real mass unity in action will always be our decisive criterion in choosing our immediate course. But there can be no doubt that we have to combine this with a planned, conscious and energetic campaign for organisational consolidation and centralisation.

b) *The problem of orientating union activity primarily on the place of work :*

A standing defect in the organisational structure of the A.I.T.U.C. jute unions is the lack of any base *inside* the mill or department. This is contrary to the fundamental principles of trade union organisation.

Ever since he can remember, the jute worker has understood by "union", nothing more than an office situated outside the mill and some union "*babus*" whose job is to write occasional petitions and hold gate, *bustee*, or mass meetings. The union is thus a reality to him only *outside* the mill and outside working hours. Inside the mill the union has no existence.

Yet it is inside the mill that the real class struggle goes on daily and exploitation of the workers is carried out in a thousand different ways. It is in the departments that *zoolum* assumes its concrete form, whether it be an unobtrusive speed-up of machinery or an act of oppression by the *sahib*; it is in the departments that the *dalals* are active, carrying on their disruptive deceitful whisper campaigns; and it is in the departments that the workers' anger bursts out into spontaneous actions every now and then. But where is the union in all this?

It is, therefore, obvious that the A.I.T.U.C. unions will remain isolated from the mass of workers unless we change radically the very basis of our organisational outlook and activity so as to make our unions really live organs in close contact with the mass of workers.

There is no question of minimising the need and importance of the union office or the *bustee* or *mohalla* committee. But the *decisive* task to which primary attention must be given—all the more because it has hitherto been completely neglected—is to link the union with the workers *at their place of work*. For it is there that their collective class consciousness regarding exploitation is at its highest.

This means that our unions have to set about organising *mill committees* and *department committees* as the foundation pillars of their whole structure. Without these, the unions will never become a part of the workers' daily consciousness and will never be able to organise them promptly and consciously for united action.

It goes without saying in mills or departments where workers' support is divided between more than one union, the A.I.T.U.C. union members will work for setting up *united* or *joint committees* drawing in the workers of different unions as well as the non-union workers. This is a question of adopting flexible tactics to meet the specific situation. But the basic purpose remains unchanged, viz. to transfer the primary base of mass organisation from outside to inside the mill.

c) *The need for functioning the unions democratically and developing a rank and file leadership:*

The A.I.T.U.C. unions must adhere firmly to the fundamental practice and obligation of *consulting* the workers on all matters affecting their interests before formulating demands or deciding on a particular course of action.

This is the essence of trade union democracy. It means, concretely, that the executive committees of the unions must be regularly functioning bodies, properly elected by the members, actively participating in the day to day work of the union, and exercising strict control over all aspects of the union's finances.

Only in this way can the workers be made to feel that they themselves are participating in the formulation of demands and the work of organisation whether inside or outside the mill. To the ordinary jute worker, union membership must be made to mean, not merely the formal payment of so many annas as subscription, but the right to express his opinion frankly and freely on all activities of the union and the responsibility to do so as well.

Democratic functioning ensures that the unions will never suffer from a "shortage" of cadres, nor become dependent on a handful of leading officials or "organisers". On the contrary, it will encourage a regular flow of rank and file militants to come forward to discharge the multifarious jobs, ranging from manning the union office and collecting sub-

scriptions to distributing leaflets, pasting up posters, addressing meetings, etc.

"Is it not a fact", asks the Secretary of the French C.G.T., "that when a programme of demands is drawn up with the participation of all the workers in a factory it is of far more value? When demands are decided upon by the workers the forms of action to be undertaken for their achievement are easily found, the chances of success are twice as great, for the fact of having helped to decide upon the demands, and having decided upon the forms of struggle, pledges everyone to do everything possible to win victory." (*World Trade Union Movement*, No. 1, 1952, p. 12.)

The unending I.J.M.A. offensive can only be checked or stopped if our jute unions are *internally* strong, if they function democratically and if they are firmly linked with the masses through active rank and file militants.

d) *The problem of linking up the work of the jute unions with the demands and struggles of the peasantry:*

This problem derives specific importance in the case of the jute workers' movement from the strong ties which they have retained with the land. The typical jute worker is still half-proletarian, half-peasant, driven by the agrarian crisis to sell his comparatively unskilled and cheap labour-power to the millowners, and regarding his factory earnings primarily as a supplement to the family's income from agriculture.

The only industrial proletarians, in the complete sense of that word, can be said to comprise that section of landless peasants who have been totally uprooted from the villages and virtually compelled by destitution and chronic indebtedness to evacuate their homes altogether and migrate for good to the jute mill areas. But such an irrevocable severing of all ties with one's native soil is still the exception rather than the rule.

The average jute worker coming from Bihar, U. P., Orissa or Andhra is still one brother or son of the family back home; his own wife and children, more often than not, have stayed behind in the village; he comes to the jute mills in an "alien" land to earn what he can, to live here as frugally as possible and to send home with unfailing regularity the money order which will supplement the miserable and shrinking pittance wrung from the soil by his other brothers and, maybe, his old father too. His securing of a job in the mills is itself often a

village affair—the *sardar* who gets him in (not without extracting his own price) may be his own uncle or an important elder of his village who has consistently used his position to recruit his own relatives and his friends' relatives! And, when the annual harvesting season arrives, our typical jute worker will often take advantage of the time-honoured convention of unpaid leave and go home for a month or two to lend a hand to the family. (He runs the risk, of course, of losing his job if he overstates the period sanctioned by his boss).

In the case of the Bengali workers the village tie is much more direct and real. The overwhelming majority of them employed in the mills of Budge Budge, Birlapur, Rajgunje, Sankrail, Bauria, Chengail, and Uluberia are peasants from the immediately adjacent rural areas. They live in their own villages, till the soil and come to and from the mills daily.

Thus the jute worker in West Bengal has this peculiar, mixed class characteristic—half-peasant, half-industrial proletarian—which is not found in such marked degree among any other major section of *factory* labour in India, but is more common in the case of plantation and coal-mine workers.

Every pressing problem of the toiling peasant—the struggle against eviction, against high rents and usury, against forced labour, and iniquitous share-cropping tenures, against forcible Government procurement and high commodity prices—is thus a vital part of the jute workers' consciousness. So also is the general level of political consciousness prevailing among the peasantry in the particular area from which the workers happen to come.

The development of a strong trade union movement among the jute workers is thus intimately bound up with the task of combining their demands and the defence of their interests *as workers* with the demands, interests and struggles of the *peasantry* of which they themselves are a living part. The closer the links which the jute workers' organised movement can forge with the kisan movement, the stronger it will become, and both movements will derive considerable benefit from the mutual alliance.

It is not possible to deal at length in this study with this important problem and its possible solutions. There is no doubt that the trade unions have practically done no work in this direction upto now, though they have been sharply reminded by events, on many occasions, that the "backwardness" of the vast mass of Hindusthani workers is nothing but a re-

flexion of the prevailing level of consciousness in the U. P. and Bihar villages which still remain overwhelmingly under Congress influence and where the revolutionary peasant movement is still comparatively weak.

The trade unions have to make a beginning by giving serious attention to the following immediate problems and tasks:

1) Establishment of contact with the Kisan Sabhas in the major districts of Bihar and U. P. from which the bulk of jute workers come. This is necessary both in order to keep the unions regularly informed of current agrarian developments, and to keep track of worker militants who go home on leave and kisan militants who may come here in search of employment.

2) Systematic agitation and propaganda among the workers on the demands and struggles of the peasantry, the fight against famine, the Congress hoax of zamindari abolition, the connection between the agrarian crisis and the low level of wages in the jute mills etc.

3) Organisation of solidarity actions by the workers in support of the peasants, in protest against Government and landlord repression on the kisan movement, in defence of kisan leaders on trial, and by way of relief for the peasantry of famine-affected areas.

4) In areas where the majority of workers come from the adjacent villages, the trade unions have to take the initiative to build up much closer and living physical contact between the two movements. This surrounding rural hinterland opens up vast possibilities of conducting successful workers' struggles in the mills concerned, enabling them to mobilise the entire peasant mass in close support to the trade union struggle. Active mobilisation of the village population would here go a long way in strengthening the workers' fighting morale and capacity and enable them physically and economically to withstand the strain of prolonged strikes or lock-outs such as are frequently resorted to by the employers.

We have seen from experience, on the one hand, that the top leaders of the Jute Workers' Federation (whether they call themselves official Congressmen or K.M.P.P. followers) and of the Howrah Zilla Chatkal Mazdur Union are the most implacable foes of unity and united action. They derive their inspiration from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to which they are both affiliated and have as their

twin objectives: (a) to keep the jute workers divided and (b) to side-track the workers' growing urge for militant mass action into disruptive and "safe" channels, which avoid mass mobilisation. The I.C.F.T.U. acts the world over as an agency for ensuring the success of the capitalists' anti-working class rationalisation measures.

On the other hand, experience shows us that the depth and intensity of the economic crisis is more and more uniting the workers, even though so far only on a local or partial scale, in favour of joint defence of their common interests. Political and other differences at the bottom are increasingly getting subordinated to the overriding economic necessity of self-preservation. Although the I.N.T.U.C. and H.M.S. leaders, for a number of reasons discussed earlier, still command considerable influence, they cannot be identified or confused with the ordinary workers under their influence.

This is the concrete situation in which the fight for uniting the jute workers has to go forward. One thing is clear: the *INITIATIVE must come from the A.I.T.U.C. unions*. They must take up as their central task, as the *core* of all their activity, the struggle to isolate and expose the confirmed disruptors, on the one hand, and to draw the broad masses, irrespective of political, national, communal and other differences, the organised and the unorganised, into a single, mighty united front capable of halting the offensive of reaction.

Unity will never come automatically or spontaneously. Our unions have to come before the workers as the conscious builders, propagandists and crusaders of unity. They must stick determinedly to their purpose of winning over the *majority* of workers in the biggest and most important mills to the policy of united action.

In this respect, the valuable experiences and directives of the W.F.T.U. must serve as the main guiding line of the work of our jute unions. And, above all, they must overcome all manifestations of sectarianism within their own ranks, before they can give expression to the workers' desire for effective resistance to retrenchment, wage-cuts, intensified labour, and unemployment.

Chapter IX

TASKS AND CONCLUSIONS

THE BROAD tasks confronting the jute workers' unions follow logically from the problems discussed above. They may be outlined, very briefly, as follows:

(1) *Formulation of simple and easily intelligible demands* on the general issues affecting *all* the workers uniformly in *all* the mills, e.g.

- Against reduction, on any pretext, of the minimum standard of basic wages and D.A. laid down by the Tribunal Award.
- Workers' wages and D. A. to remain unaffected by any compulsory reduction in working hours below the statutory 48-hour week.
- A minimum basic wage of Rs. 35 per month. (This figure corresponds to the demand of the A.I.T.U.C. for an immediate national minimum basic wage; further, if added to the existing D.A. of Rs. 37|6, it would make the total minimum emoluments only Rs. 72|6, whereas the 1948 Tribunal admitted that Rs. 71 was the minimum living wage justified at the then price level.)
- Proportionate, all-round increase in wage-scales, piece-rates and D.A. to meet the increased cost of living.
- Against retrenchment and sealing of looms; for adequate unemployment benefits, doles, and alternative jobs for all displaced workers.
- Against increase in work-loads.
- Adequate safeguards for security of service.
- Against illegal deprivation of statutory leave with pay according to the Factory Act.
- Safeguards against fall in piece-rate earnings due to bad quality of raw materials, shortage of stores, excessive speed-up, etc.

- For increased medical facilities; application of the Health Insurance Scheme to the jute industry.
- For adequate and decent housing at the expense of the employers and Government.
- For trade union rights and safeguards against harassment and victimisation of workers.

(2) *Formulation of concrete demands on other issues affecting large sections of workers (mistris, clerks, badliwallas, durwans, etc.) or affecting specific mills or departments. These have to be worked out on the spot by the local unions.*

(3) *On the basis of such general and partial demands the carrying on of the struggle for united action of all workers, using mainly the following forms:*

- Concrete proposals both to the top leadership of the non-A.I.T.U.C. unions and to their local workers.
- Formation of *united action committees* in the mills and departments on specific issues for action.
- Public exposure* by concrete facts and positive criticism of all those who refuse and obstruct united action.
- Independent mass mobilisation* and activity by the A.I.-T.U.C. unions in favour of united action and unity.

(4) *Against national disruption; against communal disruption:*

- Intensive agitation and propaganda to expose disruptive slogans and motives of all chauvinist forces.
- Ceaseless stress on the need for class unity in common class organisations.
- Patient explanation of the legitimate fears of non-Bengali and Muslim minority workers and how to allay them.
- Serious attention to cultural and social activity, particularly among the minority sections, through libraries, night schools, schools for workers' children, drama and music groups, etc.
- Issuing of leaflets, booklets, union bulletins and wall-newspapers, progressive journals, etc. in Hindi and Urdu, and other non-Bengali languages.

(5) *Organising the unorganised majority:*

- All round extension of union activities reaching out to new sections.
- Planned, systematic, regular membership drive.

(6) *Agitation for Demands in the National interest:*

- For expansion of trade in jute goods with all countries without discrimination.
- For exchange of jute goods on a basis of barter for machinery, food grains, tractors, machine-tools, and other vital necessities.
- For comprehensive official investigation into the large-scale misappropriation of national wealth by the jute companies and managing agencies by corrupt practices and illegal transactions.
- Confiscation without compensation of the British capital in the industry.

(7) *Development of working class consciousness:*

- By concrete explanatory campaigns on the national importance of the industry, its crisis, and how to refute the employers' arguments.
- By exposing the I.J.M.A.'s character and policy, the reality of British control, methods of profiteering, its relations with Government, its anti-national trade policy, etc.
- By popularising the demands, struggles and experiences of other sections of the working class, of the A.I.T.U.C. and W.F.T.U.
- By popularising demands and struggles of the peasantry and building closest possible ties between the workers and peasants' movements.
- By popularising all other democratic issues affecting the people in general, viz. the fight for Peace and against war, against famine, for civil liberties etc.
- By mobilising the workers on all these issues and strengthening their fraternal ties with the local populace.

(8) *Organisational:*

- Extensive popularisation of the slogan "One union for all jute workers".
- Steps to federate or otherwise consolidate the unions affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C.
- Emphasis on organisational work at the place of work—mill and department committees.
- Function the unions democratically and conscientiously, activise executive committees, function offices.
- Consciously develop rank and file militant leadership.

- Build up union funds for agitational work, intensify leaf-letting, postering, etc.
- Organise the retrenched workers for unemployment benefits.

It is along the broad lines indicated above that the jute unions have to work out their detailed and specific tasks.

A *mass policy*, eschewing all vestiges of sectarianism—this must be the immediate slogan of our unions if they are to take a single step forward.

Let us, in conclusion, recall the wise words of the W.F.T.U. in reviewing its world-wide experiences and take them as our guiding line:

“When leaders have been capable of formulating simple and correct demands, understandable to all and accepted by all the workers; when they have shown the path to success and, in particular, have explained the importance and necessity of united action; when they have succeeded in promoting the formation of united action committees adapted to the particular situation and based on demands and programmes adopted by the workers; when they have untiringly and publicly renewed proposals for unity with all trade union organisations at all levels in denouncing the disruptionist leaders who oppose united action; when the unity committees have fully played their role of organising the workers’ struggle; when the workers have been democratically consulted on questions affecting their movement and on the decision to be taken; when the unity committees were not allowed to break up after the struggle; then very broad movements were successfully developed.

“Moreover, in certain cases it has been possible to wage the fight for united action until organisational unity has been achieved.” (Report of Louis Saillant, General Secretary, W.F.T.U., to the Vienna meeting of the Executive Bureau, July, 1951.)

There is no doubt that by loyally adhering to the basic principles enunciated by the W.F.T.U. our jute unions can record important successes in the days ahead.