

**TRADE UNION
EDUCATION
LECTURE NOTES**

(PART I & II)

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NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this book was sold off within a short time of its publication. This only shows the great urge that exists among the cadres and the rank-and-file for trade union education.

Meanwhile, orders have piled up for copies of the book. The time however has been too short for getting and incorporating suggestions from different quarters for improving and revising the book in several aspects. The only alternative is to bring out this second edition with a minimum of necessary corrections.

Trade Union education is a continuous process. I hope that in the coming months, 'teachers', 'students' and colleagues in the trade union field will find the time to note down their comments and suggestions and send them on to the AITUC, so that next time it can be vastly improved.

A. B. Bardhan

10-9-87

New Delhi

FOREWORD

This is an attempt at a systematised study course, for AITUC activists and other trade union cadres.

Trade Union work is a speciality, and with every passing day, TU issues, TU work, TU tactics, linking the day to day TU struggle with the general class struggle of the working class, with the problems of the contemporaneous world, are becoming even more complex. Trade Union education of activists and cadres is therefore becoming a task of first priority. In order to learn to swim, a person must first jump into the water or be pushed into it. But if that person is to become a tolerable swimmer, knowing the strokes and the technique and capable of battling with the waves and the currents, he has to go through a course of coaching, of hard tutoring. And so it is in the case of trade union work. One has to begin by going into the working masses, and acquainting oneself with the conditions and problems of the particular section of workers one comes across. But after that, lack of knowledge about essentials, or leaving the matter to time and spontaneity, is no good. "Ignorance has never yet been of use to anyone".

Speaking specifically about workers' combination into trade unions, Karl Marx had observed, "One element of success they (the workers) possess—numbers: but numbers weigh only in the balance if united by combination and led by knowledge".

What is meant by "*knowledge*" here, is knowledge about the theory and practice of trade union work, knowledge about scientific socialism which is the ideological basis of revolutionary trade union activity.

The study course is meant to be an opening to this storehouse of knowledge.

The study course is made up of about 30 lessons, divided into three parts.

Part I deals with the historical growth of the trade union movement in general, and in India in particular.

Part II covers the different aspects of trade union functioning, and the common tasks which our unions have to tackle in our country today—economic, political, social, legal, etc.

Part III deals with some of the problems of the contemporary world, which pose new challenges to the working class, and which require the linking of every day tasks with national and international tasks in the new situation.

In preparing the lessons, I have drawn from available material and sources, including the skeleton syllabi that comrades have been using all these years at different places. The experience of the very useful Central Trade Union School conducted many years back has also been utilised for the purpose.

On certain aspects I have gone into some details, while skimping in case of others. This might give a lopsided appearance to the lessons. But it has been done with a purpose. Where I thought the average teacher would not be able to lay his hands on the source material himself, or perhaps omit to stress certain aspects, I have taken care to write at some length. Not so in other matters, where the material is usually at hand.

There are some repetitions. This is because what is dealt with from one angle in one lesson, has been taken up from another angle in a subsequent lesson. In such a study course this is unavoidable. In fact, it is necessary from the point of view of maintaining continuity and of stressing the underlying link.

Each lesson does not necessarily coincide with a lecture on that topic. Depending on the time available, the level of the group, the main objective of the class, one lesson may be strung out into more than one lecture-session, or conversely, two lessons may be crammed into a single lecture. This has to be worked out on each occasion. As for illustrations, facts and figures—new ones come up with each passing day, and the teacher has to use them during his lecture.

The most difficult thing was to choose the level of cadres, the study-course is aiming at. The attempt here is to aim at the median level,—neither the new entrant, the rank and file, nor the high functionary, the leader 'at the top'.

The method adopted is mainly historical rather than mainly analytical. The former is easier to grasp, and has a deeper impact. It enables one to better understand the present and

prepare for the future. Besides, the trade union movement is an ever growing and dynamic movement. It must therefore be studied as a process of changing reality, a process in which the social reality changes, the working class changes, and the movement also undergoes changes,—each contributing in bringing about the other changes.

New problems come up. New challenges arise. New solutions have to be found. New advances are registered, and new facts, even new statistical material have to be taken note of. To be able to keep pace with it, there has therefore to be continuous addition or change in the study course as well.

It is to be hoped that in the coming days trade union education will be taken up with all seriousness. And if this study course helps in this task, its purpose would have been more than served.

New Delhi

November 10, 1986

PART I

Lesson 1

THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF THE WORKING CLASS AND THE RISE OF TRADE UNIONS

—With the emergence and growth of the working class, we trace the birth and development of industrial struggles,—struggles between the exploited workers and their exploiting masters, the capitalists. From this arises various forms of combination among the workers, and thus of *trade unions*.

—Both historically and logically the starting point of capitalist production, and hence, of capitalist exploitation, begins when each capitalist employs simultaneously a large number of labourers in the same place, in order to produce the same type of commodities, under the mastership of the same capitalist-management. This becomes necessary and possible at a certain stage in the development of the means of production.

The capitalist represents *concentrated social power*, owning the means of production and the means to hire the labour power of several workers, while the worker has only his *individual labour power* for selling to the capitalist in return for wages.

[“By *bourgeoisie* is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour. By *proletariat*, the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.”]

—The seeming equality between the worker as the seller of labour power and the capitalist as the buyer, masks the real inequality, that arises from the above relation, where the individual worker, disunited, scattered, standing each for himself, and competing with the rest of his own kind, faces the capitalist.

—Trade unions arose and developed out of the spontaneous attempt of the workers to curb this mutual competition and come together for the purpose of extracting such terms from the capitalist as would help improve their condition and raise them above the status of wage-slaves. The only social force

that the workers possess is their numerical strength. But number counts when it is united and organised. To appreciate how this realisation dawned through struggle and experience, we have to refer to this graphic description by Karl Marx:

“The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie. At first the contest is carried on by individual labourers, then by the work people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois, who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workmen of the Middle Ages.

“At this stage the labourers still form an incoherent mass, scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition...

“But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in numbers, it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more...the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois, takes more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (Trade Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provisions beforehand for these occasional revolts...

“Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that places the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes...”²

—All this conclusively refutes the propaganda and slander, both in our country and abroad, that trade union organisation and the trade union movement is the handiwork of a few ‘professional agitators’ motivated by selfish or narrow interests. Trade unions have sprung forth from the midst of the working class, grown in the crucible of their struggles against inhuman exploitation, and consolidated in the flames of the workers’ woes

and sufferings. They are not the products of anyone's instigation, but the inevitable march of history. The trade union movement has its roots embedded deeply in life itself.

—In the course of their life workers set up different organisations. But the trade unions are the most important mass organisations of the working class. It is the trade unions which can draw within their fold the broad working masses, the entire class. They are the focal points for the organisation of the workers, and for their struggles in modern times. In most countries, the trade unions are by and large the biggest mass organisations, and potentially the most powerful social force for progress.

1. Note by Frederick Engels to the Communist Manifesto.
2. *Communist Manifesto*: Marx and Engels.

FURTHER READING

1. *Communist Manifesto*: Marx and Engels.

Lesson 2

THE RISE OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN INDIA

india
—The emergence of the modern working class in India was delayed due to the belated and thwarted capitalist development in colonial India. It arose during the second half of the 19th century with the setting up of modern factories, opening up of mines, plantations, railways and communication.

by creating up our self-sufficient village econ.
British industrial capital had a clearly defined policy for its Indian colony. Ending the monopoly of the East India Company in trade by the year 1813, it launched the new stage of industrial capitalist exploitation. This was to make India the agricultural hinterland of British Capital,—supplying raw materials and providing a market for its manufactured goods. The aim was to drain away our resources, to extract maximum tribute for their capital accumulation. New land systems were introduced, which imposed a new class of proprietors and intermediaries and increased manifold the burden of rent and indebtedness on our peasantry. The near wholesale destruction of Indian manufacturing and handicraft industries alienated millions of artisans and craftsmen from means of production, and led to their utter ruin. Agriculture was allowed to decay, and hunger stalked the land. The result was a series of the most devastating famines. An estimated twenty million died between 1825-1900. Lakhs were transported as indentured labour to remote British colonies across the oceans, for working in plantations. And millions of others were forced to flock to the new towns and rising industrial centres, where they found work in factories, mines, plantations or railroads, as general casual lab (X)

+With the development of imperialism, the stage of finance capital and its rule, and with the defeat of India's First War of Independence in 1857, the Company was finally abolished, and British Capital started pouring into India, particularly in fields which opened up the Indian market to British penetration, and which did not come into competition with British manufacturing industries. A network of rail-lines and telegraphs was laid. Plantations and coal-mines were developed. Cotton textile and jute mills came to be set up.

X- This ^{initial} process of expropriation evoked powerful resistance from our people. One has to recall the Santal Rebellion, the Deccan riots & so forth.

The first cotton mill started production in Bombay in 1853. The first jute mill went into production at Rishra in Bengal in 1858. The first railroad was laid in 1852.

—Alongside British investments, the cotton textile industry in particular, began to draw the new Indian bourgeoisie which was emerging out of the commercial usurious and mercantile community. Indian capital had of course to push its way forward simultaneously in collaboration with and in stiff opposition against the British.

+New classes, new forces thus began to appear on the Indian scene,—the rising bourgeoisie, the English educated middle class, the modern working class coming forth from the mass of pauperised peasantry and artisans. The slow and halting process, but nevertheless the specific form of industrial development, also determined the structure of the Indian working class for a long time. The cotton textile, jute and the railway workers were the principal segments of the rising proletariat in the country.

+By 1914, the number of industrial workers in India covered under the Factories Act was 951,000. Between 1914 and 1918, due to war compulsions, there was rapid growth in certain branches of industry. The industrial census of 1921 recorded a total of 2.6 million workers employed in all establishments employing 10 or more workers. The process then slowed down, and even received a set back during the World Economic Crisis and the cyclical crisis of capitalism, so that by the beginning of the Second World War, the number of workers in modern large scale industry numbered no more than 3.5 million. It was only after the dawn of Freedom, and the urge for rapid development, that the strength of the Indian proletariat started going up fast. But this we shall study later.

—What was the measure of the misery and sufferings heaped on the Indian working class, in the early decades of its formation? What was the nature of exploitation, which bourgeois economists and historians write nothing about, preferring to cover it with a shroud of silence? Let us quote S.A. Dange on this point:

“From 1852 on to 1880, the working class in these factories (set up by the British and their Indian agents) was exploited most inhumanly and without pity. Arrogant Britishers, pious Hindus, religious Muslims, and all combined irrespective of their religion, nationality, language or country in bleeding men, women and children in these slaughter houses of capital. There was neither law nor moral scruple to protect these millions, dazed by the new order, the new machines, the new unheard of ways of work

by the end of the 19th cent

and new masters, from the cruelties of capital in its birth on Indian soil, in a country conquered by a foreign imperialism and ravaged by its own landlords and monied traitors.

"In those days, it was jungle law that prevailed, there was no limit on hour of work. Men, women and children were herded in these dens of capital to work from 12 to 16, 18 and even 23 hours of work per day. There was no Sunday holiday, no starting and closing time. Children of five and six years of age worked full time as ~~the~~ grown ups. And when they died or were maimed in the machines there was no value for their life, or limb."

"Who then brought capital to its senses and secured ~~some~~ law, some decency in the life of the worker and his exploitation? The whole history of working class struggles world-over shows that the bourgeoisie never yielded any reform, any wage increase or improvement to the workers without workers waging determined struggles. The Indian bourgeoisie is no exception to the general characteristic of that class as such".¹

~~In brief, there was no factory law to regulate the working conditions. With the introduction of the electric lamp, even the natural limits set on the working day by sunrise and sunset ceased to operate. The miners were especially low paid, and the mines were literally 'death pits'. Workers everywhere lived in the lowliest hovels. The condition of plantation workers touched the lowest depth. Indeed, what prevailed was the 'Jungle Law'.~~

On the other hand, the capitalist garnered a veritable harvest of profits. To give one instance: In the Report issued by Tata's Empress Mills in Nagpur, during its golden jubilee celebration in 1927, the owners gloatingly stated,

"...The total profits in the Empress Mills upto the 30th June, 1926, aggregate over Rs. 92,314,527 which is nearly 61.47 times the original ordinary share capital: and upto the same date the Company has paid Rs. 59,413,267 in dividends on ordinary shares which works out to 80.86 per cent per annum on the originally subscribed capital".

Empress Mills was by no means an exception. The same was true of most other industries.

—But just like their class brothers in other countries, the Indian workers ~~too~~ did not suffer their woes and miseries as dumb animals. They began to fight back spontaneously, sporadically, supported often by the national temper. Sections of Indian workers fought not only against their intolerable conditions, but against imperialist oppression for the national cause.

For long, of course, no stable organisations emerged. The Indian workers were too illiterate, too peasant minded, ~~and too backward~~ ^{and too caste-divide} to be able to undertake this task at that time.

—We hear of a strike by palanquin-bearers of Calcutta as early as 1827, and of solidarity strike action by ferryboatmen on the Ganges and by horse-driven cartmen. We hear of strike of Cachar tea garden labourers during 1855-57. In 1862, the railway porters went on strike in Howrah. In Bombay the haloakkers went on strike in 1886, the brick-layers in 1873. In Nagpur, the Empress Mills workers went on strike in 1877. Between 1882 and 1890, no less than 25 strikes were recorded in the then Bombay and Madras Presidencies. There is in fact, a vast scope for historical research in this sphere. It is neither our intention nor possible here, to give an account of all strikes and other actions in this period. ^{+ so did the railway clerks of the East Indian Railway}

These actions were not without their effect on the British rulers. In addition, the Lancashire employers were also alarmed at the growth of the Indian mill industry and its rate of profit. They clamoured for some sort of factory legislation which would prevent 'excessive exploitation' of Indian labour. As a result of the workers' own struggles and helped by the quarrel among thieves, the Indian workers won the first Factory Act in 1881.

Since then, with every successive wave of strikes, new legislations were passed, each time shortening the working day, restricting the employment of child and female labour, etc. The strike struggles of 1920 brought the 10 hour day. The struggles of 1930-34 gave us the 9 hour day. The post-war upheavals made the Congress governments give effect to the 8 hour day in 1946.

—As stated before, though not lacking in militancy, the workers as a mass were too illiterate, too poor and backward, too peasant-oriented, to be able to set up stable organisations. Initially, what worked was a combination of spontaneity, militancy and of elemental association based on traditional ties, like village, caste etc. Only the top strata could set up organisations like the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (1897), the Printers' Union of Calcutta (1905), the Bombay Postal Union (1907), the Kamgar Hitavardhak Sabha, Bombay (1910), and so on.

It was the combination of the nascent trade union struggles, with the new upswing of the national movement during the Anti-partition and Swadeshi movements, Tilak's arrest in 1908, and the post-war upsurge between 1918 and 1920, which brought workers into political action and in turn induced the

radical intelligentsia to go among the workers, that laid the firm foundation of modern labour movement in India.

Lenin wrote in 1908, after the 6 day's political general strike of Bombay workers in protest against Tilak's conviction: "The Indian proletariat has already sufficiently matured to wage a class conscious political mass struggle..."

Wrote Macdonald in 1910:

"Indian working class might at some future date evolve some 'trade combination' of a kind midway between the castes of India and trade unions of Britain". Actually, the Indian working class had advanced further than what Macdonald would reluctantly admit.

—The year 1920 (October 31) saw the convocation of the first national convention of trade unions in Bombay, and the birth of the first central organisation of Indian workers, the All India Trade Union Congress. Present at this session were 101 delegates, representing no less than 50,000 workers with 60 unions who affiliated and 40 who sympathised. Therefore it is not as if, the AITUC was born out of anybody's wish or simple considerations like, who will represent India's workers in the ILO. Its basis had already been laid. This great historical event ushered in an organisation, which could provide a central direction to what the workers' struggles and unity had already brought forth at their various places of work, viz. the trade unions. A decisive stage was thus reached by India's working class and its trade union movement. The Indian Trade Union Act 1926 had to be passed, which recognised the trade union as a legal entity under certain minimum conditions.

1. Hundred Years' Gains of our Working Class—S. A. Dange.
2. Inflammable Material in World Politics: V. I. Lenin.
3. This consideration was only secondary. But even granting it, this means international considerations impelled Indian workers to combine on a national plane.

FURTHER READING

1. India Today: Rajani Palme Dutt.
2. History of the Trade Union Movement in India:
3. Hundred Years' Gains of Our Working Class: S. A. Dange.
4. AITUC Fifty Years: S. A. Dange.
5. Strikes in India: V. B. Karnik.

WORKING CLASS AND INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

—From the later decades of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, along with the emergence of the working class, there had been struggles—some feeble, some militant, but all spontaneous and sporadic. But with the rise of the national liberation movement, the Indian labour movement also got a fillip and reached a higher stage. The spirit unleashed by the former could not fail to have an impact on the workers smarting against oppression. Thereafter, the two movements advanced, ebbing and flowing together, one reinforcing the other.

P. 11. The partition of Bengal in 1905, evoked an unprecedented national upsurge. Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods symbolised the anti-imperialist mood. Workers not only in Bengal but even in far away Punjab and the South, responded to the call of Hartal. The defiant mood found vivid expression in the refusal of Government Press workers in Calcutta to print the Gazette. Between 1905-1909, there were widespread strike actions in Bombay mills, East Bengal Railway and elsewhere, against extension of working hours, against miserable conditions and gross abuses by capital. Sometimes, they were directly against political oppression and foreign domination.

The high-water mark was the 6-day strike by more than 2 lakhs of Bombay textile workers against the arrest and conviction of Tilak in 1908,—a day for each year of sentence, an action which Lenin hailed from afar, in the following words: (see P. 12)

—The period of 1919 to 1922 was one of tremendous national upheaval. The post-war discontent against worsening conditions, and the push given by the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia to the world revolutionary movement, brought a surge of strength both to the national liberation struggle, and the labour movement. The hartal and general strike against the Rowlatt acts, and the wave of indignation that swept the country after the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre had not only working class participation, but were also reflected in the strike movement of the workers on a scale never before witnessed.

of the Indian people against British imperialism and for national liberation

In the beginning of January 1919, already about 1,25,000 workers were out on strike. In the first half of 1920 there were about 200 strikes, involving nearly 15 lakh workers. In November 1921, the Bombay workers 'greeted' the Prince of Wales by going on strike and staging an angry demonstration. ~~R. P. Dutt summed it up in the following words:~~

~~"In the new period of awakening at the close of the First World War, the great strike movement of 1918-21 was the harbinger of the national revolutionary wave, which finally brought the Congress into movement in the non-cooperation campaign of 1920-22".~~

From P. 12
missing at not level
~~—This was the backdrop in which the foundation conference of the AITUC took place in 1920. It was no accident that the presidential address of Lala Lajpat Rai at this session, as also the speeches and resolutions at subsequent AITUC sessions, emphasised the basic ideas of, (i) workers organising and acting as a class, (ii) Indian workers acting in solidarity with workers outside India ("forging a link in the chain of international brotherhood", as Lalaji put it), in particular with the first victorious socialist revolution in Russia, and (iii) organised Indian working class participating actively in the battle for Swaraj. ~~Those became the three banners of the Indian working class movement.~~ The first ever May Day was celebrated in 1923 in Madras, led by Singaravelu Chettiar.~~

From P. 12
~~—After the retreat and withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, a new political force basing itself on the working class took shape in the Indian scene. In December 1925, the Communist Party of India was formally set up. In 1924, the AITUC had already passed a resolution stating that a Free India should be a socialist republic. Communists took up trade union work in right earnest, carrying the rising proletarian ideology of scientific socialism among the mass of workers. 'Congress Socialists' and radical intellectuals also went in large numbers among them.~~

Earlier, as also in subsequent years, many social reformers, humanists, and nationalist liberals went among the workers from outside, with the twin objective of mobilising workers for the liberation struggle, and for the workers' own rights and demands. But the overall attitude of the bulk of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists was one of ambivalence, —sympathy for the oppressed and exploited in their tribulations and occasional struggles, but hostility to their militant class action and organisation. This was remarkably personified in Mahatma Gandhi, who while organising the textile workers of Ahmedabad and personally conducting their struggle, refused

to associate himself and his 'Majur Mahajan' with any attempt to build and consolidate a *national* and a *class* organisation of the workers. It is then that he came forward with his 'trusteeship' ideology as opposed to the ideology of class struggle, to the development of the proletariat as a *class*, aware of its historical role and destiny in society.

—From the late twenties of this century, the history of the Indian trade union movement also reflects in one way or the other the struggle between the bourgeois ideology which dominated the national movement and also held sway in the trade union field, and the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. We see it in the splits, followed by reunification, and then again by splits that overtook the trade union movement. 1927-28 witnessed new stirrings among workers. Protracted, bitterly-fought and highly organised struggles of railway workers, and of textile workers in Bombay and other centres, took place. The 60,000 strong Girni Kamgar Union took shape.

More than 30,000 workers came out on the streets on February 3, 1928 when the Simon Commission landed in Bombay, combining the slogans: "We want complete Independence", and "Eight-Hour Day", etc.

In December 1928, at the Calcutta session of the Congress, over 50,000 workers from neighbouring mill areas marched inside the Congress pandal, and passed a resolution calling for 'Complete Independence'. This goal was later adopted by the Congress at Lahore in 1929.

—The role of Communists in this upswing of the trade union movement, is testified to by a well-known labour historian, who had personally no sympathies for the Communists. Writing about the Bombay textile strike (1928), he observes:

"Communists were able to get the leadership of the strike because they guessed correctly the mood of the workers and put themselves forward as vigorous champions of their cause. They were the first to realise that the rationalization scheme could be countered only through a general strike and not through separate strikes in individual mills. Having realized this, they were not in a hurry to impose their will upon the workers. They allowed the latter to learn by their own experience and advocated a general strike only when they were ripe for it... they were tireless in their work, fearless in their attitude and steadfast in devotion. These qualities paid them rich dividends and after the end of the strike, they became unquestioned leaders of the working class of Bombay".³

—The round-up of Communist leaders in the 'Meerut Conspiracy Case' (1929), left the workers without a mature and ex-

perienced leadership for a number of years. Nevertheless, there were a number of heroic rearguard actions. The Communists and other activists had prepared the organisational groundwork well, and even without their trusted leaders, the workers acted. As often happens in periods of general retreat, certain striking rearguard actions also take place, which have significance for the movement in subsequent years of its revival. One such action was the jute mills general strike in 1929. The jute mill-owners united for common action under the IJMA. But the workers' action was so successful, that it was the employers, and not the workers who made the first approach to government for its intervention in settling the dispute! With the second wave of national struggle (1930-34), the Civil Disobedience Movement, workers again came out on the streets. 50,000 textile workers in Sholapur struck against the arrest of Gandhiji on May 5, 1930. Along with other sections of the population, workers took control of the town, replaced the police and the civil administration and established their own order. The British rulers had to declare martial law on 12 May, in order to regain control over Sholapur.

—After the withdrawal of the C. D. Movement there was a period of comparative lull on the national front. But working class actions continued as seen in the strikes of the G.I.P., MSM and BNR railway workers, and the big textile strikes in Bombay, Kanpur, Nagpur, Sholapur and other centres in 1933-34. The strike of the Sholapur workers lasted for nearly 4 months despite the most severe repression.

This was followed by a bigger strike wave in 1937, during which jute and cotton textile workers fought victoriously against the wage-cut imposed some years earlier, during the Great Depression. The AITUC organised a one-day political strike against the new imperialist dictated constitution, which the Congress also vigorously opposed. This situation posed the question of reunifying the TUC, which had split earlier in 1929, and then again, in 1931. The AITUC once again became the sole central trade union organisation of the Indian workers. With its reunification there was a spurt in the strength of the AITUC.

In 1937, the first Congress ministries assumed office in the provinces. The question arose: How will the Indian bourgeoisie use the partial state power it had obtained, in its relations with the working class? The answer was the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act,—a reactionary act, prejudicial to the interests of the workers, and meant to subordinate their interests to the class interests of the bourgeoisie. The workers reacted by a one-day protest strike on November 7, 1938. The Congress government

fired on the workers, and claimed two victims. During the short regime of the Congress ministries at that time, TU leader Hazara Singh was crushed under a truck while picketing during a strike in the TISCO Jamshedpur. In Assam, the Assam Oil Company workers at Digboi were fired upon by the military, and 3 of them killed. Subsequently, 60 workers were victimised for giving evidence before the Enquiry Commission. The AITUC gave a call for an All India Digboi Day on August 6, 1938. Head on clashes, culminating in firings and deaths occurred at Madras, Bombay, and other places.

There was also the case of applying Sec. 144 against the British owners of the Harvey Group of mills at Madurai. But this first action of its kind against the owners, was also the last. In general, the policy of the bourgeoisie was to suppress the workers when they combined together and resorted to militant actions for vindicating their rights.

—In September 1939, war broke out. More than 90,000 workers downed tools in Bombay on October 2, 1939 in opposition to the 'imperialist' war. Strikes occurred in many places for increased wages and grant of dearness allowance to offset the rising prices in the wake of the war. While the capitalists profited from war orders, the demand arose for grant of 'war bonus' to the workers.

—The fascist attack on the Soviet Union (June 1941), and the 'Quit India' Movement (from August 9, 1942), created a complex situation, where on the one hand the AITUC called for support to the anti-fascist war and defence of the Soviet Union, and on the other hand, actively campaigned against repression and for release of national leaders, and for the formation of a 'national government for national defence'. Tactical mistakes were committed in this complex situation, which resulted in partial isolation. But this was soon overcome.

—The rout of fascist Germany, Italy and Japan, mainly due to the victorious exploits of the Red Army, immensely strengthened the world revolutionary forces and unleashed a powerful wave of national liberation. The post-war upsurge in 1945, gave an increasing momentum to the strike wave. Political mass actions (for instance, around the INA Trial) became the order of the day. On 18 February, 1946, the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy revolted and took possession of the ships.

Responding to the appeal of the sailors, working class in Bombay struck work. Over three lakh workers were on strike. British soldiers fired on the workers and the people. More than 250 were 'officially' declared as killed. In Calcutta, Karachi, and

in fact all over India, similar mass actions took place. Commenting on the Calcutta action, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote, "Participation of so many workers in anti-imperialist struggle created a new situation in our country".

—The "new situation" was that, the imperialists could no longer continue their rule over India. On 11 July, 1946 the postal workers went on a nationwide strike, joined later by other sections of the P & T Department. July 29 witnessed an unprecedented general strike in support of these workers. The last die was cast. Talks began for transfer of power. Simultaneously, imperialism and internal reaction fanned communal passions to a fever-pitch. Democratic and secular consciousness among the people, and class consciousness assiduously developed among the workers, faced the challenge of centuries-old beliefs and prejudices and arising from that a consciousness built on religious and communal lines. The dawn of Freedom came on August 1947. But India was partitioned, and a communal holocaust broke out. Class conscious workers rallying under the Red flag performed heroic deeds to put out the flames of communal riots. But the battle between the two consciousness continues to this day, and has become an element in the struggle for national integrity and toilers' unity, against the divisive and communal forces.

—The claim is repeatedly made that the Congress *alone* fought for freedom. True, its share as the national front of the liberation struggle is the major one. But the influence of the labour movement on the freedom struggle was not inconsiderable. It also grew and matured alongside the latter struggle. It impelled the freedom struggle forward at all stages, though, due to several objective and subjective causes it could not establish the leadership or the leading role of the working class in the movement. It would be an historical error not to see that the Indian workers did not concern themselves exclusively with the immediate problems of mitigating their miseries and improving their lot. They are among the several streams that joined together in the mighty flow of our freedom struggle.

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1. *India Today*: R. P. Dutt.
 2. Textile Labour Association (TLA) Ahmedabad, has been popularly known by this name.
 3. *Strikes in India*: V. B. Karnik.

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5. *The Working Class In India's Struggle For Freedom*: Gautam Chattopadhyaya.
6. *Strikes in India*: V. B. Karnik.



Lesson 4

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN POLITICAL TRENDS AND THE RESULTING SPLITS IN THE T.U. MOVEMENT

—The world has changed—and changed decisively, since the first trade unions came to light in the industrial West; since Marx elaborated his teachings about them and about the theory and tactics of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation; since Lenin led the October Revolution and founded the first toilers' state. It continues to change at an increasingly accelerated rate. Our country has changed almost beyond recognition since 1857, and since Independence in 1947. The Indian working class has changed since its emergence more than a century and a quarter ago. And so has the contours, the character, the problems and the tasks of the trade union movement. The purpose of our study is firstly, to understand these changes, and the forces that are bringing about the changes.

—In the previous lessons, we have gone a little bit into the past. We do not go into history for its own sake. It is not our aim merely to study and interpret the world, but to transform it.' To us, knowledge of history is an essential weapon for fighting the present and future battles. Unless we know how the working class has grown and changed, how its trade unions have arisen and developed to whatever they are today we will not be able to grasp the meaning of these changes. We will not be able to learn from positive and negative experiences, and thus prepare and arm ourselves for the future. In the trade union movement in capitalist society, two classes, two interests, two outlooks are locked in continuous battle. The bourgeoisie interprets the past and present in its own way, and propagates it so as to influence the future in its narrow class interests. We have to counter it at every step, to be able to advance. The first president of the AITUC, Lajpat Rai, had already stated in his Address in 1920:

“Truth in Europe is of two kinds: (a) capitalistic and governmental truth... and (b) socialistic and labour truth... My own experience of Europe and America leads me to think that social-

istic, even Bolshevik truth is any day better, more reliable and more human than capitalistic and imperialistic truth”.

This observation holds good not only for Europe and America, but for all class societies.

—We have mentioned earlier about the interaction of the labour movement advancing even though haltingly towards trade union consciousness and the national movement dominated by the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. We have mentioned about social reformers and moderate liberals on the one hand, and (from the late twenties onwards) the Communists and socialists on the other, going into the midst of the workers. The Communist by their patient and painstaking work, were among the first to give the trade unions a stable and regular organisational shape. (Here is the testimony given by the White Paper issued by the Government of Bombay in 1930: “In 1919 and in 1924 the mill operatives came out on strike in a body. But they did not come out in pursuance of a call for action raised by a properly constituted trade union of which they were members. A widespread grievance gave them temporary unity and they had no organisation or funds behind them. The Girmi Kamgar Union was the first union to undertake intensive propaganda and organise a large body of workers into a trade union, with a regular organisation...”). The Communists had taught the workers to relate their economic struggles with the political struggle, their national tasks with their international tasks. They vigorously opposed reformism and economism in the trade union field. The round-up of Communist leaders in 1929, and the Meerut Case was both an attempt to crush the rising tide of revolutionary trade unionism, and to isolate the Communist leadership from the general movement.

—The existence of different political groups and personalities within the trade union movement inevitably introduced an element of conflict as regards the aims and tactics of the movement, and its central organisation, the AITUC. This subsequently led to a series of repercussions.

—With his characteristic shrewdness, Gandhiji had distanced himself from the founding of the AITUC. He had helped to set up the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (the ‘Major Mahajan’), for in any case, that could not be prevented. But he saw that the TLA keeps away from any attempt to organise the workers as a class, and therefore on a national scale.

Speaking about the improved means of communication created by modern industry which place the workers of different localities in contact with one another, Karl Marx had stressed, “It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national

struggle of classes.”... Marx always emphasised the urgency of organising “the labouring classes on a national scale”, since it is the national boundaries that mark out the real battle-ground for the growth and development of the class struggle, and therefore ultimately for the emergence of the workers’ international consciousness. Thus, Gandhism stood opposed to Marxism in raising the workers to the level of a class, and of raising their movement for securing purely economic improvement in an individual factory or in some individual trade to the level of a political class struggle.

Against this, Gandhiji put forward the theory of “Trusteeship”, holding that industry belonged to society and the capitalists, are just trustees thereof. The workers should look at the capitalists, as sons towards their fathers. The farthest he was prepared to go, is well expressed in his own words: “If the toilers intelligently combine they will become an irresistible power. That is how I do not see the necessity of class conflict”.

He was not opposed to their combination in unions. But he put definite limits on their tasks and tactics. By way of tactics, he insisted on compulsory arbitration. He refused to affiliate the TLA to the AITUC, since the latter believed in class struggle.

We have given this in detail, since this was the most complete and consistent bourgeois ideological position of class collaboration, in relation to the trade union movement in India,—one which raises its head again and again.

—The removal of the mature and experienced mass leaders from the scene due to repression in March 1929, helped the reformist right-wing leadership to precipitate a split in the AITUC, at its 10th Session in Nagpur in late 1929, over which Jawaharlal Nehru presided. The seceders led by V. V. Giri, N. M. Joshi and a few other veterans refused to accept the majority decision for boycotting the Royal Commission of Labour (also known as the Whitley Commission), and walked out to set up the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF).

While not quite feeling happy at what he termed “the youthful enthusiasm of some members of the left wing”, Nehru was forthright in his criticism of the ‘seceders’, the ‘right wing’. This is what he said,

“The left-wing was in favour of a boycott of the commission, the right-wing in favour of cooperation... In this matter, as in many others, my sympathies were with the left...It seemed absurd to cooperate with official commissions when we were carrying on a direct action struggle”.

Commenting on the behaviour of the right-wing, he observed:

"Many of the seceders actually voted for the resolution which they protested against in their subsequent statement. This was a strange conduct, and regrettable enough..." and so forth.

It stands to reason that the Communist stand, that the trade union movement and its tactical position could not be at variance with the national political situation and its requirements, was right.

—But at the 11th Session, held in July 1931, a second split overtook the AITUC. This time the Communist section walked out, on the issue of international affiliation to the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU),—a proposal that the majority rejected. The Communists formed the Red TUC. This was an example of left sectarianism—an infantile disorder.

—However, the economic crisis, and the burdens imposed on the workers posed the question of T.U. reunification. The Communists were the first to appreciate this need. The Red TUC was dissolved and merged back into the AITUC. This was consummated at the 14th Session of the AITUC, in April 1935.

—The next step was to approach the NTUF. A joint Labour Board was set up in 1936 for joint actions by the AITUC and the NTUF. In 1938, merger proposals were agreed upon, an agreed set of office-bearers was announced, and the merger was finally ratified in the 18th Session of the AITUC in 1940.

—It is worthwhile recalling that the principles for unity that were enunciated then, and accepted by all, included, the unequivocal acceptance of the principle of class struggle, one union in one industry, and AITUC as the central trade union organisation of the Indian workers. To allay apprehension, an inbuilt constitutional safeguard was incorporated to the effect that, all political questions and questions of strikes would be decided by three-fourth majority of the General Council.

—This reunification was not to the liking of the Indian bourgeoisie. With the impending dawn of Independence, and the prospect of its coming to power, the bourgeois leadership of the Congress, deemed it necessary to intervene, to split the working class, and set up its own captive organisation. After Congress ministries were installed in several provinces in 1946, one of the first pieces of legislation introduced by the Bombay Government was the "Bombay Industrial Relations Bill", with the proclaimed aim, "to harmonise the relations between capital and labour", through compulsory arbitration and banning of strikes, and creating government "approved" unions. The lone Communist Member in the Assembly vigorously opposed this at every stage.² The ruling Congress required trade unions subservient to them as this would help to pave the way to take India along the path of capitalist development. Gulzarilal

Nanda, the Minister who piloted the B.I.R. Bill in the Bombay Assembly frankly stated in his speech at the founding session of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, convened by the Congress Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, in May 1947, "The urgent need of the moment is to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of workers who are in fundamental opposition to the Communists". Sardar Vallabhai Patel was even more forthright, Said he, "It is no use trying to reform the AITUC and capture it, because the communist unions put up a bogus membership and the not hesitate to resort to unscrupulous methods. ... The step which is being taken now should have been taken earlier".

Thus was a split justified, and the INTUC called into being, as an ideological, political and trade union rival to the AITUC.

One should gratefully recall the dignified reply of N. M. Joshi to these charges. "The newly formed organisation is really an adjunct of the INC and is in no sense a non-party or non-political labour organisation as the AITUC is. ... Communists today have a majority in the AITUC but all decisions taken by the AITUC are the decisions of the AITUC as a whole. ... Unfortunately, the bewildered Congress ministries think that the easy way out of difficulty lies in dividing the ranks of labour. They will live and learn but in the meanwhile the mischief has been done".

These words have a prophetic ring in them. The INTUC has indeed had to live and learn—witness the strikes they had also to lead, including joint strikes on several occasions. But the mischief has been done!

—This split accelerated the process of further splits and fragmentation. In 1948, the socialists came out of the AITUC, and together with M. N. Roy's Indian Federation of Labour, set up the Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

The R.S.P. preferred to set up another, called the United Trades Union Congress. When the S.U.C. came into existence, it organised a parallel UTUC.

The split in the Socialist Party, divided the HMS further.

The rising political ambitions of the Jan Sangh (now the BJP) drew its eyes towards the workers. Thereupon, it set up the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, with a singular religio-chauvinist ideology. Its slogans are: "Nationalise the Labour! Labourise the Industry! Industrialise the Country." God is the owner of wealth, and capitalists and workers should live like an industrial family under divine dispensation. Therefore no class struggle, and no internationalism. Instead of May Day observe Vishwakarma day. The BMS also funnels the RSS ideology into the workers' ranks.

~~so pattern down to the Ayodhya~~
During the Ayodhya incidents, the HMS ^{R4} could be seen openly as a part of

It was the
pretext of
to bring more
to the
party

Finally, the split in the Indian Communist Movement in 1964 created strains within the AITUC, and by 1970 a new central organisation called the Centre of Indian Trade Unions was set up by the CPI(M).

The split which the CPI(M) forced on the AITUC and left led unions and federations, has divided the militant and revolutionary ranks of organised workers. It has reduced the capacity of the advanced and organised vanguard of the working class to play its due role in the Indian situation.

The practice of 'each political party—separate trade union centre' has gone ahead, so that now regional parties also are trying to have their own TU Centres.

In this situation, the tendency towards independent, unaffiliated unions and industrial federations has also grown. It has also provided the soil for individual racketeers and demagogues to further divide and mislead the workers.

—But of course, life has its own compulsions. And so, we have both the processes going on simultaneously. While fragmentation is taking place, the need and the urge for unity is also growing, immeasurably. More and more joint actions, and stable joint forums are coming up. *as we have already seen this; no has now become a force & is*

1. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it"—Karl Marx.

2. Refer S. A. Dange's Speech in the Bombay Assembly, September 1946.

compelling a no. of CIO's to think & talk in terms of TV. unification.

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the 'Sangh' paira.

POST-INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN ECONOMY AND IN THE WORK FORCE

—When India became free, after nearly 200 years of British rule, it inherited a colonial, backward, and distorted economy.

Agriculture contributed nearly half of the national product and engaged nearly 70 per cent of the work force. Feudal and semi-feudal relations of production had powerful sway. Agricultural production was not only stagnant, but marginally declined between 1931 and 1947.

Barely 17 per cent of the national product originated in mines, manufacturing industries and small enterprises, and this secondary sector of the economy engaged only 9.6 per cent of the population. Lower forms of production dominated the industrial sector. Consumer goods production prevailed in the manufacturing industries, and contributed 78 per cent of the output of the manufacturing sector. Production was seriously limited by the low purchasing power of the rural population and by a narrow home market. The total production of steel was only around 10 lakh tonnes, of pig iron around 15 lakh tonnes, of petroleum products only 2 lakh tonnes, and of machines, machine tools, chemicals etc., almost negligible. Thus, the industrial sector was both lopsided, and technically very backward.

Besides, British capital held strategic positions in mining, and in mills and factories.

To strengthen our political freedom, it was necessary to build a powerful industrial sector on firm foundations, to carry through radical agrarian reforms, and develop an independent Indian economy.

—From this arose the concept of state entry in the industrial sector, and of planning as a lever to build a modern industrial economy independent of foreign capital domination. The approach of the bourgeoisie and its political party in this matter, of course differed basically from that of the working class and the left and democratic parties and elements.

The former wanted state intervention and control to be used for furthering capitalist development, for taking the economy

along the capitalist path. The latter wanted gradual curtailment of the role of big private capital, takeover of foreign capital, loosening its hold on the economy and putting a check on its further encroachments, and socialisation of major means of production.

—Anticipating the imminent transfer of power, the Bombay Plan prepared by Tata, Birla and other prominent capitalists, declared, “State control appears to be more important than ownership or management. Mobilisation of all the available means of production and their direction towards socially desirable ends is essential for achieving the maximum amount of social welfare over a wide field. It is not necessary for the state to secure ownership or management of economic activity for this purpose. Well directed and effective state control should be fully adequate”.

Thus, State intervention, control, planning	— Yes!
State ownership, nationalisation	— No!

—In 1948, government announced its industrial policy resolution. By this, the state was made “exclusively responsible for the establishment of *new undertakings*” in coal, iron and steel, mineral oils, telecommunication appliances, aircraft manufacture and ship-building, but existing private enterprises were to continue and even expand. Defence, railways and atomic industries, were to be “the exclusive monopoly” of the public sector, which the first two already were while the third was non-existent at the time. The role assigned to the public sector was thus very modest.

—The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956 took a major step forward by declaring that,

“The adoption of the socialist pattern of society as the national objective, as well as the need for planned and rapid development, require that all industries of basic and strategic importance, or in the nature of public utility services, should be in the public sector. Other industries which are essential and require investment on a scale which only the state, in present circumstances, could provide, have also to be in the public sector. The state has therefore to assume direct responsibility for the further development of industries over a wider area”.

Industries were divided into 3 schedules:

(A) Industries, the future development of which was to be the exclusive responsibility of the state,

(B) industries, which would be progressively brought under the public sector and in which the state would generally take the initiative in establishing new undertakings,

(C) Remaining industries left to the private sector to develop, but the state reserved the right to regulate them.

—The two resolutions do not speak of nationalisation, and in fact, both made it clear that the public sector was complementary to the private sector, intended to facilitate the rapid development of capitalism in India. Subsequent pronouncements swung from declaring its role to be that of “capturing the commanding heights of economy” to one of acting as “a pace setter in basic and strategic industries”.

Nationalisation came out of pragmatic needs—political and practical, of securing control over credit resources, of curbing the monopoly bourgeoisie in certain fields, of managing industries with falling output, of nursing “sick industries” back to health and of continuing employment.

—The growth of the public sector is evident from the following figures:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of enterprises</i>	<i>Investment (Rupees in crores)</i>
1.4.1951	5	29
1.4.1956	21	81
1.4.1961	48	953
1.4.1966	74	2,415
1.4.1974	122	6,237
1.4.1979	176	15,602
1.4.1984	214	35,394
1.4.1985	221	42,811
1.4.1986	225	50,341

—Economic and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, has been of immense help in building the public sector. The enterprises built with Soviet help form the hard core of the public sector—such as steel, heavy engineering, power engineering and generation, machine building, oil, coal, etc. It is this that has helped put India on the road to self-reliance. Soviet aid for such heavy industries has enabled India to open up remote areas for industrialisation, and partly curb regional imbalance. It has led to expansion of the work force and its diversification. All this has strengthened India’s bargaining power, and helped it to stand up to imperialist pressures and blackmail—both on economic and foreign policy issues.

—The public sector has provided the infrastructure, abundant credit, cheap raw materials and processed goods to the private sector, and created favourable conditions for its growth, for the development of monopolies. The pricing policy in the public sector has helped to bolster private capital, and subsidise its

profits, while taking on the losses itself. Even Big Business journal "Commerce" has admitted that, "The phenomenal progress in India's private sector has become possible thanks to the structure created by the public sector". This was inevitable, with the decisive positions of state power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, intent on developing capitalism.

—All in all, the course of development pursued during four decades of freedom, has brought about economic growth, modified the obsolete land relations, built up a strong and diversified public sector with a core of heavy industries, and laid the foundation for a self-reliant economy. But the capitalist path followed has aggravated disparities and contributed to social polarisation. The crisis of this path is making the bourgeois government to adopt a series of so-called new economic policies, leading to serious consequences. All this we shall study in subsequent lessons.

—Meanwhile, let us see what this meant in terms of the expansion and changing look of the Indian work-force. The following table illustrates this:

Employment in Organised Sector (in millions)

End of March	Public Sector					Private Sector	Grand Total
	Central Govt.	State Govt.	Quasi Govt.	Local Bodies	Total		
1961	2.09	3.01	0.77	1.18	7.05	5.04	12.09
1971	2.77	4.15	1.93	1.88	10.73	6.74	17.47
1976	3.05	4.90	3.39	1.98	13.32	6.84	20.17
1980	3.18	5.48	4.34	2.08	15.08	7.23	22.31
1982 ...	3.25	5.85	4.81	2.04	15.95	7.55	23.49
1984	—	—	—	—	16.85	7.40	24.25
1985	3.34	6.3	5.51	2.51	17.3	7.32	24.62
1986 (June)	—	—	—	—	—	—	25.37

Total employment in the organised sector has gone up by a little more than 100 per cent during these 23 years. The share of employment in the public sector has risen from 58.3 per cent to 69.5 per cent, while that of the private sector has declined from 41.7 per cent to 30.5 per cent. The annual compound rate of growth in the case of the public sector has been around 3.0 to 3.4 per cent, while in the case of the private sector, it has varied from 2.3 per cent in some years to as low as 0.3 per cent. From 1982 to 1984 there has actually been a decline. No wonder, as the number of 'sick units' in the private sector has risen sharply from 24,550 at the end of December 1980, to 93,282 at

the end of December 1984, and has now crossed the 1,30,606 mark in June 1986.

—What have been the sources of this expansion in the workforce since Freedom?

Firstly, from the peasantry and rural workers. Obsolete feudal land relations were modified after Independence, by abolishing zamindari, malguzari and other types of intermediaries. Tenancy legislations were enacted, followed by land ceiling acts. But due to the compromising role of the bourgeoisie towards the landlords and semi-feudal classes, this aspect of the democratic revolution remained unfinished. Agrarian reforms stopped halfway. The pattern of landholdings has not substantially changed and bulk of the surplus land has not been distributed. Hardly 10.3 per cent of the potential surplus of 21.5 million acres has been distributed so far. In 1981, landless agricultural workers in the country numbered 55 million. To this is added another 1 million every year from the ranks of the pauperised peasantry.

According to the Sixth Plan, the number of people living below poverty line was 338 million in 1980, (of them over 280 million in the rural areas). An estimated 6.7 million people is added to this annually (5.17 million in rural areas and 1.5 million in urban areas).

Recurring ravages of scarcity and famine, and lack of employment in rural areas even in normal times, has set in motion large scale migration from villages to towns,—mainly to major industrial complexes in search of employment and livelihood. The figure of rural unemployed is estimated at nearly 50 million.

—Second, the figure of job-seekers on the live registers of employment exchanges (overwhelmingly from urban areas) has gone up from 16.58 millions in 1981 to 30.48 million in March 1987. Of this, 13.26 million are educated unemployed. This constitutes a vast 'reserve army' from which industries and services are to recruit.

—Third, expansion of education, including technical, poly-technical, engineering and professional education, has created a large force of scientific and technical personnel (India ranks third in number in this sphere). The number of technical graduates and postgraduates alone, was 1.10 million in 1981, while non-technical graduates and postgraduates numbered 5.88 million. Since then, the number has been growing at an accelerated pace. The requirements of technologically developed and sophisticated modern industries, in production, service and administrative spheres, have led to their absorption in increasing numbers. They come from the urban middle classes and professional groups, from sections of the middle and rich peasantry, and even from the working class. Reservations for scheduled

castes and tribes and for the backward classes too in some states. In the higher educational institutions and services have helped people from these lower and hitherto deprived sections of society to also join the ranks at these higher levels, in addition to whatever scope they have at the bottom of the ladder.

—And lastly, extension of industrial activity and certain major projects to remote areas (including tribal regions), has brought in 'local' people, mainly as unskilled and semi-skilled labour force, who have no previous experience or knowledge of an 'industrial culture'. Simultaneously, it has led to an influx of people from 'outside' the region for working in these projects, chiefly in the skilled and highly skilled jobs. Migrant construction workers have also swelled, who circulate from project to project.

—The work-force has thus swelled with the inflowing stream from several sources, including from hitherto non-working class sources. The phenomenon, the changed composition of the working class in present times, and the problems arising there from we shall study further in subsequent lessons.

—But so as to equip ourselves with some of the facts and tools of trade union and political activity today, we give here a few selected tables:

Working and Non-Working Population, 1981 (in millions)

	Total	Rural	Urban
Population (Total)	665.3	507.6	157.7
Male	343.9	260.1	83.9
Female	321.4	247.5	73.8
Main Workers (Total)	222.5	176.4	46.1
Male	177.5	136.8	40.7
Female	45.0	39.6	5.4
Marginal Workers (Total)	22.1	20.9	1.2
Male	3.5	3.1	0.4
Female	18.6	17.8	0.8
Non-Workers (Total)	420.7	310.3	110.4
Male	162.9	120.1	42.7
Female	257.8	190.2	67.7

Note : A *main worker* is one who was engaged in economically productive activity for minimum of 183 days prior to the date of enumeration.

A *marginal worker* is one who worked for less than 183 days.

A *non-worker* is one who had not worked at all in the

previous year. Housewives, students and retired people are included in non-workers.

(‘Main Workers’ in 1981 census broadly correspond to ‘workers’ in 1971 census).

Employment In Organised Sector by Industry Division in 1982 (in '000s)

Industry	Public Sector	Private Sector
Agriculture, hunting etc.	457	851
Mining & Quarrying	832	129
Manufacturing	1,592	4,661
Electricity, gas & water	698	36
Construction	1,112	71
Wholesale & Retail trade etc.	113	277
Transport & Communications etc.	2,781	60
Services	8,362	1,463
Total	15,947	7,548

Highest employment in the Private Sector is in manufacturing industries, while in the public sector, highest is in services followed by transport and communications.

Wage Earners and Self-employed (1977-78)

	Number (millions)	% to total
<i>Wage & Salary earners</i>	100.5	38.5
Organised Sector	24.8	9.5
Public Sector	15.0	5.7
Private Sector	9.8	3.8
Unorganised Sector	75.7	29.0
Agricultural Workers	58.3	22.3
Non-Agricultural Workers	11.4	4.4
Others	6.0	2.3
<i>Self-employed</i>	160.4	61.5
Cultivators	128.1	49.1
Non-Cultivators	32.3	12.4
	260.9	100.0

N.B. (Some figures in one table do not tally with figures in other tables, because the basis taken is not identical, and the sources are also different).

Employment in the unorganised sector is three times that in the organised sector. Self-employed persons are more than one and a half times the wage and salary earners in both the sectors.

1. This figure has already crossed 30 million.

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(Contributions by N. K. Krishnan, A. B. Bardhan and Chaturanan Mishra)



POST-INDEPENDENCE WORKING CLASS STRUGGLES AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

—After independence the Indian bourgeoisie led by the big bourgeoisie has come to hold decisive positions of state power. It has strong links with, and compromises with the landlord. It started to wield this state power in the long-term interests of independent capitalist development, mouthing such slogans as 'welfare state', 'mixed economy', 'socialistic pattern of society' and so on. This meant building a public sector, which in essence has an anti-imperialist edge and character. It meant regulating monopoly growth and controlling conflicting claims of capitalist expansion through the instrument of planning, of credit and budgetary factors. It meant a certain measure of agrarian reforms and of investments in the agrarian sector. As to the working class, the policy of the bourgeoisie was to keep them in leash and grant concessions when it must or when socio-political requirements dictated it.

—It launched this policy, firstly, by splitting the trade unions, setting up unions under its ideological political and practical control and bolstering them up by blatant administrative measures. It imposed a scheme of industrial relations which hamstrung the union, virtually illegalised strikes and imposed a long-drawn system of compulsory adjudication involving the workers in endless litigation.

—As opposed to this, the ceaseless effort of the AITUC and other like-minded trade unions has been to establish minimum living standards and raise them progressively, defend the existing standards against erosion, due to inflation, price rise and outright wage-cuts; ensure job security against attempts at rationalisation, modernisation, automation and so on; obtain a measure of social security arising from accidents, ill-health, retrenchment and old age, and maternity; defend and extend trade union and democratic rights against all attacks to curb or snatch them away; move the country in the direction of independent economic development, democracy and social progress, and externally towards a progressive foreign policy of non-alignment, of anti-imperialism, support to national liberation struggles, friendship with socialist countries and defence of world

peace. There have been mistakes and even blunders committed by the leadership but the direction of the main effort was never lost sight of.

Soon after freedom, the government launched severe oppression against the AITUC and Communist-led organisations. The Telangana peasants who were fighting for land and against feudal and razzakar atrocities during the Nizam's regime were later brutally suppressed by the armed forces when this struggle was carried forward under changed circumstances. Thousands of Communist leading cadres from the trade unions and other mass organisations were put behind bars. The left-sectarian and adventurist policy pursued by the leadership at the time gave a handle to the government to carry through its repressive acts. The call for a railway strike from March 9, 1949, given over the head of their traditional federation, proved a fiasco. This led to isolation from the masses and the functioning of the AITUC was paralysed.

—In 1952 the AITUC met in a convention in Calcutta, regrouped its forces, appealed for healing the breach in the trade union movement and set about rebuilding the organisation at all levels.

—The restoration of normal activity along correct lines paid good dividends. After 1946 a new stream had also started joining the main current of the trade union movement. Led by the bank employees, the middleclass employees, the white collar people started organising themselves in trade unions, resorting to working class techniques and methods of struggle. The All India Bank Employees' Association, which had been set up in 1946, held its first annual conference in 1947 at Lucknow. Other sections of middleclass employees such as insurance, mercantile and government employees followed suit. The Calcutta Convention of the AITUC took note of this positive development and called upon the middleclass employees to organise and join hands with the working class in common struggles, common endeavour and common destiny.

Since then the organisations of middleclass employees have always been active, militant and broad-based contingent of the Indian trade union movement. In course of time, teachers, professors, engineers, journalists and other professional groups have also formed their organisations, are engaging themselves in militant strike actions, and are allying with the trade union movement on various occasions.

—The struggle for wage rise and standardisation of wages has been the single most important cause for industrial disputes, leading to strike actions in this period. The ILO had adopted a Convention (No. 26) on Minimum Wages as far back

as 1928. This was ratified by India in 1968. Meanwhile, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was passed. Its scope was confined to employments where sweated labour is more prevalent or where a chance of severe exploitation of labour exists. But the implementation of this has been more of a dead letter except that it has provided a banner for agitation to the trade unions. The National Commission on Labour (1969) had observed that, "Minimum wages, once fixed, had not been revised for long periods in many employments" and as a consequence prevailing rates of wages are in many cases higher than the minimum fixed long back. Where higher minimum wages are solemnly notified, employers are permitted to ignore or violate the same and get away with it, (bidi, powerlooms, etc.).

—The Fair Wages Committee set up in the early years define certain concepts of minimum wage and living wage, stating that the lower limit of fair wage would be the minimum wage and the upper limit would be set by the capacity of the industry to pay.

—The high water mark in the wage struggle was the decision of the 15th Indian Labour Conference in 1957, which laid down certain scientific norms for calculating a "need-based minimum wage." This was an important victory of the trade union movement on a question of principle. In practice, however, all pay commissions, wage boards, tribunals, etc. have tended to bypass it as unreal or impracticable under the circumstances, and government has colluded in revising the norms downwards.

—A significant achievement in wage determination, brought about through innumerable local and industrywise struggles has been the introduction of bipartite negotiations and the virtual abandonment of tribunals and wage boards in major industries. The way was paved by the bank employees (AIBEA), and it has now become the practice in most of the public sector industries and a few important private sector industries, too. The principle of collective bargaining scored a victory over the compulsory arbitration and adjudication process advocated by the government due to the growing strength of the trade unions in these industries. In return, this further consolidated the trade union strength and also brought unions of different affiliation on the common bargaining table, opening the way for subsequent joint moves and actions. Organised workers in these organised industries have been able to make substantial gains through such wage settlements. Attempts are now being made by the government to reverse this practice or to put it in a straitjacket. Through such means as BPE guidelines, and outright 'wage-freeze'.

--The demand for dearness allowance had been raised from the beginning of the war (witness the great 'Mahagai' strike in 1940 of Bombay textile workers). This demand was meant to prevent erosion in the real wages of workers due to price rise. After freedom, the capitalist planning process has inevitably brought high inflationary pressures and further set into motion a price spiral. Several inquiry committees (Divetia, Jayratnam and others) had already evolved the system of D.A. linked with cost of living indices during the war period. In later years, the Rajadhyaksha Award (1946), the First Central Pay Commission (1947), the Fair Wages Committee (1948), the Bank Award Commission (1955), the Second Pay Commission (1959), the Das Commission (1965), the Gajendragadkar Commission (1967) etc culminating in the latest Central D.A. Committee set up by the Government of India, have laid down D.A. formulae. Different methods and different rates of neutralisation were provided by each of these but every step forward has been the product of bitterly-fought struggles and strike actions too numerous to be narrated.

Earlier the practice was low basic wage and high D. A. But now, after bonus, gratuity, etc. are calculated both on basic wage + D. A. and besides, there are no possibilities of any material fall in the price index, the tendency is to merge wage + D. A. at a certain point in the index.

However, what has been conceded with one hand under pressure of struggles, is sought to be taken away with the other, through such mechanisms as index fraud, resistance to a new family budget enquiry, arbitrary change in the base year, and refusal to revise the rate so as to provide for more than 100 per cent neutralisation at the lowest wage-levels (since in these cases, the impact is higher than what the cost of living index indicates), 100 per cent neutralisation at the median level and progressively lower rates at higher levels, etc.

--The struggle for bonus, which has a long history, based on the workers' claim that this is a 'deferred wage' and which has been the cause for annual strikes in most industries, was crowned with success when the Payment of Bonus Act, 1955, was put on the statute book. Subsequent struggles have led to raising the minimum from 4 per cent of annual wages to 8.33 per cent, extending bonus to all sections of employees, i.e. wherever there is an employer-employee nexus, crossing the ceiling of 20 per cent in industries which earn superprofits and lifting the maximum qualifying wage, etc. For each step, and on several occasions, the workers have had to go into mass actions. Bonus has now become an essential annual component of workers' total emoluments in organised industries and in several

unorganised industries, too. The attempt is now on to dilute it by linking it with all sorts of productivity norms and schemes.

Social security as an essential requirement for the maintenance, production and extended reproduction of 'wage labour' itself—the most important productive force in society, has been a vital issue of trade union struggles. During British rule the Workmen's Compensation Act and Maternity Benefit Act had already been enacted. After freedom, trade union struggles and the bourgeoisie's own requirement for the reproduction of wage labour have been instrumental in introducing several social security legislations such as the Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952, the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, Family Pension Scheme, Lay Off and Retrenchment Compensation, etc.

Organised workers have been able to win a number of 'fringe benefits' too, blazing a trail for other sections of workers in the struggle for better living standards.

For certain industries which have characteristics of their own, the prevailing anarchy and lawlessness has given way to specific pieces of legislation such as: The Plantation Labour Act, 1951; The Mines Act, 1952; The Dock Workers' Act, 1948; The Working Journalists Act, 1955; Motor Transport Workers' Act, 1961; Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966; Contract Labour Act, 1970; Sales Promotion Employees' Act, 1976; the several Shops and Establishments Acts, etc.

In almost all cases the degree of implementation depends on the strength and vigilance of the trade unions and their constant struggles. In the case of contract labour, which is proliferating in all spheres of industrial, commercial and construction activities, the provisions of the Act are totally ignored and the law is virtually a dead letter.

—Trade union struggles were not limited to only economic demands in this period. They were conducted on major policy issues too.

—The AITUC was the first to take a positive stand on the question of the public sector when certain other sections in the trade union movement were either indifferent to it or even adopted a posture of sectarian hostility. At its Ernakulam session (1957) it adopted the well-known 'two pillar policy' of defending and extending the public sector and simultaneously, of struggling for workers' rights and demands in the public sector. It is this attitude that enabled the AITUC and the trade union movement to also carry on the struggle for 'nationalisation' of certain industries and for government takeover of 'sick industries' with a clear perspective.

--On the issue of banks nationalisation it is the AIBEA, backed by the AITUC, which played a decisive role. This had been a demand of the national movement itself. But it is the AIBEA which revived and took it up in 1963, backed up by struggle in 1964. In the face of the rising demand, the then Finance Minister Morarji Desai introduced the hoax of 'social control' in 1968 which actually meant giving free scope for the monopolists and imposing fetters on the employees. The AIBEA's strike against the Social Control Bill, the struggle within Parliament and the infight within the Congress, all contributed to the ouster of Morarji Desai, the collapse of his Bill and the subsequent nationalisation of banks on July 19, 1969.

The AITUC has crystallised the stand that the public sector is by no means a socialist sector in a country where the state itself is a bourgeois state and is building capitalism. It is a state-capitalist sector. But in the given context it has an anti-imperialist character, and helps build an independent economy and strengthens self-reliance. This has enabled the AITUC to combat both left and right deviations on this important issue.

In today's context, when the government is trying to downgrade the public sector, the struggle to defend, extend and democratisate the public sector assumes tremendous importance as we shall see in subsequent lessons.

--With the growing economic and political crisis, the bourgeoisie has tried to seek its own solutions by stepping up attacks on the working class. The accumulated discontent of the workers found vivid expression in the bitterly fought 1974 strike by railwaymen, the biggest contingent of employees in a single industry. The National Campaign Committee of Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS) was set up as the united platform of struggle and it had the backing of all trade unions barring the INTUC. After 11 days the struggle had to be withdrawn due to leonine repression. AITUC followers were in the thick of the battle and were among the worst sufferers of repression and victimisation. But unfortunately this brave action in which we played a glorious part, was not supported by a correct policy outlook, as a result of which the AITUC could not capitalise on and carry forward the results of this struggle.

--The wrong political outlook that had gripped the leadership then was at the bottom of AITUC's initial support to the emergency imposed in 1975 by Smt. Indira Gandhi. Repression on workers was intensified by the government. Compulsory Deposit Scheme was introduced. Bonus was attacked. 'No profit, no bonus', was the formula propagated by government. Wage-freeze was imposed. MISA was used against trade unionists, including AITUC militants. Very soon, the emergency proved

to be thoroughly counterproductive. It provided no way out for the bourgeoisie. By late 1976 strikes and struggles of workers, which had never really died off, resumed in intensity. The burgeoning discontent was led and utilised by a combination of rightist forces. This brought the Janata Party to power after emergency was withdrawn.

—Efforts to take away the gains of the workers and solve the bourgeois crisis at the expense of workers, continued unabated during the Janata rule.

Attempt was made to impose the Boothalingam Panel's recommendation for a wage-freeze. Only the united call for a protest strike in the public sector on June 28, 1978 compelled the government to beat a last minute retreat. The next target were the bank employees who were branded as "high-wage islanders" and whose D.A. formula was sought to be revised. The militant front put up by the AIBEA, backed up by solidarity actions of the entire trade union movement forced the government to climb down. More than two lakh jute workers had to fight a 50 day strike for their demands. A new element appeared on the scene with the powerful demonstration of more than three lakh agricultural workers before Parliament on March 20, 1979. This showed that the most exploited section of our people, the rural proletariat, have joined the fighting ranks and have now taken to the path of organisation and struggle.

—The question of industrial relations has been a source of constant 'guerilla war' between the workers and the capitalists backed by the bourgeois state, precisely because the ongoing class struggle finds day-to-day expression in that form. The most disputable issues are those about conditions for registration and the recognition of unions, about government interference in internal union affairs, about verification or ballot, about the right to strike and mode of settling disputes, etc. Several abortive attempts were made in the intervening period to clamp such anti-labour industrial relations law on the whole country.

In 1978, during the Janata regime, this evoked an unprecedentedly powerful and joint struggle. On November 19, 1978 a big joint convention was held in Delhi followed the next day by a four lakh strong march to parliament. In the teeth of this opposition, the Bill could not be proceeded with. It lapsed with the fall of the Janata Government.

--But with the return of Indira Gandhi to power in 1980, similar efforts were resumed. The National Security Act and the Essential Services Maintenance Act were passed. An Ordinance (later on an Act), denying the right to bargain to LIC employees was issued. Boothalingam Panel recommendations (issu-

ed during Janata regime) and Bureau of Public Enterprises guidelines for wage-freeze or only marginal increase were sought to be enforced. Several administered price hikes took place.

Against these acts, vigorous strike battles were fought by all sections. Notable among them was the 77 days strike by Bangalore and Hyderabad based public sector engineering workers during 1980-81.

—These struggles against government attack on trade union rights and its policy of wage restraint and price rise form the background to the June 4, 1981 Convention (Bombay) which gave birth to the National Campaign Committee (NCC), including all trade union centres, barring the INTUC. This significant development, conforming to the prevalent stage of unity achieved in our trade union movement, has been carried forward at the second National Convention held in Delhi in August 1983. The NCC has since then been further broadened and the process continues.

—The economic situation and government policy in relation to it were responsible for the historic Bombay strike of over two lakh textile workers for more than a year and a half, for the countrywide general strike on January 19, 1982 on the call of the NCC, for several other magnificent and joint strike actions of workers.

—The installation of the Rajiv Gandhi Government has further intensified these actions and given them a new dimension on account of its new economic policies and also due to the grave political situation in the country. February 25 'Bharat Bandh', preceded by bandhs in some states in 1986, the public sector convention on October 21 and 22 which gave a call for the successful countrywide strike by public sector workers on January 21, 1987 are the forerunners of the qualitatively higher stage of trade union struggles in the coming days.

FURTHER READING

1. AITUC Memorandum before the Bonus Commission.
2. AITUC Memorandum before the National Commission on Labour.
3. Report of the General Secretary, 31st Session, AITUC.
4. Report of the General Secretary, 32nd Session, AITUC

THE RESULTS SUMMED UP

—More than a century and three decades have passed from the time the first modern factory, mill or industry started in our country. Eighty years are over since the first trade union was established, and 67 years since the day the AITUC was set up. What distance has the working class and its trade unions travelled through all these years?

—A century back there was no law that prevailed in the industrial sphere. It was a period of jungle law, unlimited working hours, unrestrained exploitation—of man, woman and child. The British bourgeoisie held sway, and the Indian bourgeoisie had also evolved as a class. The workers were a mass of paupers, of ruined men from other classes of moribund Indian society who happened to stumble into the mills, workshops, mines and railroads. They were yet to become a class. They fought with elemental militancy mixed with terror whenever misery overwhelmed them, but with hardly any organisation. What held them together was their traditional links and common woes. They acted as peasants lumped together into factories.

—National awakening and the national struggle gave them the tongue. 'Outsiders' from the social and the national movement helped to bring them into stable organisation, showed them a cause to fight for, and a common identified enemy to fight in combination. They began to grow into a class.

—The entry of Communists and Socialists helped educate them in class consciousness and the tactics of the class struggle, instilled in them confidence in victory, gave them a revolutionary banner and a slogan of international brotherhood "Workers of all Lands, Unite!"

—Workers everywhere start their 'mahabharat', with the struggle to limit the working day, because in the 19th century unlimited working day is synonymous with unrestrained exploitation. The '8 hour day' is the first banner unfurled by the workers a century back. In our country too, that is how it began. The Factory Act 1381, was passed. That was the beginning. And as S. A. Dange wrote in 1952, "One hundred years ago the work-

er had not even 6 hours of his own. All his time was labour time to produce profits for the bourgeoisie. Now 8 hours are labour time and 16 hours his own".

—The struggle then proceeds on the issue: his basic right to organise. Should he be dragged to court for forming an association and charged with conspiracy to deny the boss his labour power which he had contracted to sell for wages,—a crime for which Wadia (a disciple of Annie Besant) had been charged in Madras? Is a trade union illegal? The matter had been settled in England and the workers were permitted to have their trade unions, by statute. This too the Indian worker won, and the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926 was passed.

—In the beginning, his wages depended on the whims and fancies of the boss. The boss got credit from the worker, since he appropriated the product and realised its value, but chose to pay the worker much later. As to fines and penalties there were no limits. He fought for and got the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 passed.

—It was the workers' labour power that the capitalist bought and sold. When this labour power ceased to be available, because of accident, maternity, disease or death there was no contractual obligation on the capitalist. The workers fought, and the realisation dawned on the capitalist that for the reproduction of labour power, the worker has to reproduce himself. The Workmen's Compensation Act, Maternity Benefit Act came as a result.

—The struggles for a need-based wage, for compensation against price rise, for job security, for bonus, for social security etc. went on. And each time, the workers reached a milestone in their long march.

—All this we have studied in the previous lessons, as a part of living history. In the course of the many decades' history of struggles the workers have had to pay a heavy price, in terms of jail, lathis, police-firings, dismissals and victimisation. The suffering of our forbears and their families knows no bounds. We have our big quota of martyrs, from the days of British rule, and from the day the Indian bourgeoisie took the reins of power. From our midst have arisen innumerable working class activists who took the Red Flag to remote corners of the land and planted it firmly there. There have been successes and failures. To count the achievements:

- The 8 hour day, and overtime for extra hours
- Weekly off, and paid holidays
- Interval for meals
- Leave with pay, and casual leave

- Timely payment of wages, and limit on fines
- Minimum wages (where we can enforce it), and standardised wage settlements
- Compensation against price rise
- Lay off and retrenchment compensation
- Bonus
- Fringe benefits (where we are better organised)
- Insurance against accident, disease or death
- Maternity benefit
- Prohibition and protection of child labour
- Provident fund, gratuity and pensionary benefits to provide for retirement and old age
- Specific acts to regulate working conditions in specific industries.

—As we pointed out, there have been successes and failures. In fact more strikes failed, rather than succeeded. Marx had long ago pointed out, "Now and then workers are victorious, but only for a time. *The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers*" (Italics ours). Therefore though we are enjoying the fruits that have been bequeathed to us by our forefathers, yet the main legacy is, "the ever expanding union of workers". It is this that we have to grasp and carry forward.

—What is the situation in this regard? Here we give a table which shows the growth in the number of unions, and their membership during three decades:

Year	No. of registered Trade Unions	No. of Unions Submitting returns	Membership of Unions Submitting returns (in thousands)		
			Men	Women	Total
1951-52	4,323	2,556 (55.3)	1,847 (93.2)	136 (6.8)	1,996
1961-62	11,614	7,087 (61.0)	3,607 (90.7)	370 (9.3)	3,977
1965	13,246	6,932 (52.3)	3,565 (94.1)	223 (5.9)	3,788
1970	20,879	8,537 (40.9)	4,699 (91.8)	421 (8.2)	5,120
1975	29,438	10,324 (35.1)	6,063 (92.6)	488 (7.4)	6,550
1978	32,361	8,727 (28.5)	5,771 (93.0)	433 (7.0)	6,203
1980	35,750	4,426 (21.6)	2,505 (94.1)	158 (5.9)	2,663

The figures for 1978 and 1980 are skewed, because of absence of data from several states, and provisional data in case of some others. The 1981 Census gives the following data:

1. Total Labour Force	244.6 million
2. Total Membership of Unions	7.7 million
3. Total Non-agricultural Labour Force	66.8 million
4. Unionised as percentage of Total Labour Forces	3%
5. Unionised as percentage of Non-agricultural Labour Force	11.5%

From a study of both the tables, the conclusions emerge:

(i) The number of unions has gone up almost 8 times in 3 decades especially between 1955 and 1975. Thereafter, a certain plateau has been reached.

(ii) The membership has increased by only 3.8 times. This means the number of union with relatively small membership has gone up faster.

(iii) The percentage of workers unionised is still very poor. Prodigous efforts have to be made by the trade unions, by the organised workers in the first place, to bring the vast mass of yet unorganised workers into the fold.

(iv) The percentage of women members is very small, and there is greater fluctuation, showing the instability of their membership.

(v) More than half of the registered trade unions do not submit their annual returns regularly. This shows their faulty and erratic functioning. It also makes an overall estimate of total membership, financial stability etc., extremely difficult. Depending upon the efficiency of the Registrar's Office, unions which do not submit returns become casualties and are struck off the list. Over the years, there has been no improvement, but rather deterioration.

The behest of Marx about "The ever expanding union of workers", is thus not being fully implemented in letter and spirit.

—In recent times however, the broad unity that has been achieved, has given confidence to the workers in undertaking mass actions on national economic and political issues, and even on international issues like price-rise, economic policies, defence of parliamentary democracy and democratic rights, against separatist and divisive forces against imperialist conspiracies and in defence of peace, etc. The AITUC and other left unions have been the initiators and main organisers. But the actions have

involved the NCC as a whole, and of late, the INTUC has also been drawn into a number of united actions. The initiating and leading role of the trade unions as a social force is coming to the fore. How much more would this be, given a united trade union movement, and a stronger and more broad-based organisation.¹

We can now draw a few lessons from history :

First, all the gains have come as a result of struggles and sacrifices. The working class is what it is today, because of these struggles and sacrifices.

Second, the alien rulers till 1947, and then the Indian bourgeoisie and the state has at every step viciously opposed the working class and its striving for better conditions.

Third, even laws, notifications, awards etc. beneficial to the workers, get implemented, only when the workers and their organisations are vigilant and active, and fight to enforce them.

Fourth, only when maximum possible unity is achieved, either within one union or through joint action of several unions, do the workers' struggles become effective. Disunity hampers struggles, and makes them ineffective if launched under those conditions.

Fifth, when struggles for immediate or partial demands have been linked with struggles on questions of policies or in other words, grew into political struggles against the ruling class, they acquired broad sweep, and yielded substantial results. The belief that confining a struggle as a purely economic struggle for 'purely workers' interests', and keeping it isolated and untainted by 'politics' ensures better success, has proved to be profoundly mistaken.

Sixth, where the workers have moved as a class, and have been led by a class conscious political vanguard like the Communists, the struggles have been more organised, purposeful and better led. Where reformist individuals, political adventurers and all kinds of demagogues have managed to put themselves at the head, the struggles have proved to be barren of results, or failed to live up to their great expectations, howsoever broad-based and militant they have been to begin with.

Seventh, trade union struggles that enjoyed wide sympathy from the people and could rally solidarity and support from the peasantry and other sections of working masses, have generally met with success.

Eighth, well-conducted and united struggles of the workers have evoked international interest and sympathy. At the same time, where Indian workers have moved on issues of international importance like peace, anti-apartheid, support to liberation struggles, the bonds of international brotherhood have been strengthened.

Ninth, actions of our working class on political issues and mass issues, have won them place at the vanguard of the struggle for democracy, national unity and social progress.

1. The struggle for trade union unity, and for developing the broadest possible united and joint actions has been discussed in Part III of this Book.

FURTHER READING

1. *Hundred Years' Gains of the Working Class*: S. A. Dange.

THE INDIAN WORKERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

—The industrial revolution traces its origin to the invention of the spinning jenny around 1764, followed in quick succession by several other inventions. The means of production had been revolutionised, and advanced to a stage where factory production commenced on a large scale. The old feudal system and production relations had to be broken, and replaced by new capitalist production relations, giving rise to two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

England, the cradle of the Industrial revolution, became the workshop of the world. With capitalist exploitation, there also started the resistance of the workers—Luddites, and a series of workers' riots and revolts. Guild and craft organisations, mutual aid societies and associations became the starting point of workers' combination. The bourgeoisie retaliated by the Anti-Combination Act. This had to be repealed in 1824, following a wave of strikes.

The Chartist movement initiated by the London Working men's Association, complemented the trade union movement, by raising political demands, such as universal manhood suffrage, secret ballot, etc.

—In the European continent, industrialisation lagged behind, and hence trade unionism came later. The series of revolutions in 1848 in several countries, gave a push to this development. It was at this time, Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto, which ended with the rallying call: "Workers of all lands, Unite!"

—From the beginning, the father of the working class movement stressed the international character of the movement in its fight against capitalist exploitation. In 1864, mainly on the initiative of Marx, the International Workingmen's Association (First International) was founded. Trade unions were beginning to coalesce on a national plane. For instance, the British TUC was formed in 1868. It was left to the farsightedness of Marx and Engels, not only to write about, but also to take the first practical steps towards an international combination of

workers. The IWA was not purely a trade union organisation,— in the early formative period, when trade unions were yet to arise in several countries, it could not be so. But already in 1869, it broached the proposal, at its fourth Congress, in the following words:

“Holding that the international character of labour and capital requires an international organisation of the trade unions, the Congress charges the General Council to bring about an international association of the trade unions”.

—The first International could not survive long to carry out this directive. However, it had elaborated the slogans, which were to be the starting point of the international trade union movement, viz. “eight hours as the legal limit of the working day”, extensive factory legislations, higher wages, defence of female and child labour. The ‘Paris commune’, the first workers’ state won in 1871, implemented many of these slogans. But within 3 months it was drowned in blood by the bourgeoisie.

—In May 1886, major industrial centres in USA (the country where the most rapid capitalist development had started, overtaking many traditional capitalist countries of Europe), were involved in an upsurge of mass workers’ actions for the 8-hour working day. A strike was simultaneously launched on May 1 1886 all over the US, and in Chicago an impressive procession paraded down the Michigan Avenue.

On May 4, when the workers were holding a meeting at Hay market Square in protest against the police brutalities the previous day, an act of provocation was engineered, and again indiscriminate firing was resorted to by the police on the peaceful crowd. 6 were killed on the spot (the previous day 4 had died), and 200 wounded. Hundreds of peoples were rounded up after the tragedy, and 8 of them were prosecuted. There was not a shred of evidence against these eight, and in any case, only 1 of them was on the scene when the incident occurred. Yet, harsh sentences were passed against all. Five were to be ultimately executed, but one of them died in the prison cell and thus escaped the gallows. The other 4—*Albert Parsons, Augustus Spies, George Engel and Adolf Fischer*, were hanged on Black Friday (November 11, 1887). They bravely mounted the gallows, and their words uttered after the hangman’s noose was round their necks have become legends. Spies cried out, “There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today-” Parsons was the last to speak, “Oh men of America! Let me speak... Let the voice of the people be heard...!” At this point, the traps opened and the voice was cut off.

More than half a million people came out on the streets to pay their last respect to the heroes.

—The events in Chicago one hundred years ago gave birth to the May Day tradition of the world labour movement. On July 14, 1889, the Paris Congress of the Second International voted to declare May 1 an International Day of Workers' Solidarity. May 1, 1890 was duly observed in all European countries, and in America. Frederick Engels wrote about it: "Today...the European and American proletariat is reviewing its fighting forces, mobilised for the first time, mobilised as *one* army, under *one* flag, for *one* immediate aim... And today's spectacle will open the eyes of the capitalists and landlords of all countries to the fact that today the working men of all countries are united indeed.

"If only Marx were still by my side to see this with his own eyes!" (Italics his)

The birth of May Day represented a boundary line between two ages inside the workers' movement. The day of unity of working people of all countries was born in the struggle for workers' rights. It was haloed with their blood, and their martyrdom.

—Trade Union movement spread to many countries. After several efforts and conferences, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) was set up in 1913. But the horizontal spread of the movement was accompanied by the inroad of various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies of the Right and the Left, such as 'pure and simple' trade unionism (Britain), 'anarcho-syndicalism', 'opportunism' and 'revisionism'—all of which were dead-set in opposing the Marxist trend in the working class movement.

The bankruptcy of the IFTU was exposed during the First World War, during the great economic crisis (1929-32) and the subsequent rise of fascism. The Second World War effectively buried it.

It was left to Lenin to fight all the anti-Marxist trends mentioned above. After the victory of the October Revolution, the stage was set for a revolutionary international trade union organisation. The Red International Labour Union (RILU) as it was called, played its role in spreading the ideas of revolutionary trade unionism and creating its nucleus in several countries. But the rise of fascism in Europe, and the urgent task of building a United Front to halt fascism and ward off war, created a situation where the RILU could not continue its separate existence. In 1937, it went into liquidation.

—The compulsions of the Anti-fascist War raised afresh the

question of international trade union unity, since there was no single international trade union organisation in existence at the time.

—On the initiative of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee set up in October 1941, a World Trade Union Conference, attended by trade-union organisations of more than 40 countries, took place in London, three months before the rout of Hitler-fascism, i.e. in February 1945. This Conference decided to set up a new world organisation called the World Federation of Trade Unions.

—The foundation Congress of the WFTU took place in Paris from September 25 to October 9, 1945. This was the culminating point of the process of international trade union unity and united action generated during the worldwide struggle against fascism. The war was only just over. The last shot had been fired. Many countries lay in ruins. Even so, the urge for unitedly building a new world of Labour and Peace, brought 346 delegates representing 67 million workers from 56 countries to this Congress. Only the right-wing dominated American Federation of Labour (AFL) refused to participate. On October 3, 1945, with the adoption of its constitution, the birth of the WFTU was formally proclaimed. Since then, October 3, is observed as "WFTU Day".

—As stated in the Preamble

"The WFTU exists to improve the living and working conditions of the people of all lands and to unite them in pursuit of the objectives sought by all freedomloving peoples...

"These aims and objects can only be fully attained by the establishment of a World Order in which all the resources of the world will be utilised for the benefit of all its people, the vast majority of whom are workers by hand and brain whose protection and whose progress depend upon the union of all their organized forces nationally and internationally..."¹

The founding of the WFTU is a great and historic achievement of all those forces who have struggle for trade union unity. Monopoly capitalist circles especially in USA, who wished to pursue their own policy of aggrandisement in the post-war world, looked upon the WFTU as an obstruction to their plans, and therefore egged on the reactionary and right-wing leaders of the AFL to split this international unity of the working class. Dragging with them the British TUC leadership, and their allies in Western Europe, they set up in late 1949, a new international organisation, known as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

—It must however be noted, that the victory over fascism, the

upsurge of the national liberation movement, the powerful growth in the ideas and influences of socialism, gave a tremendous fillip to the growth of trade unions in Asia and Latin America. National and regional centres came up fast. By consistently championing the workers' vital interests and trade union rights, the prestige of the WFTU has steadily grown among working masses of all over the world. A big step forward in international unity was taken with the creation of Trade Unions' International (TUIs), as industrial branches of the WFTU. They incorporate organisations affiliated to the WFTU and organisations not affiliated with it from countries where splitting activities have kept such organisations outside the WFTU. The TUIs help to rally the working people in kindred branches of industry in different countries to uphold working class interests, coordinate the struggles for better conditions, render assistance to and express solidarity with struggling workers, etc.

—During more than 40 years of its existence, culminating in the latest 11th Congress in Berlin (September, 1986), the WFTU has grown from strength to strength, uniting together more than 214 million workers from 138 countries embracing all continents and social systems. Its persistent and persevering efforts for unity, have generated new trends in unions that are today affiliated with the ICFTU and the WCL. It has opened up possibilities of international joint and united action by trade unions affiliated to different world centres in relation to activities of TNCs, in the struggle against apartheid, in defence of world peace for a nuclear-free world, for total disarmament, and a new international economic order, etc.

As a class organisation of the workers, the WFTU expresses the anti-war aspirations common to the whole working class, for a world of peaceful labour. It has all along pursued a policy of rallying the forces of peace and social progress, of concretely combating every imperialist war manoeuvre, of opposing the arms race and releasing resources for development, for eliminating hunger and poverty, etc. As initiated by the WFTU, September 1 has become a Day of International Trade Union Action for Peace. Born in unity, it has immeasurably strengthened international working class and trade union unity always bringing to the fore the oneness, the commonness of the issues that face the workers in all countries. The realities of the nuclear age are obliging the ICFTU too to revise its earlier unconditional support for imperialist policies on the issue of war and peace, and to take a positive stand on the question of nuclear disarmament, as well as on anti-apartheid struggle, and so on. The basis for common international ac-

tion is therefore widening, though the ICFTU officially continues to oppose any joint work with the WFTU.

—From its birth in 1920, among the ideas upheld by the AITUC, has been the idea of international working class brotherhood. Lala Lajpat Rai had declared in his presidential address: “The movement we are inaugurating today is thus of more than national importance. It is a matter of international significance. The workers of India are joining hands and brains not only to solidify the interests of Indian Labour, but also to forge a link in the chain of international brotherhood.”

However, the question of international affiliation remained a knotty problem. The IFTU, dominated by the reformist leadership of the British TUC-type did not support the colonial peoples’ demand. Therefore, there was no question of affiliating to the IFTU. On the other hand, the right-reformist and bourgeois-liberal section within the AITUC was not prepared for affiliating it to the RILU. An attempt to do so actually precipitated a split in the AITUC in 1931. The AITUC thus remained unaffiliated both to the IFTU and the RILU.

—From the very foundation of the WFTU, the AITUC has been in the WFTU. The AITUC plays a prominent role in the work of the WFTU. It has played a key role in bringing together trade unions of the Asian and Pacific region, and setting up their centre.

—International affiliation is now accepted also by other major trade union centres in India. But as if extending the split on the national plane, the INTUC and the HMS chose to affiliate themselves to the ICFTU. In the modern world, it is no longer possible to think of national isolation, except by organisations like BMS and a few others whose horizons are limited, whose ideology is based on narrow national chauvinism, but which for that very reason find common identity with many international reactionary positions, inspired by imperialism and its allies. An ideological struggle against these trends, as well as against ultra-left trends on this question, as on other questions, is essential.

—An important international organisation concerning the working class, is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) founded by the League of Nations in 1919. This was in a way, a reformist response to the growth of revolutionary sentiment in the world following the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. It is a tripartite body, with representatives of governments, of labour (as a rule, trade unionists nominated by government from major TU centres), and of employers. By its very structure, it is loaded on the side of employers and go-

vernments, who also choose their 'labour partners' as it were. Nevertheless realities have forced themselves on the ILO. Its Conventions on various aspects of labour relations, and on putting restrictions on unrestrained exploitation,—though not binding on governments unless ratified by them, have proved useful to the working class. They are useful weapons in the hands of workers. This is to the ILO's credit.

The Soviet Union joined it in 1954, followed by other socialist countries. In recent years, many newly-liberated countries have also entered the ILO. These have led to some changes within the ILO, though its basic structure, founded on the concept of 'social partnership' and defence of private ownership, remains unchanged since 1919. The WFTU in accord with the trade unions of socialist countries and other progressive trade union centres, uses the ILO as a platform for upholding the interests of working people, for defence of peace, conversion of war production to peaceful purposes, defence of TU rights, against unemployment and for the right to work, etc. The ICFTU, on the other hand adopts a reformist approach, based on class collaboration, finding itself in identity with employers and capitalist governments on several issues. The ILO has thus become an arena of class struggle, the outcome depending on several occasions on the correlation of forces in the world.

Representation of Indian labour on the ILO, is naturally a vexatious issue, since the government discriminates in favour of the INTUC.

1. Refer Preamble and Constitution of WFTU.

FURTHER READING

1. *WFTU*: V. Mozhayev, Published by AUCCTU.
2. *Trade Union Record*: 20 September 1984.
3. *Trade Union Record*: May Day Centenary Issue.
4. *AITUC Fifty Years*.
5. *Haymarket Heritage*: Anatoly Repin: WFTU Publication.
6. *History of May Day Celebration in India*: Dilip Bose.



THE CHARACTER OF A TRADE UNION

--As we see from the history of the movement in India and in other countries, it is the daily life experience of a worker that induces him to combine with his fellow-workers, and form a union. It is through the trade union that the worker wages his day to day struggle against exploitation by the capitalist. And just as a new-born babe is nursed in the cradle, and only thereafter takes the first tottering steps out into the world, so does the 'collective worker' steps out as the working class movement after being nursed in the cradle of the trade union.

"The trade union is the cradle of the labour movement. For working people naturally turn first to that which affects their daily life, and they consequently combine first with their fellows by trade".¹

Under capitalism, it is the trade unions which rally together the broad mass of workers within common class organisations, and lead them in the struggle against the exploiting bourgeoisie and its state machinery. They are the principal weapons in this struggle.²

—The very nature of the workers' struggle therefore requires that the trade union should embrace within its fold the entire mass of workers at the work site, the factory, or the industry, in order to be effective. Its doors should be open to all workers, irrespective of caste, sex, language, or the religion which any one professes. Every worker has to be approached, and motivated to enrol into a union. On the other hand, any worker who does not join or belong to the trade union at his work-site, such a worker does not discharge his elementary class duty.

—The rank and file worker, after passing through the crucible of struggle led by his union naturally comes to regard it as his very own. Between him and the boss, it is his trade union that stands as the shield. It is also his sword in all his offensive and defensive battles. It is the trade union that helps him to improve his living and working conditions, and to defend whatever he has already gained. No wonder, once the worker is in a union, and that union has led him through

struggles, whether well or ill, he is found to be tenaciously attached to his union. Attempts to dislodge him from there, are not easy. Even when the worker has been ill-led and misled, then he who wishes to bring him over to the correct path, has to undertake patient and perseverant work over a period of time to establish his own credibility and convince the worker through his life-experience.

—Even infringement or restriction of the right of the workers to associate and to join in the union of their choice that the capitalist state or the individual owner undertakes, is rightly construed by the workers as an attack on their basic right, as a general attack on the labour movement, with a view to weaken it.

—Where a section of workers themselves impose restrictions on rallying together the entire mass of workers in a common union, that too becomes an attempt, whether deliberately or otherwise, to curb and weaken the movement. The first such instance is the setting up of craft or category unions.

British trade unions in their infancy were narrow craft organisations which had only immediate and partial practical aims, such as increase in wages, shortening of the working day and better conditions for the particular craft in question. Marx and Engels noted their narrow outlook, though even this they considered a serious step forward along the road of development of the labour movement. Craft unions outlived their utility, and gradually grew into big industrial unions in that country.

—Here in India, and in some other countries, we continue to face the problem of categorywise unions and associations. These generally get formed out of a narrow outlook about the interests of one's own category. But sometimes, category unions spring up because of the unsatisfactory and undemocratic functioning of the general union dominated by representatives of only some categories in the establishment, and the neglect of the specific problems of other categories. When this happens, it is a warning signal that not everything is good and healthy with the functioning of the general union, and therefore corrective measures have to be taken.

In any case, category unions encourage a narrowness in outlook and divide the workers by category from the rest of their brothers in the same work-place. The interest of "my own category" without regard to the general interests of all workers, arises from the mistaken belief that it is possible to achieve the former without fighting for the latter. It inevitably leads the category to a position of antagonism, with or

indifference about the other categories. It thus introduces an element of 'competition' within the ranks of workers, which it was the purpose of the union in the first place, to eliminate. It obstructs the growth of class consciousness.

We therefore discourage category unions and stand for industrial unionism. Our aim is: "One union in one industry/establishment", going forward to "One Industrial Federation" over a bigger geographical area, viz. the state or the country as a whole.

But since category unions may have arisen out of the failures of an existing reformist-led and undemocratically functioning union, we may work in these unions, *always* keeping before us the aim of drawing the workers behind them towards one union, irrespective of category.

—A dangerous and disruptive trend is that forming caste-based unions, whether openly or under cover. In the context of caste division in our society, and the rise of casteism and its cynical utilisation by vested groups for serving their selfish interests, this has serious implications for the labour movement.

This move usually emanates from those belonging to the 'lower castes', by rousing and stressing real or imaginary grievances against the other sections, and by preaching caste exclusiveness. Workers with a backward tribal consciousness, and sometimes even other minorities, are also sought to be dragged into such unions or 'cultural associations'.

It has to be pointed out that the caste ideology of the dominant castes (presuming that there is any such expression within the trade union concerned), cannot be fought by propping up a caste ideology of the lower or backward castes. Both the majority and the minority sections, both the 'upper' and 'lower' castes, have to be convinced that the interests of both demand mutual trust, cooperation, greater democracy and unity. At the same time, the genuine grievances of the lower castes have to be espoused by the other sections.

More than a century ago, Karl Marx had pointed out the need of a principled struggle against any traditional cause that keeps the workers divided. Marx wrote, "In the USA. every independent movement of the workers was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic". He therefore urged the workers to fight slavery, since "Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labour in a black skin is brand-marked". This is even more relevant in India where age-old caste brand-marks keep the workers divided.

However to equate caste war to a form of class war in Indian conditions, as certain opportunists are seeking to do, is totally wrong and disruptive. Class consciousness and class struggle *unite* all sections of the exploited masses against the exploiters. Caste consciousness and caste struggle *divide* the exploited masses according to their castes, while claiming to fight the exploiters. They divert the struggle against the main enemy.

Caste and community-based unions, or differences based on caste or community within the unions, have to be vigilantly combatted, and caste discrimination and atrocities against oppressed section have to be actively and concretely fought.

—Serious consideration has to be given to the emergence of trade unions grouped around certain individuals, to the phenomenon of 'personality cult' in the trade union movement, especially in major industrial complexes.

This is not altogether new, nor peculiar to our country alone. The specific causes behind this phenomenon are:

- * expansion of industries bringing in young first-generation workers from the urban and rural rich and the middle classes;
- * vast growth of petty-bourgeoisie, and petty-bourgeois influence affecting the workers;
- * large sections of workers having undergone education, including technical, and developing acquisitive ambitions;
- * intensified monopoly exploitation;
- * deliberate attempts by the bourgeoisie to prop up individuals—even 'militant' individuals, who are nevertheless easier to manipulate, and the disinformation spread by the immensely powerful mass media which always boosts up such 'heroes'; and
- * above all, division in the left ranks, leading to counter-productive trade union rivalry.

All these causes create the fertile soil for growth of demagogues and careerists, and individual trade union 'bosses', who are supposed to be more powerful than the established trade union centres in one region or the other.

In each case, the problem has to be concretely studied, the causes have to be analysed, and steps worked out to combat the same. A wholly negative attitude towards such individual-led unions has to be eschewed, especially when the mass of workers continue to repose faith in them. Sterile criticism especially when struggles are being led, has to be avoided. The "mood" of the workers has to be carefully noted. At the same time,

workers have to be educated through their own experience, that such 'individuals', 'heroes', trade union bosses and demagogues, cannot deliver the goods. Even if immediate gains are won, such 'leaders' lack the class perspective of proletarian struggles.

—It has to be emphasised that a trade union, above all, is a common class organisation of the workers, a broad collective inspired and moved by a cause, and an ultimate goal, and not merely the 'personal following' of a leader.

- 1 *Letter addressed to Chicago workers by the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, in 1874;*
2. *Under socialism, this role is different, since there is no bourgeoisie and its state machine to struggle against. But the role of the trade unions in a socialist society gets even more enhanced. Failure to discharge this role can lead to very serious consequences, as was seen in certain countries.*

FURTHER READING

1. *This is no Trade Unionism*: B. S. Dhume.
2. *Marxism and the Role of the working class in India*: S. G. Sardesai.
3. *Caste, class and reservations*: A. B. Bardhan.
(Chapter from pamphlet: *Debate On Reservation*)



Lesson 10

REVOLUTIONARY TRADE UNIONISM VERSUS REFORMIST TRADE UNIONISM

—Trade unions, as we saw, grew out of the workers' spontaneous attempts to combine together, and assert their strength of numbers through such combination, in order to fight exploitation, improve their living and working conditions, and raise themselves above the status of mere bonded labour and wage slaves.

The immediate task and aim of the trade unions is therefore to take up the urgent demands of the workers at any work-site or establishment, and to lead them into a struggle for winning them. Without this, the entire mass of workers could not possibly be induced to join a trade union. This has to be the *starting point* of trade union activity.

It is in the course of struggles for these demands that the workers are steeled, their class consciousness is roused, and their class organisation is consolidated. Any under-estimation of struggles on day to day issues, any neglect in undertaking them as and when occasions arise,—and these occasions are bound to be all too frequent in the capitalist system, would therefore be totally wrong. Such a disdainful or even lethargic attitude would make the rank and file workers lose interest in their unions.

—But improvements which we are fighting for, are not an end in themselves. As long as capitalism lasts, exploitation continues, no matter what improvements the workers manage to secure in the course of their trade union struggles. What then is the full scope of action of the trade union movement, and the goal towards which it has to strive, while carrying on its everyday battles? Here is what Marx had to say about it:

“At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wage system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady.

They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the *material conditions* and the *social forms* necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the *conservative* motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watch word, "*Abolition of the wages system!*" (Italics in original)¹

Precisely because Marx drew attention to the final goal of the movement, that is why he was particular about the first, the *initial* steps that the workers take towards combination and struggles.

—It must be noted that improvements in the conditions under which workers live and labour, reforms in political and social life, are important and necessary. Reforms are a welcome change in their living conditions. They also lead to an improvement in the conditions of struggle of the proletariat, broadening the possibility of drawing larger masses to support the revolutionary cause. But to consider reforms as everything, and to forget the struggle for the final aim, i.e. socialism, is to stultify the trade union movement, and condemn it to the humdrum task of securing one petty concession today and another tomorrow, without in any way changing the whole system. It amounts to walking round a circle. This is *reformism* in the trade union movement. Such reformist trade unions cannot become 'Schools of Socialism'. Revolutionary trade unionism implies the linking of struggle for immediate and partial demands with the struggle for changing the system, with the struggle for the final goal. It means the combination of economic struggle with the struggle for political demands, for alternate policies.

Not to link up the one with the other, sabotages the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, whether one wishes it or not. Either way, it plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie.

—Trade union work in many cases suffers from the general and chronic disease of '*economism*', the usual expression of reformist trade unionism. Economism amounts to confining oneself to the spontaneous struggle for partial and immediate demands in the trade union domain, forgetting that the working class has to ultimately aim at capture of power and the abolition of wage slavery. It is not enough for instance, to confine our trade union struggle only to the question of defence of trade union rights, or a proper rate of D.A., or better wages and so

on. It must also be directed against the policies of the government which heap miseries on the toiling masses and hamper development, and reveal to the working class the various interests, class forces and parties which shape these policies. If the trade unions organise wide and massive struggles against such policies, it becomes possible to rally wider sections of the people, and compel government to retreat on certain issues. The struggle assumes a political character, deepens the class consciousness of the working class, and helps it to play its role as the vanguard force of social progress. *Exclusive* concern with day to day trade union work, and indifference towards political work, is a common deviation, that has to be corrected.

—Some trade unionists' concept of politics extends only up to such political questions that come up in the course of a specific trade union or economic struggle. They are prepared to fight this 'political struggle' since circumstances compel them to do so, but not the political struggle for working class power. They are even prepared to launch, and sometimes do launch the most militant strike actions, but shorn of a class perspective. This is a trade unionist interpretation of 'workers' politics', which means nothing more nor less than adapting the proletariat's interests to those of the bourgeois state. This is a specific brand of 'economism', of 'syndicalism'. 'Economism' breeds spontaneity and neglects the role of consciousness which is based on the totality of knowledge, and is therefore caused from outside to the ranks of the workers. Such reformist outlook in trade unionism, helps sustain ideas of gradualism, of growing 'step by step' into socialism, of the so-called 'socialistic pattern of society', of 'people's capitalism' and its Indian variant of 'Ramrajya' etc., that is assiduously propagated by spokesmen of the bourgeoisie among the workers.

A gross form of reformist trade unionism is the pre-occupation with litigation, with adjudication and legal work. It has bred a type of 'trade unionists', who are more of lawyers and attorneys, than of trade union leaders and activists. In some cases it has even created a brand of parasites who feed on the workers' helplessness and weakness.

Recourse to the processes of law, to courts and tribunals, is no doubt necessary on certain occasions and in specific cases. Such occasional and timely recourse proves helpful in the course of the movement. Several times courts have handed out very important and useful judgements, (instances can be quoted). But where trade union litigation becomes a substitute for mass activity, for the mass movement and struggle, and where legal work

has become the main work, there class consciousness is blunted, and faith in bourgeois legal processes is instilled, which ends most of the time in frustration.

—Some trade unionists look upon the unions, as means to approach the ‘powers-that-be’ in a body for redressing grievances, something that cannot be done individually by each worker. Here, the capitalists and the government, are cast in the role of ‘givers of charity’, while the workers associated in their trade unions are supposed to be the ‘receivers’. Even proximity to ministers, and close association with the ruling party, is painted as a big positive factor in trade unionism of this sort. In essence, this is the outlook of the INTUC and other independent reformists. The theory of trusteeship, shorn of all its high-sounding trappings and philosophising, has a similar outlook.

The working class has however to pin its hope not on the charity or philanthropy of the boss and the government but on its own revolutionary energy and mass movement. As Marx put it: “Social reforms can never be caused by the weakness of the strong: they must and will be brought about by the strength of the weak”.

—The most insidious trend at present within the trade union movement in our country, is that of ‘independent’ and ‘pure trade unionism’, of ‘trade union neutrality’, of ‘keeping away from all political parties’ and from what is contemptuously called the “battle of flags”.

The objective basis for the proliferous growth of this trend is of course, the fragmentation of trade unions along political lines—each party setting up its own trade union wing, thereby splitting up the workers and seriously weakening their struggle. The so-called ‘pure trade unionists’ are capitalising on this division among workers. They advise the workers to keep away from ‘politics’ and the ‘politicians’. To whom should they turn? They should turn, it is said, to individuals ‘free’ from such links, to ‘independents’ in every sense of the term. The workers are thus pitted against their existing central trade union organisations, and against their political parties. In common with the extreme left, they dub these parties as the ‘establishment’, and so on.

It is obvious that these independent and free trade unionists, are trying to drag the workers away from class consciousness and class struggle, towards ‘economism’ with a vengeance. Absence of militant mass activity, and failure to judge the workers’ moods at the appropriate time, provides them the necessary chance. Trade union demagoguery of the above type appeals

to the backwardness of the working masses and to narrow self-interest. What the workers need are not demagogues, but certainly powerful propagandists and agitators. They need effective "peoples' tribunes".

—"Trade union neutrality" is expressed in the following ways: (1) eschewing all 'politics', and confining union work to struggle for economic demands, (2) keeping workers away from all political parties.—in fact instilling in them a deep hostility for the left parties especially, and (3) when pressed, talking vaguely about 'workers' politics', about some sort of pragmatic programme.

Trade union neutrality is in essence a bourgeois idea, and brings grist to the mill of the bourgeoisie, since it detaches the workers from the proletarian class struggle.

—Trade unions are, and should be 'independent' of any particular party, in the sense that they are not subordinate to, nor directed by any party. But they cannot be 'independent' of, nor 'free' from all 'politics', as also the political influence exercised on them by the left parties which show them the path to their destiny. We want the trade unions to be independent, to take their own decisions democratically. We do not want them to be independent of socialism, independent of the political struggle for ending capitalist exploitation.

Revolutionary trade unionists have therefore to combat all such anarcho—syndicalist and reformist trends in the trade union movement.

—Reformism wears various other garbs apart from those mentioned above. The ideology of the B.M.S. for instance, is an amalgam of downright apology for capitalism and religio-communal traditionalism, served up in the specific Indian situation.

On the other hand there is also a growing trend of sectarianism, of infantile leftism, of militant action by a minority group acting for the passive masses.

—A consistent and principled struggle has to be conducted against all these trends, on the basis of concrete study and exposure. Their target in the final analysis is the revolutionary trade union movement. No wonder, reformists and sectarians of all brands—even the apparently most militant among them, get all sorts of encouragement, sometimes open, at other times subtle, from the bourgeoisie.

—How is this struggle to be reconciled with the struggle for broad trade union unity?

'Reformism' as a trend must be fought politically and ideologically. But even while doing so, joint actions must be forged with reformist-led unions on common issues affecting the working masses. Only that would enable the workers behind them to *understand from experience* the mistakes and limitations of reformism, to appreciate what revolutionary trade unionism is, and make them support the latter. Whatever work is carried on within a common united union, time and patience should be allowed to the workers to arrive at the proper understanding. Sectarian errors, aggressive and arrogant approach have to be avoided, and in any case, the rank and file following must never be confused with the 'leaders'. Fraternal approach towards the masses, friendly attitude even towards the 'leaders' in order to facilitate joint actions, and above all patience,—these are necessary attributes in this struggle. Joint and united actions, correct tactics from one stage to the next, always help to raise the level of understanding of the workers, and yield returns to revolutionary trade unionism.

—The developing situation in our country and the sharpening of the class struggle, is itself posing issues of policy, of 'politics', and providing the ground for linking the struggle for immediate demands with the struggle for the political aim of the working class movement.

1. Address by Marx to the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, printed as a pamphlet: "Value, Price and Profit".

FURTHER READING

1. *Value, Price and Profit*: Karl Marx.
2. *What Is To Be Done*: V. I. Lenin.
3. *Reports of the General Secretary*, AITUC to the Sessions and meetings of the General Council (latest ones).



PART II

Lesson 11

THE WAGE QUESTION

The key issue of trade union work is the issue of wages. The struggle for higher wages, for shorter working hours, for job security, against erosion of wages and against intensification of labour, occupies the major part of trade union activity. These struggles account for the lion's share of industrial disputes, work stoppages and mandays lost in industry.

—In the capitalist system, the capitalist and the worker face each other in the labour market, as a seller and a buyer. What the worker offers for sale is his capacity to labour, his 'labour power'. And what the capitalist buys is this labour power, which he then puts to use on the raw materials and the instruments of production, for producing the desired commodity.'

Like other commodities that are offered for sale in the market, labour power is also a commodity. The capitalist pays to the worker the money equivalent of his labour power, that is to say, his wages, in order to use it for a certain period of time, or for a certain amount of work.

—On the face of it, the worker appears to be a 'free agent' and juridically speaking there is equality between the capitalist and the worker, in their capacities as the buyer and seller of labour power. But in the economic sense it is really not so. Capital is concentrated social power, while the worker has only his individual labour power at his disposal. The worker can live only when he sells his labour power and the other buys it for wages. The capitalist on the other hand, may choose to, or choose not to buy it. He can live without buying it. Masked or concealed in this relation of *wage-labour*, is the system of exploitation and social force.

—How is wage determined?

—Wage, as we noted, is the price in terms of money, for the commodity, labour power. The price of a commodity is its exchange value expressed in terms of money. It registers fluctuations around its value, determined among other things by the law of supply and demand.

This price is determined by its cost of production, being either above or below it, the rise and fall reciprocally balancing each other during a period of time. So also in the case of labour power, as a commodity. Its price too, is determined by the cost of production of labour power, which means in other words, the cost of upkeep of a worker, the price of his means of subsistence. For the capitalist system to go on, the worker must be in a position to do his work efficiently. Having worked and tired himself out for the day, he must next day be in a position to resume work. For this, his bare necessities,—not only for himself but also for his propagation as a race, as well as other needs, dictated by traditions, social customs and advancement, have to be fulfilled. The value of these commodities in terms of money, taken together, constitutes the cost of the worker's upkeep. The social average, is the wage that the worker gets paid. Just as the prices of other commodities fluctuate round the point—value, so also wages hover round the value of labour power, depending on several factors. Very often the capitalist succeeds in pushing down the price of labour power, sometimes very greatly so. At all other times, *slightly* so.

Labour power is however distinguished from all other commodities. Its peculiarity lies in the fact, that it can be put to use for creating new and additional values. While labour power may be put to use for say 8 hours of work and create new values, the time required for producing labour power itself, i.e. for producing the commodities necessary for its upkeep, may be only 4 hours or so. Such a possibility exists precisely because of the growth of productive forces in capitalist society.

Thus, during the 8 hours that a worker is engaged in production, for the first 4 hours one may say he produces value, equivalent to the value of commodities necessary for his upkeep. This is *necessary labour time*, and for this he is compensated in the form of wages. For the next 4 hours, he is putting in *surplus labour time*, producing *surplus value*, which the capitalist appropriates. Of course, what we are concerned with is not the time required or spent by each individual worker, but with what is *socially necessary* in the given circumstances.

—It is creation of surplus value that is “the direct aim and the determining motive of capitalist production”. Therefore the historical tendency of capitalist production, is the search for reducing the necessary labour time, and stretching out the surplus time; for reducing wages in relation to the total value added after manufacture, i.e. reducing the wage cost as a per-

centage of value of production and extracting higher surplus value, etc. etc. This is sought to be done in various ways, which are at the root of all attempts for intensifying labour, for higher productivity, for rationalisation, modernisation and so on.

‘Over work’—physical, mental and nervous, is a constant phenomenon in the capitalist system, which the worker fights back through combination, by means of the class struggle.

—The history of wage struggles, in other countries as well as in India, is a history not only of bitter clashes, dogged battles and countless sacrifices in the field, but also of ideological struggles with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois doctrines, which have all tried to disarm and demoralise the working class, by pointing to the futility and the senselessness of its struggles. Today, some of these so-called ‘scientific’ arguments may appear foolish and comical. But in their time they carried great weight and authority. And even today, refurbished and sophisticated versions are dished out by the new spokesmen of the bourgeoisie. Such for instance is the ‘wage-price spiral’ theory, or the counterposing of higher wage scales to investments and job creation, etc. Some of these we shall study later.

—The essence of what came to be known as the ‘Iron Law of Wages’ or the ‘Wage Fund Doctrine’, was that no matter what the worker does, no matter how hard he fights, he will not be able to improve his condition.

This is how Jean Mouly, explains it in the *International Labour Review* (ILO’s journal):

“...Under the terms of that law, the ‘natural price’ of labour depended on the cost of subsistence and the price of commodities necessary or useful for the maintenance of the worker and his family. At the same time, there was a ‘prevailing price’ for labour, which was what the worker actually earned and which depended on the immediate situation as regards supply and demand but which always tended to bear a close relationship to the natural price.

“In fact, if the prevailing wage were to fall below the ‘natural price’ of labour for any length of time, the resulting poverty and high mortality would reduce the size of the labour force and the decline in the supply of labour would send its price up. Conversely, any rise in the wage level above the ‘natural price’ of labour would in time, result in an increase, first in the population and subsequently in the number of workers available, leading in turn to a drop in wages to a level cor-

responding to the 'natural price'. The total demand for labour was, in fact, determined at all times by a 'wage fund', which corresponded to the amount of capital available for the payment of wages, while the supply of labour depended on purely demographic factors; since wages were governed by a quotient, namely the wage fund divided by the number of workers, demographic fluctuations would bring this quotient back towards the natural wage".

Marx theoretically demolished these doctrines, by showing that wages include both a physical and a social minimum, and that the latter changes with the socio-historical conditions. He pointed out the tremendous role played by trade unions in shaping and stimulating the socio-historical conditions, and thereby changing the social minimum of wages.

Exploding the so-called 'Iron law', Marx showed that wages can be increased at the expense of the surplus value taking the form of profit.

The workers can gain a rise in wages, although the general tendency of capitalist production is to reduce the average wage level and the share of wages in production. The proportions are established by several factors,—one of the main being the struggle of the workers themselves. Marx also disproved the theory that the prices of goods were determined by the level of wages, which the proponents of wage-price spiral theory continue to repeat.

Life itself has exposed the bankruptcy of these doctrines, though they continue to be dressed up in other forms to this day.

—So now, we proceed to define wages in its several qualifications, and as ordinarily understood in our day to day work:

Wages, as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, means all remuneration capable of being expressed in terms of money, which would, if the terms of employment, express or implied, were fulfilled, be payable to a workman in respect of his employment, or of work done in such employment, and includes:

(i) Such allowances (including dearness allowance) as the workman is for the time being entitled to;

(ii) the value of any house accommodation or of supply of light, water, medical attendance or other amenity or of any service or of any concessional supply of foodgrains or other articles;

(iii) any travelling concessions; but does not include (a) any bonus; (b) any contribution paid or payable by the employer to any pension fund or provident fund or for the benefit of the workman under any law for the time being in force; (c) any gratuity payable on termination of his service.

This definition is however not adhered to in all circumstances. In some acts, bonus is included, while several other allowances are either excluded or included, as the case may be. In each case, the exact definition has to be looked into.

—*Nominal wage*, is the wage expressed in terms of money at the given moment. It is the payment in cash which the worker receives for his work. But the value of money is changing because of the rise in prices. Hence,

—*Real wage* means the goods and services which the worker can buy with his money wage. It represents the worker's actual purchasing power. If the money wage increases, but the cost of food, clothing, housing and other necessities rises up even more, the real wage falls, causing hardship to the worker and his family. This is sought to be corrected by the mechanism of dearness allowance.

—*Dearness allowance* is essentially a payment to enable a wage earner, particularly a low wage earner, to make both ends meet or maintain his usual standard of living by neutralising the increased cost of living due to rise in prices. It is a mechanism for preventing substantial erosion in a worker's real wage.³ Historically, the wages of workers in most of the industries in India, have come to be made up of two parts—a "basic wage" component and a "dearness allowance" component.

—Workers may be paid wage rates for a specified period of time, or a specified quantity of work.

Time rate: Under this system, workers are paid a specified wage for working an hour, a day, a week or a month. 'Overtime' payments are generally computed by the hour.

Piece rate: Under this system, workers are paid a specified amount for doing a specified quantity of work.

Payment by results, Productivity-linked wage etc., are variants of piece-rate, or a combination of both time and piece-rates, so as to provide the workers a monetary incentive to increase production and productivity.

They intensify capitalist exploitation on the one hand, though on the other hand, they develop the worker's initiative and self-control. The tendency in these, is to raise the individual wage earning of the worker above the average, while the average itself is sought to be lowered. Such is the contradiction.

Further, there is the possibility of the below-average worker being thrown out of the production process.

—A worker's *emoluments* or *earnings*, as distinguished from his wage, is the total in terms of money, which he receives under several heads, including for instance overtime payment.

together with any other payments or expenditures incurred (such as social security, training costs etc.) by an employer for his entire work-force. Labour costs form part of an employer's total cost of production.

1. Refer any lecture notes on Marxian Political Economy
2. Refer to Table, indicating trend of nominal and real wages, along with the consumer price index.

FURTHER READING

1. *First few chapters of Capital*, Vol I: Karl Marx.
2. *Manual On Wages*: Published by I.L.O.
3. *Wage-Labour and Capital*: Karl Marx.
4. *Value, Price and Profits*: Karl Marx.
5. *Economics for Trade Unionists*: M. Atchuthan.
6. *Fact Book on Wages*: M. Atchuthan.
7. *Wages In India*: Maniben Kara Institute.
8. *AITUC's Paper on Wage Policy*: Indore Convention, 1975.
9. *AITUC's Memorandum to the Bonus Commission* (Published in "Workers' Right to Bonus").
10. *Real Wages in India*: Shreekant Palekar.



THE WAGE QUESTION (CONTINUED)

—Several landmarks have been crossed by the Indian working class and its different segments, in the course of struggles for better wages. There are the numerous statutory provisions, the awards of tribunals and arbitrators, the interpretations and judgements by the judiciary (including the Supreme Court), the recommendations of pay commissions, wage boards and minimum wage committees, the periodic wage agreements reached through bilateral negotiations, the formulae evolved by tripartite conferences and committees, and so on. It is enough to refer to a few important landmarks and concepts, which indicate the evolution of a wage policy in our country and the principles of wage determination. Commissions, arbitrators, tribunals and courts have attempted to interpret them in their own way in order to justify the findings they have ultimately given. In many cases, the high-flown principles enunciated as premises, have not been duly followed up in the conclusion, while actually laying down the wages. This is to be expected in the present system. But nonetheless, a few basic concepts of wage determination have historically emerged, and assumed importance.

—The interim government set up on the eve of Independence, announced a programme for:

(a) Statutory prescription of minimum wages in sweated industries;

(b) Standardisation of wages and occupational terms in all the major industries and the determination of differentials in wage rates as between various occupations in an industry; and

(c) promotion of 'fair wage' agreements wherever possible with due regard to the capacity of the industry to pay.

This was the first attempt to do away with the colonial wage system, and replace it by one more suited to India's capitalist development.

—The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was accordingly passed. The International Labour Movement had already got through an ILO Convention No. 26, on this subject. The MW Act sought to provide for fixing minimum rates of wages in certain sweated em-

ployments (covering 12 industries in Part I of the schedule, and agriculture in Part II). Under the Act, state governments were empowered to expand the list in the light of local conditions. It was envisaged that the minimum wages may be fixed or revised either by notification (in which case the State MW Advisory Board should be consulted), or by considering the recommendations of tripartite committees appointed for the purpose.

Unfortunately, this MWA has not fulfilled its high expectations, except where struggles by workers in a particular industry have led to increase in wages, proving the truth that it is the equation of class struggle rather than statute which leads to improvements in workers' condition.

The one man committee appointed by Government in 1966 had observed, "All the pre-existing norms are watered down and thus the whole exercise appeared a compromise between conflicting interests rather than a scientific attempt to determine the minimum standard."

The National Commission on Labour similarly observed in 1968, that, "Minimum wages once fixed had not been revised for long periods in many employments, though the Act provided review at intervals not exceeding five years".

Thus, in some cases, the prevailing rates are higher than the minimum fixed long ago. In others, even the notified rates are not enforced. The employers can flout it with impunity. In still other cases, as for instance in agriculture, there is no machinery at all to get the minimum rates implemented.

The MWA however drew attention to the condition in sweated industries, and has therefore served as a basis for judicial pronouncements, and trade union campaigns in the post-independence years.

—The tripartite Fair Wages Committee appointed in 1948, defined three broad wages concepts, and laid down certain vague criteria for improvement of the wage structure. These concepts, which are more or less valid even today are:

A Minimum Wage, "must provide not merely for a bare sustenance of life but for the preservation of the efficiency of the worker. For this purpose, the minimum wage must also provide for some measure of education, medical requirements and amenities". The Committee gave it as its opinion that "at almost any level of the national income, there should be a certain level of minimum wages which society can afford; what it cannot afford are minimum wages fixed at a level which would reduce employment itself and thereby diminish the national income".

main earner to provide for himself and his family not merely the bare essentials of food, clothing and shelter but a measure of frugal comfort including education for the children, protection against ill-health, requirements of essential social needs, and the measure of insurance against the more important misfortunes including old age".

A *Fair Wage*, is not capable of definition. But the Committee explained that, "While the lower limit of the fair wage must obviously be the minimum wage, the upper limit is equally set by what may broadly be called the capacity of industry to pay. This will depend not only on the present economic position of the industry but on its future prospect. Between these two limits, the actual wages will depend on a consideration of the following factors... (a) the productivity of labour, (b) the prevailing rate of wages in the same or neighbouring localities, (c) the level of the national income and its distribution, and (d) the place of the industry in the economy of the country".

—*Directive Principles of State Policy*: About this time, the framers of the Constitution had also to take into account, the question of a wage policy and its future direction. Therefore, under the Directive Principles, it was laid down as follows in Article 43: "The State shall endeavour to secure by suitable legislation or economic organisation or any other way to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities".

—A major step forward was taken while working out a tripartite agreement on wage policy under the second five year plan. This was adopted at the 15th Indian Labour Conference in 1957. It set the following norms for the fixation of a "need-based minimum wage":

(a) in calculating the minimum wage, the standard working class family should be taken to consist of three consumption units for one earner, the earning of women, children and adolescents should be disregarded;

(b) minimum food requirements should be calculated on the basis of a net intake of 2,700 calories, as recommended by Dr. Aykroyd, for an average Indian adult of moderate activity;

(c) clothing requirements should be estimated at a per capita consumption of 18 yds. per annum which would give for the average worker's family of 4 a total of 72 yds;

(d) in respect of housing the norm should be the minimum rent charged by government in any area for houses provided

under the subsistence minimum
Groups; and

(e) fuel, lighting and other miscellaneous items of expenditure should constitute 20 per cent of the total minimum wage.

—But very soon the government and its advisers set about scaling down all the above norms, and going back on the agreement. The then Finance Minister, Morarji Desai informed the Second Pay Commission that “it is not binding”. The Nutrition Advisory Committee of the Indian Council of Medical Research gave it as its opinion that a lower calorific value of diet would do, and in any case, what Dr. Aykroyd prescribed was just not available. A spate of experts, the National Nutritional Advisory Committee, and so forth, indulged in exercises for justifying lower norms. Pay commissions and wage boards, vied with each other to show that the “need based minimum wage” is unattainable, and the figures of norms cannot be accepted as guides. Employers came out with calculations, statements and propositions which were indeed so revolting, that the three independent members of the Central Wage Board for Engineering Industry (including its chairman), had to observe, “we are not able to accept this (i.e. the employer’s) contention. To say the least, this statement is too naive to require much comment”.

The employers, of course, cannot be accused of naivete. It was their class outlook, to extract the maximum surplus value, and to deny even the barest minimum sustenance for the workers, which found expression.

—Bitter struggles conducted in the field, alone helped the workers to advance step by step towards a better wage structure. A few important battles were fought out in the courts. As a result, certain principles were evolved. To name a few:

Minimum Wage and Capacity to Pay: Supreme Court stated in Crown Aluminium Works Vs. its Workmen (1958 LLJ). “There is, however, one principle which admits of no exceptions. No industry has a right to exist unless it is able to pay its workmen at least a bare minimum wage”.

The relation between the two was further elaborated by the SC in Express Newspapers Vs. its Workmen (1961 LLJ).

Industry-cum-Region Principle: This principle has been elaborated at length by the SC in the Hindustan Motors Vs. its Workmen (1962), French Motor Car Company Vs. its Workmen (1962), Greaves Cotton & Co. Vs. its Workmen (1964), Kamani Metals & Alloys Ltd. Vs. its Workmen (1967).

The Principle of Res Judicata: SC has clarified that the principle of Res Judicata is ruled out, since the efforts to in-

crease workers' wages towards living wage, which also rises with changed circumstances, is a perennial one.

—*Standardisation of Wages:*

The effort of trade unions has always been to level up the wages of workers, in one industry-cum-region, to begin with, towards a common standard. This drive towards standardisation, of wages, is accompanied by a drive towards standardisation of muster, definition of occupations and their job content. Its aim is to reduce the scope for employers to attack the workers by wrong assignment of duties and corresponding cut in wages. This also created conditions for gradation of jobs and skills, and therefore of promotion, in proper time. The struggle for standardisation started with the textile workers in Bombay. It reached new heights with the prolonged national level struggle by bank employees, during which they successfully built up a strong all India organisation, and succeeded in enforcing new industrywise and nationwide standardised wage structure, through a collective agreement in October 1966.

A qualitatively new level has been reached on this issue, with the demand backed up by struggle of Central and state government employees, of power workers and others, for 'wage parity' with public sector employees.

—*Increments and Scales:* The Sastry Tribunal (for banks) stated in 1953, that, "A time scale of wage with annual increments is now recognised to be the normal pattern of a wage scale". The growing needs of the workmen's family, greater experience and improved efficiency with the passing years, and a system which does not depend on the whims of the management, have made this imperative, and widely accepted today. The working out of a wage scale is linked with fixing the minimum and the maximum of the scale and also its span, depending on promotion opportunities and other factors.

—*Wage Differentials:*

Wage disparities have generally narrowed down, due to payment of flat or telescopic rates of dearness allowances, and the efforts of trade unions for securing higher ratio of benefits to the lower paid workers. Initially, this was necessary. But now, in many industries the wage structure is such, that there is no inducement for acquisition of skills or undertaking of higher responsibilities. Hence the question of wage differentials has assumed importance. This involves the issue of *job evaluation*, and of taking into account factors like degree of skill, strain of work, training required, experience involved, responsibility undertaken, hazards attendant on the work, and so on. Where such

job evaluation is attempted, the trade unions have to keep a close watch to see that the evaluation is scientific, and not intended to foment differences among categories. Only union participation can ensure its objectivity and acceptability.

—*Equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value without discrimination based on sex*, has been laid down in an ILO Convention. This has been enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 39 (d) of the Constitution, as follows: “The State shall in particular, direct its policy towards securing... that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women”.

Trade Unions have to ensure that this principle is observed during wage fixation.

—*Fringe Benefits*: These are supplements to workers’ wages. and in organised industries with strong trade unions, they are becoming important elements in bilateral negotiations and wage agreements. Such benefits include,—paid holidays and leave, social insurance contributions (in addition to statutory provisions), medical allowances and schemes for workers and their family members, subsidised canteen, creches, holiday homes, leave travel concessions, house building aid, occupational allowances, etc. Their *different* types and proportion in the worker’s pay packet, depends on the ingenuity of the trade union. When the workers ask for ‘fringe benefits’, they are only asking for a better share of the value which they have themselves produced. No discussion on the worker’s living standards is these days complete without taking fringe benefits into account.

—*Methods of Wage Determination* :

They range from minimum wage committees and government notifications in the case of unorganised industries, to adjudication, pay commissions, wage boards, arbitration and finally bipartite negotiations leading to wage agreements. In the organised sector, bipartite negotiations, or in other words, *collective bargaining* is becoming the norm. This is actually a measure of the strength and maturity acquired by the trade union movement in these industries. The effort of the government is to put curbs and limitations on collective bargaining, one way or the other, through such means as issuing guidelines of the Bureau of Public Enterprises, insisting on **linking wage increase with productivity** in one form or other, **delaying fresh talks, fixing wages and allowances by notification** as in the case of general insurance employees, coming out with unilateral notifications, and so on.

'Strike bans' and 'compulsory arbitrations' are also meant to negate the judicial notion of equality that is implied in collective bargaining.

The working class is resisting all these attacks.

FURTHER READING

1. *Economics For Trade Unionists*: M. Atchuthan.
2. *Wages in India*: Maniben Kara Institute.
3. *Latest Wage Agreements*: AITUC Publication.
4. *Recent Wage Agreements*: AITUC Publication.



QUESTION OF DEARNESS ALLOWANCE

—The rise in prices during the first world war, and in the post-war years, seriously eroded the purchasing power of the workers, who were getting no more than a pittance as wages. It brought the textile workers of Bombay and Ahmedabad on the streets. Furious strike battles were fought and the first special cost of living allowances were won. Soon afterwards these allowances were snatched away, and during the Depression (1929-34) even wage-cuts were imposed.

Again, with the start of the Second World War, prices started soaring up, and it was once again the Bombay textile workers who came out in the 6-month long 'Mahagai' strike in 1940. The principle of dearness allowance was won by the textile workers, then by the railway workers. This was subsequently extended to other sections also. The employers of course resisted at every step, trying to lower the limit of neutralisation, to delay relief as much as possible, and to deny automatic linking with the movement of the price index.

The inflationary spiral unleashed along with capitalist planning for development in the fifties, made this into a major issue of industrial disputes.

—The workers fought not only for getting adequate and prompt dearness allowance for themselves, but also for effective steps to hold the price-line, since the overwhelming mass of people could protect their living standards only in that way. A series of powerful actions and 'bandhs' shook the country during the sixties against price rise, demanding a public distribution system and state take-over of wholesale trade in food-grains. This ultimately led to the setting up of the D.A. Commission in 1968, presided over by Sri P. B. Gajendragadkar.

—Meanwhile, trade unions in various industries won D.A. through their actions. Different formulas were fixed up, through commissions, adjudications and bipartite agreements.

Different systems prevail in this sphere, such as flat-rate system, graduated-scale system, D.A. linked to pay as percentage. D. A. linked to the price index by means of a rate per point of index and a specific point in the index above which it becomes

payable, etc. Generally however, low-paid employees have tended to get a relatively larger proportion of compensation. The neutralisation in the case of lower wages has been higher than in the case of the higher wages and salaries.

A series of well-known case laws has also been built up on the issue. But as a result of several authorities and agreements fixing the D.A., there is a wide variety as regards the rate of neutralisation, the basic wage to which it is linked, the point in the index from which it becomes applicable, the qualifying period for review of D. A., and so on. Lack of uniformity is the most striking feature in D. A. fixation. Therefore the struggle has been for getting as full a neutralisation as possible, with as little lag as possible and on par with similarly placed employees. Trade unions/associations of state government employees have been able through their bold and united actions, to secure the central government D.A. and thus to remove the invidious discrimination practised against them.

Bank employees have been able to fight back all attempts to reduce the rate of D.A., that was once agreed upon.

—Gajendragadkar D.A. Commission came out in its report with the observation that,

“D. A. is not intended to neutralise the erosion of the real values of salaries; it is designed to afford protection to wage-earners, at or a little above, the subsistence level, against the rise in prices... In regard to employees at, or a little above, the subsistence level, the obligation of the government, as employer, to grant them D. A. to protect, them against the hardship caused by the rise in prices is absolute. Industrial adjudication in India has consistently held that it is the duty of the employer in organised industry to pay his employees at least subsistence wages, if not more. This principle leads to the corollary that the employer must add to the salaries of employees at the subsistence level such an amount by way of D.A. as would enable them to sustain themselves in the case of sharply rising prices...”

—Though the National Commission on Labour, presided over by Sri Gajendragadkar, recommended 95 per cent neutralisation at minimum wage level in non-scheduled employment, and a diminishing rate for higher levels on the ground that such employees should share the cost of development, trade union action in several organised industries has resulted in 100 per cent neutralisation even at above minimum wage level. This has meant a little more than 100 per cent at the lower levels. The *raison de etre* behind this, has been upheld by the Supreme Court, on the substantial ground that the sufferings of the lowest paid due

to rising prices is even more than what is actually reflected in the price index.

However, a ceiling on the D.A. payable to the higher income groups, has been generally accepted, though no particular limit can be regarded as sacrosanct.

—The Bureau of Public Enterprises, as a part of its attempt to freeze the wages, laid down the guideline that the D. A. for public sector employees should be pegged at the rate of Rs. 1.30 for every point rise (or fall) in the cost of living index. This raised a storm of protest, and following the threat of a one-day strike all over the country on 28.1.1983, the Government agreed to revise the formula. A committee was set up. After prolonged negotiations, the Committee recommended that the rate be revised to 1.65 per point.

—Meanwhile, the Fourth Pay Commission has made the following recommendation on the D. A. issue:

- (a) Compensation may be paid for the price increase above the twelve monthly index average of 608 (1960=100), to which the pay scales are related.
- (b) Compensation may be sanctioned twice a year payable with the salary for March and September.
- (c) In the proposed pay scales, employees drawing pay up to Rs. 3,500 may be allowed 100 per cent neutralisation, those between Rs. 3,501 and 6,000 may be allowed 75 per cent and those above Rs. 6,000 may be allowed 65 per cent subject to marginal adjustments.

The relative advantages of this or that system of D.A. fixation, is leading to sections of workers and employees in the organised sector opting for one or the other system during negotiations. This is introducing an element of further instability on this question.

—The issue of dearness allowance, brings us to the question of consumer price indices. These indices are compiled by the Labour Bureau. As defined by the Bureau itself,

“A consumer price index (CPI) number is designed to measure changes over a period of time in the level of retail prices of selected goods and services on which consumers in general or those of a defined group (e.g. working class population in a particular city) spend their incomes.” The change in prices are measured with reference to a particular year, known as the “base year”.

—This fixed list is known as a “basket of goods and services” and it has to be deduced from a family budget inquiry carried

out among a sample of the population. Each item in the family budget of a particular section of the population, has a certain "weight" in the consumption expenditure, and variations in the prices of items which have a heavy "weight" have obviously a larger influence on the budget, and must find corresponding reflection in the price index. It is not necessary here to go into the statistical and mathematical details involved, except to stress the following:

The "basket" does not remain constant and unaltered over a period of time, since circumstances, habits, concepts of living standard are changing.

It is also obvious that the "basket" varies with different sections of the people, and therefore variations in the prices of different goods affect different sections in different ways. The price indices measuring these changes will therefore also differ. This can be seen from the following table:

CPI For Industrial Workers CPI For Agricultural Workers
(1960=100)

<i>Year</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Food</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Food</i>
1971	190	203	1971-72	200	215
1974	304	342	1974-75	368	413
1977	321	343	1977-78	323	349
1980	390	406	1980-81	409	448
1982	475	498	1981-82	448	492
1986	661	685	1982-83	481	527
1987 May	703	727	1983-84	522	573
			1984-85	525	569
			1985-86	555	600
			1986-87	578	623
			June 1987	588	633

—The table below indicates how prices are shooting up, and consequently what great importance the issue of dearness allowance on the one hand, and the struggle for holding the price line on the other, acquires for the trade union movement. The issue of prices and administered price hikes has been at the centre of several 'bandhs' and industrial actions in the recent period and will continue to be so in the coming days.

ALL INDIA AVERAGE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX
(for Industrial Workers) Base : 1960=100

Year	Index	Year	Index
1965	137	1987 (Jan)	688
1970	184	" (Feb)	686
1975	321	" (Mar)	686
1980	390	" (Apr)	691
1985	608	" (May)	703
1986	661	" (June)	715
		" (July)	724
		.. (August)	736
		" (September)	745

—The compilation of the CPI by the Labour Bureau, on which so much depends, has itself become a matter of bitter industrial dispute. Experience of life revealed to the workers, that the spiralling prices which they daily encountered, were hardly reflected in the CPI. The suspicion grew that these were being manipulated by the government, and that the index announced was not so much a statistical fact, but rather a political decision.

Persistent agitation, including the Bombay Bandh of August 20, 1983—led to the appointment of a committee to probe into these allegations. And the truth was out, though the Lakdawala Committee (as it was called), tried to soften it, in the interest of government. This came to be known as the 'Index Fraud' in trade union circles. Certain corrections were made thereafter. ✓

But the malaise continued. The Rath Committee was set up in 1977. The AITUC identified such factors as, realistic estimation of family expenditure in the base year, the size of the sample for a correct estimation of 'weightage' and 'basket', collection of actual retail market prices, etc. for correcting the index and eliminating any fraud. These were taken note of by the Committee.

However, the report continues to gather dust, and the 'fraud' continues. Even so, the CPI reveals the phenomenal rise in prices that continues all through this period.

—Since there is no hope of any fall, trade unions are striving for new and more realistic wage scales, in which a large portion of the D.A. is merged into the basic wage, so that the annual increments are more respectable.

1. Labour statistics are of great importance for trade union work. These are available in the Indian Labour Journal, Indian Labour Statistics, Indian Labour Year Book, Pocket Book of Labour Statistics, published by the Labour Bureau, in the Trade Union Record and in several other sources, e.g. the Annual Survey of Industries. Note has to be taken of the latest statistical figures in the course of work.

FURTHER READING

1. *Wages In India*: Maniben Kara Institute.
2. *Economics For Trade Unionists*: M. Atchuthan.
3. *Recent Wage Agreements*: AITUC Publication.
4. *Latest Wage Agreements*: AITUC Publication.



THE WAGE STRUGGLE SUMMED UP & THE CURRENT DEBATE

—In the post-independence era, especially the last decade, the working class as a whole has scored some successes on the wage question. These can be stated as follows:

Certain norms and concepts of wages have been evolved. However low the wages may continue to be in large areas, *conceptually* the working class has left behind the famine or starvation norms of wages. 'Need-based minimum wage', living wage, neutralisation against rise in prices which bring about a fall in real wages, bonus, fringe benefits, are now well-established concepts;

In some organised sectors and high-prosperity areas, the workers have been able to realise them in practice, and thus raise their real earnings;

In major industries, a measure of standardisation of wages has also been achieved; middle class employees, government employees, employees in service industries, have been drawn into the wage struggle in a big way, and given it a qualitative boost.

And finally, the system of bilateral negotiations as the method of wage determination, rather than wage boards, adjudication, etc. has also gained ground in several spheres.

—However, it is necessary to study the results of wage struggles in greater depth to understand the problems that await the trade union movement today:

Between 1939-50, the general picture of real wage trends has been one of struggle to see that the pre-war position is not seriously eroded. By 1951, the index of real earnings stood only at 92.2 (1939=100). The National Commission on Labour stated in its report, "...it would appear that real wages after a rise in the period 1947 to 1955 (reaching in the process the 1939 wage level in 1952, and improving upon it thereafter) have been declining subsequently. Part of the real wage increase between 1947 and 1955 was fortuitous because of a fall in living costs"... About the subsequent period, the NCL observed, "...On the whole, between 1952 and 1965, while per capita real income has

improved, the real wages of workers have, with few exceptions, at best not fallen..." During this period though, as the NCL noted, production per worker had increased by about 63 per cent.

The Annual Survey of Industries found that out of 195 sub-groups of manufactory, the real wages in only 14 sub-groups had increased during the period 1973-74 to 1977-78. If the average earning of all workers employed in these industries as a whole is taken into consideration, then we find that the percentage rise in real earnings during this period actually shows a negative trend of 3 per cent!

We give below a few illustrative figures, but new figures from the latest sources can always be quoted:

TABLE—1
PRODUCTIVITY IN TERMS OF VALUE ADDED OF
DIFFERENT INDUSTRY GROUPS OF PUBLIC
ENTERPRISES

Sl. No.	Industry Group	Value Added (Rs. Crores)		Percentage Increase	% of Value Added to Capital employed	
		1984-85	1983-84		1984-85	1983-84
1.	Steel	1,119.07	740.71	51.08	30.21	24.65
2.	Minerals & Metals	496.32	392.28	26.52	26.42	24.26
3.	Coal	2,415.11	1,714.24	40.89	84.33	67.16
4.	Power	135.85	110.53	22.91	6.79	9.27
5.	Petroleum	4,610.18	3,649.45	16.73	72.50	78.14
6.	Chemicals, Fertilisers & Pharmaceuticals	999.76	852.48	17.28	37.53	37.54
7.	Heavy Engineering	912.25	805.84	13.20	70.78	65.12
8.	Medium & Light Engineering	673.11	582.59	15.54	53.85	55.38
9.	Transportation Equipment	742.05	564.23	31.52	52.89	46.86
10.	Consumer Goods	116.00	82.20	41.12	330.45	66.56
11.	Agro-based Products	39.61	35.76	10.77	98.80	101.65
12.	Textiles	233.81	217.41	7.54	41.55	44.22

—Bourgeois spokesmen have been trying to accuse the working class that while its wage-costs are rising, its productivity is not growing, and therefore the savings and accumulation of capital are suffering.

This is refuted by facts, which show that the Value Added by Manufacture, (VAM) produced by the worker's labour power is increasing, while the share of workers' wages in the total VAM is declining. The rate of exploitation of the worker at the hand of capital, is rising steadily.

The NCL itself concluded in its report as follows :

"Increase in money-wages of industrial workers since independence (i.e. since 1947) have not been associated with a rise in real wages nor have real wage increases been commensurate with any improvement in productivity. Simultaneously, wage costs as a proportion of total costs of manufacture have registered a decline and the same is true about workers' share in value added by manufacture".

TABLE—2

LABOUR COST AS % OF VALUE OF PRODUCTION

<i>Industries</i>	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84
Tea	—	36.9	35.5	25.2
Sugar	9.3	8.7	7.9	8.7
Tobacco	16.4	17.3	16.4	16.7
Cotton Textiles	19.2	16.3	15.1	15.9
Silk & Rayon	13.5	15.1	15.8	14.1
Aluminium	9.6	9.2	9.1	11.0
Engineering	12.8	12.4	13.4	14.2
Chemicals	9.0	9.5	10.0	10.3
Cement	15.4	14.6	12.2	13.0
Rubber & R. Products	9.5	8.1	7.7	8.6
Paper & Paper Products	14.5	13.0	13.1	12.8
Electricity Generation	7.9	4.7	5.5	5.3
Trading	—	4.9	5.5	6.0
Shipping	10.5	11.2	12.1	13.9
Total (incl. others)	12.8	12.5	12.7	13.2

N.B. : The study of *THE ECONOMIC TIMES* (July 3, 1985) is based on the cost structure of large public limited companies in the private sector. Incidentally, labour cost includes not only wages, but also managerial salaries, perquisites, etc.

TABLE—3

LABOUR CONTENT IN COST OF PRODUCTION IN
SOME OF THE COMMODITY GROUPS IN
PUBLIC SECTOR

Sl. No.	<i>Enterprise Group</i>	<i>Labour content: % of Cost of Production</i>
1.	Steel	14.77
2.	Minerals & Metals	19.77
3.	Coal	47.50
4.	Power	5.61
5.	Petroleum	1.18
6.	Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	7.00
7.	Heavy Engineering	18.16
8.	Medium & Light Engineering	24.32
9.	Transport Equipment	15.71
10.	Consumer Goods	12.76
11.	Agro-based Enterprises	27.67
12.	Textiles	28.7

—Even in the Banking industry, where a high-powered campaign is being conducted, that the staff strength is disproportionately high, and employees are 'high-wage islanders', the share of establishment expenses in total current operating expenses declined steadily from 39.5% in 1970 to 22% in 1981. (Refer S. Chakravorthy Committee report).

—A sample of the arguments put forth on the basis of statistical jugglery by bourgeois economists on the wage question, is provided by Prof. B. K. Madan, who objected to the findings of the NCL on the ground that the Commission gave undue importance to the real wages of low paid workers. By analysing the data for all workers in Indian Manufactory, Prof. Madan had concluded that in the last two decades since 1951, the real wages of industrial workers have shown a 35.3 per cent rise. He predicted that this would be the trend for the future.

Sri Bagaram Tulpule, former general secretary, HMS, gave a telling refutation, by pointing out that, the yearly average wage is not a meaningful concept in India. Further, by simply shifting the base year of Dr. Madan's series of real wages from 1951 to 1952, the rise in real wages stands reduced to 25.1 per cent. Alternatively, by treating 1969 instead of 1970, as the

terminal year of the series, again the real wages show a rise of 28.3 per cent in a period of 19 years.

The observations made by Bagaram Tulpule, are of theoretical and practical value. Therefore note should be taken of what he says. In order to avoid variations of the above type due to erratic fluctuations in a variable, he advocates a rolling average of 3 years as a better reference point. Taking 3-year averages to minimise distortions due to sudden fluctuations in particular years, the average index of real earnings for 1951-53 stands at 105 and that for 1973-75 at 131,—an increase of 24.8 per cent. On a similar basis, the index of per capita income shows a rise of about 30.2 per cent over these 23 years.

On the other hand, the average index of value added per worker at 1951 prices was 107.7 for the 3-year period 1951-53, and 224.6 for the period 1973-75, showing a rise of 108.5 per cent during a period of 23 years.

From the above analysis of the available statistics, Tulpule sums up as follows:

- i) Even the average wage of workers in 1975 had not come up to the minimum need-based level even according to diluted nutrition standards adopted for the computerised calculations; the minimum was of course, far lower.
- ii) The average real wage of workers has been rising and falling since 1951 and the overall average rate of increase upto 1975 was barely more than 1 per cent per year. This rate of increase was distinctly lower than the rate of national per capita income at constant prices over the same period.
- iii) The average per capita income of worker families was only marginally higher in 1975 than the national per capita income in that year despite the fact that in the manufacturing sector the income is for full time work and that the productivity of labour is relatively higher due to the higher level of technology and organisation.
- iv) The productivity of labour in terms of value added by manufacture per worker at constant prices has risen at an average compound rate of over 3 per cent per year over the period 1951 to 1975. During the same period, real earnings of workers rose by only about 1 per cent per year.
- v) The earnings of workers as a proportion of the value added by manufacture have fallen from a little below 50 per cent in 1951-53 to about 32.5 per cent in 1973-75."

"What do these facts indicate? Do they show that industrial labour has become a monopoly dictating its own price and

exploiting the unorganised sector? Do they show that workers have appropriated for themselves a disproportionately larger share of the national income or even of the industrial product? Do they justify the oft-repeated assertion that wage increases in the past have been a major factor in pushing up production costs? Do they suggest that the earnings and other benefits accruing to workers have gone totally out of line with the national per capita income and that these have contributed to the dire poverty in the country as a whole? Do they indicate that the workers' claims have slowed down the growth of the country's economy? The answer to all these questions has to be an emphatic 'No.'

—The Indian Labour Journal, (1982 Feb.), admits that while the National Income rose, at 1970-71 constant prices, by 30.4 per cent during the decade 1970-71 to 1979-80, real wages in the same period rose by only 1.2 per cent. According to another official source, "real wages of labour have gone down by over 30 per cent in a 2 year period upto 1975". In replies to questions in Parliament, Government admitted that, "the assets of the large industrial houses in the country increased by over 45 per cent during the 3 years ending 1980"; while "depreciation in the value of the Rupee brought down the real wages of government employees ranging from 7 per cent to 46 per cent during the period January 1973 to September 1981, depending on pay scales".

—Even so, the government and other bourgeois spokesmen have launched a counter-offensive against the small gains that have been won by a section of the workers on the wage-man of India. The Chakravarty Committee (1973-1974) and the Boothalingam Panel (1977) were officially set up for the purpose. The ideological attack launched by these two committees, repeated ad nauseam by government on every occasion, centred round the 'Poverty Line' concept, and the assault on "High-wage Islanders". These two are complementary, and boil down to the argument that the wage structure has to be tied up with a National Poverty Line (below which more than 40 to 50 per cent of our population subsist). Any demand for wage increases by organised labour, will lead to demands on consumption, price-increases and inflation, and will divert resources from efforts to solve the general social and national problem of removing poverty. The 'High-wage Islanders' were accused of having misused their strategic location in the national economy for advancing their narrow sectional interests.

—Speaking in 1980 at the ICFTU conference in Delhi, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi repeated this idea by asking rhetorically: "Should not job creation have priority? Can resources

be earmarked to improve pay scales of the better paid amongst our workers in place of investment in new labour-intensive and employment creating projects?"

The BPE directives only spelt out the tactical approaches for clamping down a wage-freeze, on the above basis. The arguments about investment choice, development path, employment generation etc. are different now, with 'modernisation' as the new and pressing goal. But the approach towards workers' wages remains unaltered. In fact, it is further reinforced. As a part of this, the attempt is to go back on collective bargaining, or to drag feet on the issue of wage negotiations that are already overdue.

The main propaganda objective is to highlight the present disparity in wages and to perpetuate the poverty of workers in all spheres of economic activity, by invoking the name of the poor themselves! The NCL has nailed this down by pointing out, "the disparity between industrial and other workers (—agricultural, for instance) may not be due to the fact that the former are disproportionately high, but because the latter are disproportionately low".

—It is true, successes in organised actions of workers relate initially to a minority section. But this acts as a stimulus for other workers to demand higher wages. Unorganised workers, agricultural workers will follow the path of their organised brothers, and win successes. In fact, they are doing it. Therefore, it is not a question of depressing the higher level of wages in the name of the poor. But of struggling to raise the wages of the poor to approach the higher levels. This is an ongoing struggle. To seek to freeze wages, is to seek to curb the class struggle.

—As to investments, there is no direct link with wage-rise or wage-freeze. Rise in profits arising from wage-freeze does not automatically mean more investment, and therefore, creation of more employment-avenues. In fact, investigations have proved that, to some extent, low wage rates lead to low purchasing power, a narrow market, and consequently act as a disincentive to fresh investment. Unemployment is an evil accompaniment of capitalism, and is not combated by preventing wage-rise.

—Does wage rise lead to higher prices? In capitalist society, prices have no direct relation with wages. Marx had already demonstrated this conclusively. In our days, we know about 'monopoly prices', 'administered prices', 'black-market prices', 'controlled prices', 'subsidised prices' and so on. The Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi has conducted an investigation and even shown that, when the share of wages

goes up, prices of manufactured goods do not necessarily rise. On the other hand, reduction in the share of wages leads to a fall in demand for mass consumption goods, creates unutilised capacity, loss of economies of scale and thus leads to higher prices. Workers, therefore, are not responsible for cost-push inflation in the Indian context.

—What about production and productivity-linked wages? Production and productivity depend upon several factors. In capitalist society, the working class has no control over these. Despite assurances to the contrary, the gains of productivity cannot be equitably shared under capitalism. Moreover, we are yet far away from a need-based minimum wage, and that is our immediate target. Therefore, productivity-linked wage is a harmful and unacceptable concept in our conditions.

—What about a national wage policy? Under capitalism, where there is anarchy of wages, such a concept is at best academic. At worst, it means levelling down wages to the 'poverty-line'.

—The aims of the Trade Union struggle on the wage issue are therefore:

+to conduct a vigorous struggle against all bourgeois theories of wages, and all attempts, direct or indirect, for a wage-freeze.

+to fight for upward revision of wages, and for D.A. with full neutralisation, so that there is no erosion in wages.

+to aim at achieving the 'need-based minimum wage' as the immediate goal.

+to lend all assistance to the struggles of workers in the unorganised sectors and the rural workers, for raising their minimum wages, and ensuring their strict implementation.

+to enforce the principle of equal pay for equal work, and to struggle against the exploitation of female and child labour.

+to fight against the system of bonded labour and contract labour, and to ensure that wage and other labour laws are enforced.

+to insist upon and expand the system of bipartite negotiations as a method of wage determination.

+to raise the wage struggle to a national-industrial level, to the level of a struggle for national policies.

FURTHER READING

1. Same as in previous lessons.
2. Paper on Wage Policy: AITUC Special Convention, Indore.

BONUS AND SOCIAL SECURITY

—As in the case of wages, the achievements on the issue of bonus are the results of prolonged and determined struggles by the trade union movement in India.

—The workers have travelled a long way from the 'plague bonus',—a pittance paid to the textile workers of Ahmedabad and Bombay as inducement to stay on work and risk their lives when 'black death' stalked these centres in the early years of this century, to the present concept, law and practice about payment of bonus.

During the first world war years, the textile workers managed to get a 'war bonus' as a compensation against price rise. It continued also during the Second War. This was strictly an 'ex-gratia' payment, though the 'will and grace' of the owners depended a good deal on the capacity of the workers to compel payment.

—The annual struggle for bonus centred round the point that the workers were far away from a living wage, that bonus should therefore be regarded as a 'deferred wage' paid on a yearly basis, that it was a rightful claim in the share of surplus value produced by them and appropriated by the capitalist, and that it was therefore not dependent either on the sweet will of the management, or on the contingency of profit earned, about which in any case the worker had neither any say nor any truthful knowledge.

—The judgements of the Labour Appellate Tribunal and the Supreme Court in the years after independence partly upheld the workers' claim. Though, steeped as the courts and tribunals are in bourgeois ideology, they could not break out of the charmed circle of "profit" as the prime objective of all industrial and business activities. The LAT Formula, laid down a basis for bonus calculation.

—The relentless struggle of the workers compelled government to set up the Bonus Commission in 1964. It declared that a minimum bonus of 4 per cent of total wages (basic + D.A.) should be paid in all circumstances, irrespective of profit or loss. Any payment above this would be a share in the residual

profit, after meeting several prior charges. Minimum bonus thus became part of wage paid at the end of the year, and therefore a guaranteed right, while anything above this was contingent on profit, and therefore a type of profit-sharing.

—The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965 was thereafter put on the statute book. Bonus evolved into a statutory right, a sort of non-recurring wage to meet the non-recurring expenditure of the worker's family. This was however limited only to certain sections of workers, and was hemmed in by several restrictions, which permitted the capitalists to salt away their profits in the name of prior charges, reduce the 'available surplus', and deny the workers their rightful share. Government itself kept its own employees, other employees of departmentally run undertakings, local bodies and municipal services out of the purview of the Act, and of bonus payment.

—The furious battles fought by workers in the last two decades have succeeded in taking by assault one road-block after the other, put up by employers. The minimum was raised from 4% to 8.33%. Employees of non-competing public sector undertakings, followed by employees of departmentally run undertakings, and then by ministerial and secretariat staff of Central and State governments, of municipal services etc. have now become entitled to bonus. The earlier limit viz. those drawing a salary of Rs. 750 per month and more up to Rs. 1,600 p.m. would get bonus as if their salary is Rs. 750 p.m. only, has been revised for obvious reasons.

—However, it would be sheer complacency to think that the government itself is reconciled to the payment of bonus as a right of the workers. During 'Emergency', an attempt was made to snatch it away. Recently, government tried to tinker with it by first of all, announcing a paltry quantum for a large section of its employees, and then talking of depositing half in the P.F. account. The struggle is therefore unremitting.

—Further struggle on this issue is based on the demands, that:

+The benefits of Bonus Law, and payment of bonus should be extended to all sectors wherever there is an employer-employee nexus. No employee should be denied this part of annual wage payment.

+The minimum should be raised to 10% of total earnings, inclusive of fringe benefits.

+The formula for computation of profit and for arriving at the 'available surplus' should be revised.

+The ceiling of 20% should be lifted.

Social Security :

—Fundamental to wage-fixation is the workers' right to social security, paid holidays and other fringe benefits, vocational

training and prospects for professional advancement. Social security benefits have become an essential element of the workers' living standard.

—The sale of labour power by the worker is not a one-shot affair. Capitalist reproduction demands that the supply of labour power should be continually replenished. The continuation of the capitalist system presupposes the reproduction of labour power, and therefore the necessity of maintaining the workman and his family at a certain level of health and well-being, through the vicissitudes of sickness, maternity, invalidity, employment injuries, sudden loss of job, old age and death. This calls for a complex of both, social assistance and social insurance.

Moreover, the struggles of the working class, assertion of the worker's right to life, to human dignity and a better social existence, have led to recognition of 'social justice'. Present-day society can no longer ignore this humane concept, and the working class movement is strong enough not to permit it to do so. Modern concepts of social justice are further evolving with the passage of time.

—Even before freedom, the Indian workers had won security against two contingencies, viz. accident and maternity. These were provided for under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923 and by the various Maternity Benefit Acts.

—After Independence, the social security schemes have proliferated. They include for example,

+Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948

+Coal Mines Provident Fund and Bonus Scheme Act, 1948

+Employees' Provident Funds and Family Pension Fund Act, 1952

+Employees' Family Pension Scheme, 1971

+Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972

+Maternity Benefit Act, 1961

+Lay-off and Retrenchment Compensation, Subsistence Allowance during suspension, added through amendments to the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.

—Besides these, there are some sectional social security schemes applicable to specific section of workers.

—In addition to the statutory schemes, there are several non-statutory social security benefits, based on bilateral agreements, won by highly organised labour.

—The statutory provisions for social security suffer from various limitations: (i) There are many important areas of social security which are totally uncovered yet. For instance, there is as yet no provision for unemployment insurance, for old age pension, except where the workers have won it through settle-

ment or award; (ii) The provisions which exist, do not apply to all industries or to all workers. Workers in decentralised industries, and in the unorganised sector, are virtually uncovered, and in some industries which are covered, many sections of workers are excluded; (iii) The benefits are very meagre and totally inadequate; (iv) The workers themselves have to contribute substantially out of their wages for the operation of several schemes, the employer's share is inadequate and is heavily in arrears, the share of the government is negligible, and yet decisive control rests with the government, and with the employers; (v) The administration of the schemes is bureaucratic, and dilatory.

—The struggle on this issue is to secure enlargement of its scope to cover all contingencies like old age, unemployment, etc., extension of coverage to include all workers in all industries, revision of the benefits available to the workers, no contribution from workers except towards Provident Fund, and democratisation and decentralisation of management with the participation of trade unions so as to avoid bureaucratic delays and harassment. The struggle has to be in both fields—legislative, and collective bargaining.

In the present situation, with growing unemployment, more and more closures and retrenchment, the struggle for unemployment insurance, and retrenchment benefits assumes great significance.

—Modernisation also increases industrial hazards, and risks to life and health. Greater social security measures, as well as safety and preventive measures have therefore to be fought for by a vigilant trade union movement, both in the interests of the workers and the general social environment.

—In advanced capitalist countries, the arms race and heavy military spending is leading to a direct attack on the social security gains won so far by the working class. In America and Britain, we note how social security benefits are being drastically cut as a part of what has come to be known as 'Reaganomics' and 'Thatcherism'.

Trade Unions in our country too have to be on guard against similar development.

FURTHER READING

1. Paper on Bonus and Social Security: Indore AITUC Special Convention documents.
2. AITUC Memorandum to National Commission on Labour.
3. Labour in Free India: HMS Publication.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS: THE STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

—The central issue of the trade union movement is the right of the worker freely to associate, form his union and function it without any restriction, the right to collectively bargain with the employers reinforced by the power to withdraw from the production process when he finds it necessary, by calling for a strike.

The situation that exists in relation to these three basic and vital rights, namely:

+the right to form a union and have it recognised as his collective strength, as the bargaining agent on his behalf;

+the right of collective bargaining; and

+the right to strike.

determine and characterise the climate of industrial relations in the country.

—The AITUC Memorandum to the National Commission on Labour (1968-69) outlined our principled stand as follows:

In the struggle of the worker against the role of capital, his day-to-day defence of his living, his wages, his conditions of work, the trade union is his organisation of his collective strength and power. The strike or withdrawal of his labour is his only potent weapon of struggle.

And through these two, the union and the strike, he secures the right of collective bargaining with the employer. Through these, he overcomes the weakness of the individual member of his class as against the collective might of organised capital.

Hence, recognition of trade unions, right of collective bargaining and the right to strike are the most basic and vital principles of industrial relations for the working class.

—The passing of the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, conceded the right to any seven workers to register a union under certain minimum conditions. But after the strike wave of 1928 and 1929, and again after the struggle in 1937 and 1946, attempts were made by the colonial rulers, and later by the Congress governments to restrict the movement and growing organisa-

tion of workers, and curb the strike-struggles, by imposing conciliation and adjudication. Bombay workers opposed the 1937 Act by a general strike on November 7, 1938, and two workers lost their lives as a result of police firing.

—After independence, the government stepped up its efforts in this direction, divided the trade union movement, set up its own unions and promptly recognised them under the Bombay Industrial Relations Act (extended also to Gujarat and M.P.).

—In 1957, the tripartite machinery of Indian Labour Conference introduced the Code of Discipline, which the AITUC accepted, despite its severe drawback (mainly as regards verification of membership with the dice heavily loaded in favour of government-sponsored unions), only because an avenue for recognition of unions was opened for the first time.

—The right to collective bargaining was enforced by the workers' movement, which compelled the government and the employers to give up the tribunals and adjudication machinery, and agree to sit across the table for bilateral negotiations and wage agreements.

The right to strike was also enforced in real life, by government and semi-government employees, apart from the industrial workers, despite all types of restrictions and repressions, as for instance, the 1960 and 1968 Central Government employees' strikes, the 1974 railwaymen's strike, and so on.

—Following the central government employees' strike in 1960, a scheme of Joint Consultative Machinery was introduced, which provides for bipartite talks on certain issues, and compulsory arbitration under certain other circumstances.

—The international trade union movement has succeeded in getting the ILO to adopt certain Conventions, which define the workers' right to organise, their right of collective bargaining etc. Convention No. 87 of 1948, pertains to Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise. Convention No. 98 of 1949, pertains to Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining. A Recommendation was also adopted in 1971, concerning protection and facilities to be afforded to workers' representatives (employers and most of the government representatives united to see that it is not adopted as a Convention). These were adopted at the initiative of the WFTU.

—The principles laid down in these Conventions and Recommendations have not secured unequivocal admission and adherence from the government and the employers as a class, in our country.

They have tried in every way to curb the freedom of association, ban and illegalise strikes and put them down through re-

pression, and deny the right to collective bargaining. As it is, the Freedom of Speech and Association of the workers is severely curtailed by the bourgeois and the government-controlled mass media which denies him all publicity and distorts his position in every way.

The 1974 strike of railwaymen, the several repressive measures during 'Emergency', the year and a half-long strike of more than 2 lakhs of textile workers in 1982-83, are glaring examples of government's attitude towards industrial relations.

—The Janata Party when it came to power, tried to attack the trade union rights of workers in the name of a comprehensive Industrial Relations law. This evoked the united and militant opposition of the entire trade union movement, which forced the government to retreat. With the fall of the Janata Government, this bill lapsed.

The return of the Congress to power saw renewed and vicious attacks on workers' rights, through a number of piecemeal legislations and notifications, such as the Notification issued on Sept. 30, 1980 under the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation), Act 1972, the restrictions imposed on hospital and other employees, the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance, 1981 later passed into an Act the same year, the several acts passed in the name of national security which included in their ambit legitimate trade union and peoples' actions and finally, the latest proposed legislation on industrial relations which resurrects the lapsed Janata bill.¹

—The ESMA gives power to government to impose a blanket ban on strikes, under an omnibus clause which can be extended to cover every undertaking and industry in the country whether in the public and private sectors.

—This was a blatant attempt to suppress the people's rising voice of protest against the utterly bankrupt policies of government of further boosting inflation, imposing wage and D. A. freeze, and of helping the monopolists to mint super profits, a typical capitalist way out of the crisis by inflicting more miseries on the working people.

The working class reacted by observing a "Black Day" all over the country on August 17, 1981, through the biggest-ever workers' march to Parliament on November 23, 1981 at the call of the National Campaign Committee, followed by a 'Bharat Bandh' on January 19, 1982.

The ESMA was nevertheless steamrollered through Parliament, and is being repeatedly used against strikes and calls for strikes.

—As distinguished from the Ordinance, the Bill when intro-

duced in Parliament, included two new clauses with regard to lockouts and layoffs, as a show of impartiality. *But can strikes and lockouts be equated?* Already in 1954, while answering a questionnaire on industrial relations, the AITUC had dealt with this issue. Here is what it said,

“In the present laws in this country, as well as in all capitalist states, strikes and lockouts are placed on an equal footing. If they admit the right to strike, they admit the right to lockout. And when they restrict or ban strike, they also speak of banning lockouts...

“In this, the framers of the law take their stand on the conception of formal equality between the employer and the workers.

“Such conceptions are not based on the reality of the situation...

“Why is a lockout declared by the employer? Because, he wants to make more profits or cut out losses by reducing wages or worsening the conditions of employment of the workers. When the workers refuse to accept the employer’s conditions, he is locked out.

“If an employer locks out a worker and stops production, does he lose his living?

“But what is the effect on the worker? With his only means of livelihood gone, the worker, who always lives only by labour from day to day, is faced with immediate starvation leading to deaths of several in case of prolonged stoppage.

“Thus the right to lockout is a right to starve and kill a worker or the right to threaten him with starvation and death.

“If a worker goes on strike and stops production, he loses his livelihood but does not affect the livelihood of his employer.

“Thus the right to strike is not a right to starve the employer but a right to bring pressure by refusing to produce profits and by voluntary suffering and collective action. The right to lockout and strike in their effect are not the same. The one is a right to starve, the other is a right to live.

“Hence the right to strike is inviolable, the right to lockout is anti-social and not permissible”.

Life has shown that while workers are attacked, victimised suppressed and even shot dead for going on strikes, no employer is prosecuted or jailed for resorting to lockouts, layoffs and closures. Such is the much-vaunted claim about “holding the scales even” as between workers and employers.

—The latest proposed legislation contains a whole set of anti-trade union measures, such as:

a) Rejecting the democratic demand of ballot for recognition

of trade unions and imposing the check-off system which can easily be utilised to the disadvantage of militant TUs and in favour of the docile TUs.

- b) Seeking to impose Industrial Relations Commissions with wide powers which will virtually illegalise strikes, and do away with collective bargaining.
- c) Seeking even to deregister unions for supporting so-called illegal strikes and penalising them and also their office-bearers.
- d) Seeking to give powers to the registrars to interfere in the internal working of the TUs.
- e) Seeking to put serious restrictions on registration of unions.
- f) Providing for imposing an anti-working class 'Code of Conduct' on the TUs—including debarring the workers from participating in solidarity actions or bandhs.

The aim of the proposed legislations, enthusiastically supported by the employers, is to emasculate the trade union movement and to foist regimented and lackey trade unions on the workers.

—These anti-trade union measures are complementary to the anti-people and pro-monopoly economic policies pursued by government. Nor are they isolated; they are a part of the anti-working class drive by all capitalist ruling circles.

At the present stage, capitalist ruling circles in many countries are attempting to reverse the gains of worker's struggles and to virtually eliminate collective bargaining rights. Firstly, a number of 'unfair labour practices' are being introduced in the name of 'flexibility', which they say, is essential when new technology is introduced. Permanent workers lose their job security. There is greater stress on temporary work, part time work and schemes of home-working. Collective agreements are scrapped altogether or two-tier wage systems are introduced. Secondly, there is increasing state intervention in favour of the capitalist monopolies and repressive machinery is increasingly used to suppress workers' protest actions. A whole lot of reactionary amendments to labour legislation is introduced. Transnational employers are mounting pressure on governments to attack trade union rights, and some governments are willing to oblige in the name of creating a favourable climate for foreign investments and technology. The International Monetary Fund insists on stringent anti-trade union laws as one of its 'conditionalities' for loans. These are elements of the present-day neo-colonial offensive.

—The trade union movement, both in our country, and on an international scale, is offering stiff resistance to these attacks, and is mounting struggle for repulsing them.

The task of the trade union movement is to fight every infringement or restriction of the rights of the workers, and to struggle for democratic industrial relations which recognise the three basic and vital rights stated at the outset.

NOTES

1. Recently, the NSA and even the Anti-terrorist Act have been used against trade unionists, despite assurances to the contrary in Parliament.

FURTHER READING

1. Problems of Industrial Relations in India: AITUC Publication.
2. Main Document, and 'Co-report on Trade Union Rights' by Indrajit Gupta,—11th World Trade Union Congress, Berlin.

LABOUR LAWS

—Knowledge of labour laws is an essential part of trade union work.

Labour law has today become a specialised branch of law, with many 'specialists' coming up in this field. A working knowledge of laws as are applicable to the particular industry is a necessary weapon in the armoury of trade union functionaries.

Labour legislation has evolved through many decades of trade union struggles, and also the attempts of bourgeois lawmakers and jurists to replace the primitive jungle law of the early capitalist era by a rule of law that will govern capitalist production relations and iron out the problems in the working of the system. The trend of labour laws is generally to replace contract laws and 'sanctity of contract' in the labour field by social legislation, tempered by evolving concepts of 'social justice' and 'human rights'.

International standards of many pieces of legislation have been laid down by the ILO Conventions and Recommendations, which are the product of international working class movement even within the limitation of a tripartite machinery. These have formed the basis of enactments by member countries like India.

Certain other laws, especially in the sphere of industrial relations and social security, have evolved out of Indian conditions, the specific socio-economic structure, the peculiarities of the industries concerned, and the equation of the class struggle within the country.

The study of labour laws has to begin with a study of those laws which are of basic importance for every trade union. These are:

1. *The Trade Unions Act, 1926*: An act to provide for the registration of trade unions and in certain respects, to define the law relating to registered trade unions.

This act lays down the minimum rules for the constitution and functioning of a union, the utilisation of funds, submission of annual returns, and penalties for failure to do so.

State governments have framed rules under this Act, and they have to be referred to by the trade unions before filing application for registration and annual returns, etc.

2. *The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947*: Its objective is to make provisions for the investigation and settlement of industrial disputes, including apprehended disputes and for certain other purposes.

There is an enormous body of case laws concerning the definition of 'industry' in this Act. The term 'industrial disputes' covers disputes arising out of employment or non-employment and those arising out of the terms and conditions of employment, e.g. lay-off, retrenchment, strike, lock-out, wages, disciplinary action, etc.

The Act lays down the machinery for resolution of disputes, through conciliation, adjudication in labour courts and industrial tribunals. It provides for joint reference of disputes, arbitration etc. It prohibits strikes under certain circumstances, as also lockouts.

Works Committees are provided under this Act.

Though this is a Central Act, its administration is also with the state authorities, which have framed their own rules under this Act.

(In Maharashtra, Gujarat and M.P., we have also the Bombay Industrial Relations Act or its replica, for regulating the employer-employee relations and providing for settlement of disputes in certain industries covered under these acts).

3. *Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946*: It requires employers in industrial establishments to define conditions of employment under them and to make them known to the workmen in the language understood by them.

Model Standing Orders are framed under this Act, and certified by the competent authority after hearing the employers and the employees. Classification of workmen, misconducts and punishments, are specified in the Standing Orders.

4. *The Factories Act, 1948*: This regulates labour and working conditions in factories, such as provisions concerning health, safety, welfare, working hours, rest interval, spread-over, overtime, employment of women or young persons, annual leave with wages, etc.

5. *Payment of Wages Act, 1936*: Its objective is to regulate payment of wages, define wage period, permissible deductions from wages, and procedure for claims arising out of wrongful deductions or delay in payments, etc.

—The second category of labour laws are those which speci-

fically relate to certain industries, and define conditions of employment in them. Trade unionists connected with these industries have to study the respective laws. For instance:

- Mines Act, 1952*
- Plantation Labour Act, 1951*
- Working Journalists (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955*
- Motor Transport Workers' Act, 1961*
- Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1948*
- Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Service) Act, 1976.*
- Sales Promotion Employees (Conditions of Service) Act, 1976.*

Government employees, railway employees, banks and insurance employees, have their own acts, service regulations and manuals.

—The third category of laws relate to workers in the unorganised sector and sweated labour. Trade Unionists venturing into the vast unorganised and sweated labour sector, have to acquaint themselves with these acts, and also the case laws that have been built up around them. The most important among these laws are:

1. *The Minimum Wages Act, 1948*, to provide for fixing minimum rates of wages in certain scheduled employments.

The rates may be fixed for the first time, or revised, by the appropriate government, either by appointing a committee to advise it, or by notification.

The Act provides for maintenance of registers and records by every employer, supply of wage books and attendance cards to employees, and appointment of inspectors and authorities for deciding claims and complaints by the government.

2. *Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970*

3. *The Employment of Children Act, 1970*

4. *The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976*

5. *The Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979.*

These acts are aimed against exploitation of contract labour, against begar and 'forced labour' (Article 23 of the Constitution), against employment of children below the age of 14 years in construction work (Article 24), for equality without regard to sex (Article 14), and so on. Since these workers are mostly unorganised, the laws are generally not observed. From this arose the concept of 'Public interest litigations' upheld by the Supreme Court in a few historic judgements, in 1982 and thereafter, in the case of workmen employed in projects con-

nected with Asian Games, casual labour employed in Jawaharlal Nehru Centres, and similar cases. The directive of the SC dated September 18, 1982 in the Asia Games Project Case, is worth noting:

“..Whenever any construction work is being carried out either departmentally or through contractors, the government or any other governmental authority including a public sector corporation which is carrying out such work must take great care to see that the provisions of the labour laws are being strictly observed and they should not wait for any complaint to be received from the workmen in regard to non-observance of any such provision before proceeding to take action against the erring officers or contractors, but they should institute an effective system of periodic inspections coupled with occasional surprise inspections by the higher officers in order to ensure that there are no violations of the provisions of labour laws and the workmen are not denied the rights and benefits to which they are entitled under such provisions and if any such violations are found, immediate action should be taken against defaulting officers or contractors”.

—In addition to the above laws, there are a few others relating to specific types of unorganised manual and headload workers in different states, such as

The Mathadi Hamal and Manual Labour Act of Maharashtra, The Muttah, Jattu, Hamals and other Manual Workers Act, 1976, of Andhra Pradesh, etc. etc.

—The fourth category of laws, relate to the payment of bonus, or to social security benefits. They are:

- ✓ 1. *The Payment of Bonus Act, 1965*
2. *The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923*
3. *The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948*
4. *The Employees' Provident Funds Act, 1952*
5. *The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961.*
- ✓ 6. *The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972*

These have been discussed in an earlier lesson.

—The fifth category of laws, are those which are enacted by the states and trade unions in the respective states have to know them. Among these are:

- The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946* (and its counterparts in Gujarat and M.P.)
- The Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971*
- The Shops and Establishments Act, (in each state) and so on.*

—The Sixth category of laws are purely repressive in nature, either dealing specifically with labour, or as part of general repressive laws. This is in addition to certain anti-worker provisions in other laws. The main aim of the repressive laws is to ban strikes and other forms of struggle in the name of public utility services, essential services, maintenance of public order, and so on. Chief among them on the statute book are:

The Essential Services Maintenance Act

The Industrial Security Forces Act

The National Security Act

* Articles 311 and 310 of the Constitution, or Section 36A (d) of the Banking Laws (Amendment) Act, are also weapons aimed against employees, and can be used arbitrarily against them by the administration.

—Laws relating to labour can thus be broadly classified into two categories—favourable and unfavourable. The former have come as a result of working class struggles for more rights and better conditions. The latter are the product of ruling class attempts to curb and obstruct these struggles, and to put them down. The two pressures simultaneously operate within the present system, and determine the outcome of labour legislation.

—A study of the history of labour legislations, and of their implementation and practice, reveals the following:

Only working class struggle decides the norms of favourable labour legislation.

Working class action brings about changes in these norms, with the passage of time and with changing conditions.

Working class action and vigilance alone guarantees the implementation of favourable provisions in the laws.

Working class action prevents any going back on the legal gains that have been won, or any watering down of the favourable provisions.

Working class struggle alone stops the heavy hand of repressive and anti-labour laws.

Thus the field of labour laws is an arena of class struggle, and not just of litigation.

FURTHER READING

All labour laws relevant to the work of the trade union in the specific trade or industry. One has to keep track of the latest amendments to these acts, and also of new labour enactments.

TRADE UNION FUNCTIONING

—The starting point of trade union functioning is that the unions are broad organisations. By their very nature, their doors are open for any and every worker in the establishment or industry. They draw within themselves, and are expected to draw, all workers within their fold, though even under the best of circumstances in capitalist society, the trade unions do not embrace the whole of the class. As Lenin said, "Let every worker who understands the need to unite for the struggle against the employers and the government join the trade unions. The very aim of the trade unions would be impossible of achievement if they did not unite all who have attained at least this elementary degree of understanding, if they were not very broad organisations".

Therefore the *first task* of trade union functioning is the drive to enrol every worker in the establishment or industry of which it is the union,—at any rate the maximum possible who can be attracted to it. Since membership is always annual, (whether subscription is collected monthly, quarterly or annually), this has to be a continuous and periodic campaign, without any let.

Spontaneity in struggle or in movement has its counterpart in spontaneity in organisation. Its worst manifestation is the casual and sporadic attitude towards membership. The strength of a union is quantitatively measured in terms of membership, and not on any vague claim of 'influence'. Spontaneity has to be replaced by organised activity among the mass of workers.

Close contact with the working masses, is the ABC of trade union work. One of the surest means of constantly developing and maintaining links with every worker, including the new worker who is to be persuaded to join the union, is a regular membership campaign. This also helps to win over those who are disgusted with union rivalry and therefore hesitate to join any union. Their doubts have to be answered, they have to be brought to the positions of militant trade unionism, and enrolled within the union. As a matter of rule, a month or two should be set apart every year as 'enrolment months'. One of the

grounds of our opposition to 'check-off system', consists in this that personal contact with workers through membership campaign, is replaced by an administrative scheme of membership collection.

The *second task* of trade union functioning is the need to regularly function the *organisational structure* of the union. Every union, according to its bye-laws and regulations, has a general body or a delegates' conference at the bottom, a managing committee and designated officers at the top, and in the case of big unions and unions spread out over large jurisdiction, certain intermediate branches, local or factory committees.

—*The general body or delegates' conference* meets annually, or once in two or three years according to rules. In the case of a union with small membership, or a union restricted to one place or factory, it is possible for all members to meet and to participate in the work of the general body. But when the membership is large, or the union covers wide areas, this is physically impossible. General body meetings in such cases deprive large number of members from participating and voicing their opinion. In effect, a small number of members, or members from one place usurp the functions of the general body, while a majority of members are denied the possibility of exercising their democratic rights.

—In such cases, the proper thing to do is to have delegates' conferences,—with delegates elected by departmental general bodies, or by branch general bodies according to their membership. The *departmental or local branches* then become the basic unit of trade union organisation. The aim of the union membership campaign is not only to enrol the maximum number as members, but also to organise them into factory or departmental, mine pit-head and project site, workshop and power station branch committees. This alone can make the work place a 'fortress' of the union, and make its position unassailable. The managing committee and the central office of the union has to be in regular touch with the branches, ensure a two-way channel of communication, pay heed to the demands and grievances of members sent through the branches, check up on funds collected and paid into the central coffers. Regular election and functioning of branch committees have also to be looked into from the centre. It has to be ensured that branches work within the general line laid down by the union, and that proper discipline is maintained, so that unity is consolidated. Care has to be taken to see that the branches do not atrophy, or exist only on paper. This can be done only by having a close link with the branch secretary and other office-bearers, giving them

personal help and guidance, and attending to their education and training.

—This brings us to the *third task*, viz. of holding regular elections, as per the rules and bye-laws of the union.

In electing the *Managing Committee*, care must be taken to see that it is as representative as possible of the entire membership of the Union. Representatives from major categories should find a place in the committee, so that any incipient feeling of neglect is not allowed to grow into a major grievance and then into a breakaway organisation. The rules and conventions should provide for due representation to all branches. If there are rival groups, nothing should be done to eliminate the minority groups by the majority. Rather, all groups should be suitably put to generate litigation and result in disruption of the union.

—Elections can be held by show of hands. But if the situation so demands it is better to have secret ballot. An impartial machinery or a representative from the state or all India centre can be requested to conduct the elections. But whatever be the method of voting, the register of paid members (in case of general body meeting), or of duly elected delegates (in case of delegates' conference), should be available in time, attendance of all who are present should be properly recorded, all proceedings should be duly noted, and the final results should be countersigned by the presiding authority. Any failure on these counts or unfair practices and manipulation can aggravate disputes generate litigation and result in disruption of the union.

—The result of the election should be promptly reported to the press and to the mass of workers, and notified to the registrar of trade unions in the proper form, as also to the state and all India centre. Prompt and effective intervention by the state and all India centre can nip in the bud any dispute festering into open disruption.

—In electing office-bearers, a balance has to be struck between the requirements of continuity and change in the leadership, keeping in view the foremost necessity of stability in the organisation and building the prestige, authority and experience of its leadership.

Trade Union democracy should not of course be construed as the holding of regular union elections only. *Real democracy*, and not 'formal democracy', means involving the mass of workers in the activities of the union. Only such real democracy and mass involvement do away with the "leader—mass following", "one leader—thousands of followers" pattern prevailing in many unions, especially those of backward workers. Moreover a trade union is not a temporary but a permanent organisation defend-

ing workers' interests. The members have to be persuaded to show continual interest in their union. Participation in the movement and in various other activities of the union, extending to the greatest possible number of the most diverse groups and sections of workers, is the hallmark of real trade union democracy, and the beginning of the workers' education as a class. Enrolment within the union, to begin with, only teaches the worker the alphabet of combination, of coming together for fighting some gross abuse or injustice. But it is only in the course of struggles and mass activities, that the worker understands the meaning of class against class, the nature of bourgeois rule, and gets schooled in socialism and socialist democracy.

The tendency to run unions as narrow confines of individual bosses, to restrict union executives to a small and select coterie, the failure to function the union bodies in a democratic manner drawing in widest possible sections, failure to hold regular union conferences and elections,—these tendencies have to be fought and overcome.

Importance should always be attached to elections to *cooperative societies* and *works committees* in the establishments. They help the union to consolidate its influence and hold on the workers. Sometimes where the unions are controlled by other forces, even limited success in such elections helps to establish links with the mass of workers. It follows that our elected representatives have to give a good account of themselves in these elected bodies.

—The *fourth important task* of trade union functioning is the choice of competent office-bearers of the union.

Office-bearers have to represent the union before the employers, government and other unions, negotiate agreements and represent grievances, conduct or monitor adjudication and other legal proceedings, keep contact with and lead the mass of workers.

In our specific conditions, this means a combination of 'outsiders' and experienced employee-activists as office-bearers. Victimised employees have a special place in this choice of office-bearers.

With unions developing into big organisations, and the consequent increase in work-load, it has become necessary to have a few full-time office-bearers (at least in the major unions), along with other part-time officials. The fulltime office-bearer may be an employee working on a formal or informal 'time-off' basis, or a victimised worker or 'outsider' who is paid a reasonable salary. In addition, big unions with large membership and several branches, may also require a paid staff for routine

office-work, such as typing, attending to correspondence, keeping accounts, etc. Effort should however be made to involve as many union activists as possible, in the day-to-day work of the union, on a voluntary basis. It is they, and not the paid staff, who form the back-bone of the union organisation and its functioning.

—The *fifth important task*, is the setting up of a functioning union office. Big unions can, and generally do have their own independent office. But even small unions should strive to have a definite place as their office, if necessary by sharing it with others. In any case, 'union offices' which are to be found inside the portfolios or 'shabnam bags' of some 'roving leaders', or in dusty files lying about in somebody's house, should not be tolerated.

Office-management presupposes the division of work among the various office-bearers, and allotment of specific tasks or departments to each according to his capacity and desire. It also means systematic coordination among the office-bearers, and pooling together of energy and resources for periodic campaigns.

In most cases today office-work is very much neglected. Files are at sixes and sevens. Letters lie about unattended. There are no fixed office hours and so on. In the minds of some leaders, this work has very low priority compared to other presumably 'revolutionary' work. The other usual plea is 'lack of time'. Actually, it is a case of disorderly habits of work, and failure to plan activities and distribute responsibilities. Such scatter-brain and anarchic attitude has to be fought.

—Systematic office-management requires that the following papers and records are kept up-to-date by all union offices, whether big or small:

- +Registration certificate
- +Affiliation certificate (if affiliated)
- +Copies of the constitution (with latest amendments if any)
- +List of office-bearers and managing committee members
- +Membership register, and corresponding counterfoils (if there are branches, then membership charts and counterfoils sent by branches)
- +Account books and vouchers
- +Minutes book
- +Certain essential files of correspondence, circulars etc.
- +Files of 'Trade Union Record', and other Trade Union and Labour journals
- +Standing Orders, and/or Service Regulations, applicable to the Industry

+ Principal labour legislations (with their latest amendments) and important case laws.

In the course of work distribution, at least one office-bearer, who has aptitude for running an office, should be put incharge. He must attend office regularly at fixed hours to suit workers' convenience. He along with one or two others should familiarise themselves with the standing orders and disciplinary laws, with the existing machinery of representation etc., so as to be able to answer charge-sheets, and so on.

—Workers coming to the union office have to be treated with consideration, sympathy and tact. There must be no hectoring tone, and no irritation in talk and behaviour. The worker should not be repelled, and should feel that he is taken seriously. He must feel it as his 'own' office, and not an alien establishment.

Letters and applications addressed to the government authorities and managements, must be based on facts, to the point and logical. They can be polite yet dignified, firm yet not provocative.

Individual cases (legitimate ones, and not those which seek favours), have to be dealt with and followed up. The ordinary backward worker attaches tremendous importance to this, and feels helpless and resentful if he is rebuffed in an unwarranted fashion.

—Custody of funds, systematic realisation of membership dues and levies, legitimate expenditure backed up by vouchers, and periodic accountability are important aspects of office management. Lapses on this score cost many a reputation, and become fertile sources of slanders, disputes and disruption. The treasurer, assisted if necessary by an accountant should be responsible for this. A bank account is a must for every union, and there should always be joint operation.

In organising office-work, which is a form of staff work for carrying out all other activities, "no detail should be neglected if that detail concerns the worker".

The *sixth important task*, is the conduct of meetings.

Trade union functioning involves several types of meetings, mass meetings, gate meetings, group meetings, branch meetings, general body meetings, managing committee meetings, and so on. Each meeting has its own characteristic, and therefore a special way of conducting it. But every meeting invariably calls for careful preparation,—as regards the mobilisation and attendance, the technical preparation, and the subject matter of the meeting.

If a meeting turns out to be a collective waste of time, where

only windbags let off so much gas, then the subsequent meetings are also affected. Interest diminishes, attendance falls, and a large number of workers keep away from subsequent meetings. How many good meetings fail to impress, just because the stage is wrongly set, sufficient advance propaganda has not been done, the loudspeaker is lousy, and as a result energy is wasted and good money has gone down the drain!

Annual general body meetings or delegates' conferences must invariably have a written report, and a written statement of accounts for discussion and adoption. These are occasions for review, for generalisation of experience, and therefore for raising the level of the membership and cementing their loyalty to the union. They should be taken seriously. Ordinary general body meetings must also be held at intervals to maintain touch, to report back, and to keep up the interest of the members.

Managing committee meetings must have due notice and a definite agenda, and must be conducted in a business-like manner. Minutes must be kept and decisions entered in the minutes book. After the attendance has been noted, the chair has called the meeting to order, the agenda has been adopted, the first job should be to read and confirm the minutes of the previous meeting followed by a short report by the secretary about implementation of decisions taken earlier and the work done. Then follow the other items, discussions on each of them and a corresponding decision. If there are differences of opinions, a consensus can be arrived at. But if some member nevertheless insists, then a vote can be taken and the decision be adopted by a majority. The chairman and other members have to see that the discussion, even if it is heated, does not degenerate into a squabble. The main thing is to listen to the other point of view, even if one sharply disagrees with it.

—*The seventh important aspect*, relates to the personal behaviour of the leaders. This may read like a set of moral preachings. But a TU functionary has to follow certain norms of behaviour, a code of conduct in his daily work.

§ He must be modest and patient with the masses, and not bureaucratic or 'superior'. Arrogance, conceit, bluff, personal vanity and a patronising attitude towards the masses only repels them. He must adopt a cultured behaviour towards everyone, and even while dealing with the 'enemy' at the conciliation and negotiation table, he should be polite and dignified, though sharp and firm in his approach. Rudeness is not an attribute of the class struggle. At gate meetings, he can use the weapon of ridicule, sarcasm and righteous indignation when necessary, but not vulgar abuse, which is unfortunately usual with some speakers.

§ He must avoid sectarian or sarcastic behaviour with the activists and workers of other unions. Sharp criticism may be necessary at times, but there has to be an attitude of respect and equality. When required, he must reply sharply and effectively to criticism and attack, and the hostile and disruptive action of 'rival unions', but not get provoked into retaliation. After all, trade union unity and joint action with these unions remain our aim.

§ He must guard against any communal, caste or chauvinist behaviour, and prevent it in others around him.

§ He must try and pick up at least a working knowledge of the language and traditions of the workers among whom he has to work. Towards the unorganised, backward and tribal workers, he has to be particularly considerate, so that there is not even a suggestion of 'looking down' upon them.

§ He must cultivate the habit of punctuality, and thoroughness.

§ He must learn to listen to criticism from his colleagues and the rank-and-file, and take that into consideration during future work.

The model that the TU functionary has to aim at is not a glorified 'trade union boss' nor a demagogue who plays up to the backwardness of the workers and rouses their base instincts, but a '*tribune of the people*,'—one who reacts to every manifestation of tyranny and injustice, who is sensitive to the feelings and mood of the masses, can rally them into a struggle against the oppressors and exploiters and show them the way forward

TRADE UNION FUNCTIONING (CONTINUED)

—In the previous lesson, we discussed certain important tasks, connected with the *method* of functioning. We now consider the *content* of trade union functioning.

—The trade union activist should *know his industry*. Only then he can understand the problem of wages, of piece-rates, of work-load and modernisation plans, etc. relating to his undertaking and industry. The best teacher is the worker in the industry, and the activist should unhesitatingly learn from him. This applies not only to the 'outsider', but also to an employee-functionary, since every employee to begin with, knows only his specific job, and not the totality of the industry.

—The next thing is to *know at least the rudiments of the labour laws*, the standing orders etc.,—all the relevant ones for his industry. All the provisions of laws and standing orders, which are in the interest of the workers, have to be enforced and utilised. The attitude should not be to "leave all this to the lawyers", except where actual court appearance is required. He must also know which laws are ranged against the workers and are to be fought.

—The trade union activist has to acquire a *knowledge of the economics* of his industry, the trend of developments, and also a rudimentary knowledge of the national economy, and economic policies that are being pursued by government. Without this, he cannot understand the supply and demand, the prices, the market for the product he produces, nor the profit and loss in his industry, the place of that industry in the general economy, the impact of economic policies that are being pursued, both in his particular trade and on the country as a whole. Without this, he cannot understand the phenomena of inflation and rising prices, of budgetary taxation and deficits, of concessions to capitalists and additional burdens on the poor, of international trade and balance of payments, of foreign loans and collaborations with TNCs, etc. Unless he knows something of this, he cannot educate the mass of workers in his trade or industry and carry conviction to them, nor can he connect the struggle in his own sphere, with the struggle against the general economic policies pursued today.

—The trade union activist must acquaint himself with the *national and international politics* from the class point of view. Without this, he cannot link up the economic struggle with the political struggle, the struggle for a better life with the struggle for peace, disarmament and a nuclear-free world, the struggle for communal harmony and national integrity etc., which are urgent tasks facing him at the present time. Without this, he cannot raise the level of class consciousness of the workers.

—He must know a little about the *history of the trade union movement*, about the specific struggles and achievements in his particular sphere, so that he can not only draw on past experiences, but also be able to inspire the workers, give them a *sense of victory achieved through struggle and sacrifice*, and confidence as a class fighting for a better future.

—This brings us to the question of *formulation of demands* by the union for the particular undertaking or industry.

(i) The demands must start from the realities of the situation. The person in whose name the demands are to be formulated, is the worker. Therefore common sense demands that it is the workers who should be first consulted. Only then one can know what is actually agitating the workers. It is necessary to sense the 'mood' of the worker, that 'mood' which is the essence of the situation and determines the extent of the workers' readiness.

(ii) To think that demands can be based on the wishes of the 'leaders' or on other extraneous considerations, is downright subjectivism, and bureaucratism.

(iii) Sometimes demands are put forward which the workers themselves feel are incapable of realisation. Sometimes old demands are repeated mechanically, even though the situation has changed and they have become outdated. Sometimes demands are placed out of false notions of prestige, or out of a *sense of 'competitive economism'*. Sometimes they are watered down as a reaction to earlier exaggerated demands to demands which were pitched too high and led to failures. In formulating demands, one has to safeguard against all these.

(iv) It is very necessary to see that the demands formulated are capable of rousing mass enthusiasm, and therefore of unleashing mass action. This means the demands should cover all sections and categories, and should be such as are intelligible and acceptable to all,—including the backward amongst them.

(v) One must abjure the notion that a 'charter of demands' has to be long and weighty, that the more the merrier. However big and impressive a 'charter' is, it will remain on paper unless the workers act on it. Only that charter is effective which the mass of workers can remember and repeat, and consider their

own. Therefore the charter should be sober, precise and intelligible to all workers.

(vi) Formulation of demands in the organised sector these days, has been raised to the level of a charter for general co-ordinated action by workers in the same or several similar and allied industries. This involves wider consultation with other unions in the same or allied industries.

(vii) Before the charter is finalised and submitted, it should be thoroughly discussed by the workers at various levels, and adopted by the managing committee, and the general body.

(viii) A propaganda campaign should be immediately launched among the mass of workers using various methods, so that the charter has the necessary mass backing.

—After the charter has been submitted, and the management has been compelled to take notice of it (this is possible only after the masses have been rallied behind it), the workers should be periodically kept informed of developments. Here truth and statement of facts proves more powerful than bluff and bombast. Where certain arguments of the employers, or the stand of other unions have created doubts, they should be answered with facts and arguments; and if any revision is felt necessary then it should be explained to the workers. Through all the stages, from formulation of demands to submission, and then negotiation, a spirit of class confidence has to be kept up among the workers.

Marx, the greatest theoretician of the working class movement, has himself provided us a model of trade union practice, of formulating the economic and political demands of the working class based on a detailed study of the workers' real condition. In 1866, he drew up a general table of inquiry, which included questions on wages—their types and rates, occupation, age and sex of the employed, apprenticeship, hours of work, conditions of places of work, effect of employment upon physical condition, education and moral condition, etc. etc. He returned to the need of such an inquiry again in 1880 in his famous "Workers' Questionnaire", which included 100 questions in 4 sections. As Engels wrote, "the condition of the working class is the starting point of all social movements today". This applies to every stage of the movement, including each subsequent stage of struggle on the formulated demands.

—In this context, the question of struggles, and therefore, the *form of struggles* comes to the fore.

The very genius of the working class movement has discovered several forms of struggle, depending on historical experience, national traditions, specific situation, level of consciousness of

the workers, their mood, the attitude and behaviour of the enemy, and so on. Ever new forms continue to be discovered and added to the storehouse of the movement. The trade unions are therefore not tied to a few routine or hackneyed forms—to any 'permissible' forms, or to any series of forms which must as a rule follow one after the other.

—The first thing to note is that, trade unions are not a form of establishment of the workers, but an 'organ of struggle'. They cannot maintain themselves as class organisations in any other way than by struggle. There may be days when the mass of workers march in serried ranks along the middle of the road, their banners flying and fists clenched, advancing boldly against the class adversary. There may be other days when they are just strolling along the shady footpaths and byelanes in singles or groups. But the long periods of lull are also preparations for the coming days of confrontation. We have here not a stagnant pool but a flowing current,—sometimes moving placidly along, at other times foaming and rushing turbulently ahead. The main thing is the movement forward,—the speed, the tempo, the form are secondary.

—Struggles may be spontaneous, or they may be launched as part of a planned initiative. But even spontaneous struggle is not a bolt from the blue. As Lenin said, it "in essence represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an *embryonic form*". Spontaneity of the mass, a spontaneous upsurge of the workers calls for skillful intervention by the trade union leadership, with a view to give it a direction, and lead it to a successful conclusion. The demand on the leadership is greater, and not less on such occasions. But our common misfortune is the general unpreparedness to meet such situations, our under-estimation of the 'unorganised mass' and its preparedness for a show-down, or of the mood of the 'organised mass' to go into action.

—That form of struggle is the most appropriate at a given moment, as would mobilise the widest possible sections of the mass, and is acceptable to them. Such a form of struggle becomes a prelude for further action. The concept of the trade union movement is not that which is in the mind of a few leaders, but that which is in the consciousness of the broad mass of workers who have been won for the struggle. Can a higher form of struggle be followed up by what is supposed to be a lower form? Must not a struggle always progress from one form to the next higher form, and so on? The answer is, this will be decided by the needs of the movement, and not by any mathematical progression. Every real step of the movement, every form—whether preceding or following, has to rest upon the support and cooperation of the maximum possible mass of workers.

A stage-managed action of a selected few, not relying upon mass support, can turn out to be a miserable and costly flop or a fiasco.

The T. U. functionary must neither run ahead of the masses nor lag behind. This he can learn only by experience and study, by being in close touch with the masses. Some time, he has to restrain the inexperienced masses. At other times he has to rouse them into correct action.

—The question of *strike* as a weapon and form of class struggle has to be considered from this angle. We stand for the unfettered right of strike, precisely because we regard it as one of the most powerful weapon. That is why, it has to be used in proper time and in appropriate manner. The trade union movement in our country has perfected the forms of 'one day strike' (a sort of warning, of declaration of intent), 'protest strike', 'solidarity strike', 'strike of limited duration' (a few hours, or a few days), 'indefinite strike', 'political strike', 'industrial strike', and finally a 'bandh'—a total cessation of all industry, trade and other activities, in which the working class leads other sections of the people into action on specific issues. Such 'bandhs' can be local, regional, state, or country-wide.

—Whatever the form of the strike, it has to be thoroughly prepared, properly organised, and must rely on the general solidarity of the workers of a given trade, and on their moral and material support. A strike must have at least the passive sympathy, if not the active support, of the people all around,—and especially so, where a public utility or a service industry is concerned. The adage, "we are like the fish, and the people are like the water" fully applies in such cases. The working class ceases to be the vanguard of the people, when its action evokes hostility rather than sympathy, when it even appears to be confronting the people.

It follows that the justifiability of the worker's demands, the attitude of the employers and the government, the inevitability of the strike and its progress, should be fully publicised through meetings, the press (which may or may not give the whole truth), and through other forms of publicity and propaganda. The support of the people should be actively and planfully sought.

—What are the 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' of a strike?

+ Before calling a strike, explore all avenues of settlement.

+ Ascertain fully and soberly the readiness and the will of the workers for strike action. (A strike ballot is usually a formal affair, and therefore not necessarily the best way to do so).

+ Once the strike has been launched (if it is an indefinite

strike), go ahead with determination, and defend it against disruption, employers' goondas, and police repression.

+ Planfully mobilise support and solidarity of other sections of workers, and also of the people. For this purpose solidarity committees can be of good use.

+ Arrange proper publicity and propaganda.

+ Keep the mass of workers mobilised all through the strike. Even if some sections go back to their villages in a long-drawn out strike, be in touch with them. For this, work out suitable forms. Utilise a strike for education of the mass of workers in class consciousness, in explaining the link of their struggle with the general class struggle.

+ In case it becomes prolonged, or is likely to be so, organise relief. (This is useful for morale, even if it is inadequate for actual purposes).

+ Be prepared for negotiations when the proper opportunity presents itself.

As to the *Don'ts*:

+ Do not launch a strike without knowing the workers' mood and wishes.

+ Do not hesitate to launch it, after negotiations fail or if employers refuse to negotiate, and when workers are agreed on its necessity.

+ Do not deliberately violate certain obligatory legal procedure, except the blanket ban, when in any case, the strike would be illegal.

+ Do not close the door for talks or mediation efforts, when the situation demands it.

+ Do not do anything which will alienate public sympathy.

+ Do not expose all key cadres, though not at the expense of the day-to-day conduct of the strike.

+ And finally, when the mood of the worker justifies retreat, do not hesitate to call it off in an orderly fashion, keeping morale and organisation intact as best as possible. On the other hand, do not panic and call it off for fear of repression or apprehending defeat. The mass of workers should be consulted before the actual withdrawal, placing all facts before them. Where the mass is scattered all over at different centres, the democratically elected executive or council should be necessarily consulted.¹

—These days, many strikes are united ones, in which a number of unions are involved. Joint Committees have to be set up in such cases for the conduct of the strike, and we have to take initiative to see that these committees function regularly and on the basis of unanimity or consensus.

—Though the union executive and branch committees are already there, it is desirable to have broad strike committees at

different levels, where representatives and active volunteers from all sections, departments and localities are included.

—No strike by itself is a final and *decisive battle*. It is one of the skirmishes in a long-drawn out battle against organised capital. It is a “school of war”. Therefore a strike has an end, just as it has a beginning, and the end may be a more or less complete victory, a compromise, or even an unconditional withdrawal. After all even the most elite regiment of an army can feel the effects of exhaustion after continuous and prolonged engagements with the enemy, and may have to withdraw in an orderly fashion from the field. Otherwise, the results may be harmful. We have the example of more than 2,00,000 textile workers of Bombay, who were on strike for more than a year and a half during 1982-83. This was an unparalleled and heroic strike. But opportunities for compromise and orderly withdrawal were scorned by the leadership. The result was a disorderly break-up of the strike and severe repression, whose effects still continue. On the other hand, there was the one-year long strike by more than 1,50,000 coal miners of Britain, who withdrew their strike in an organised manner, and marched back to work with bands playing and banners fluttering, their families escorting them to the pitheads. But even the most bitter setback, the bloodiest defeats have a positive side, if the workers and the leadership learn from them, and the lessons are driven home.

—*Solidarity action* during strikes, is a weak and neglected aspect of our activity. Many times, even the workers in the factory next-door are not approached for expression of solidarity. In industrial townships which have rural surroundings, the peasants are not approached. We have to note that it is solidarity action which moulds the workers’ revolutionary consciousness. In his time, Marx always found the opportunity during strike-actions to appeal, “for organising the raising of money to lessen the sufferings of the widows, wives and children of the strikers”. It is this which makes the workers *feel* and *act* as a class.

NOTE

¹The tendency to ignore this minimum democratic principle when a compromise has been arrived at and a strike involving tens of thousands is sought to be called off, exists among some sections of the leadership. This attitude of taking the masses for granted can lead to unexpected and unpleasant consequences, both for the employees’ cause and their organisation. The withdrawal of the recent college teachers’ strike is a case in point.

MASS WORK AND MASS MOBILISATION

—Mass involvement is the foundation of real T.U. democracy, Mass mobilisation is the essence of T.U. struggles.

We must therefore make every effort “to gain the ear of the working class”. “Into the midst of the masses!” has to be our rallying cry. And to be able to link up with them in a thousand ways, we have to undertake multifarious type of activities and develop and consolidate every type of workers’ organisations: trade unions, cooperatives, women’s, youth; sports and cultural associations and groups.

—We have noted the changing composition of the working class in the course of the last three decades. Industrial expansion, and the growth of modern, sophisticated industries especially in the public and the monopoly sectors, has brought with it a huge influx of ‘new recruits’ into the ranks of workers from the most varied sections of society, and with the most varied background. The *new worker* is more educated and has better professional skill. The proportion of specialists and technically qualified workers is higher. Even in the non-technical sections, we have people qualified in the fields of commerce, accountancy, stores and marketing, etc.

—The trade unions have to work out a special approach towards them, in order to draw them as integral elements of the movement.

By and large, the educational level of the workers in most industries has gone up. This is an advantage, since the educated worker has an easier access to printed literature and quicker grasping power. But on the other hand, he has a natural expectation to understand things and be convinced by facts and arguments. He cannot be fed and led by mere slogans.

Moreover, large sections of ‘middle class employees’, teachers, engineers, NGO’s, junior doctors etc. have also entered the fighting ranks of trade unions.

—At the other end is the mass of workers in unorganised industries and the decentralised sector. In addition, there is the large number of construction workers, ranging from a minority of skilled and highly skilled technicians to a big mass of unskilled labour, engaged in quarries, in breaking stones, in

digging the earth, clearing and levelling the soil, carrying loads, etc. They are in the employ of big construction firms, or a hierarchy of thousands of contractors. These project workers, living in camp sites are among the worst exploited. The problem is to approach this mass, acquire a permanent hold on it, and harness its militancy and energy for organisation and struggle.

Thus, at one and the same time the T.U. movement has to tackle and mobilise the 'new worker', the most diverse types—ranging from the 'intelligentsia' to the most backward contractor-labour, the tribal or rural labour. Failure to do so, creates a fertile soil for the rise of 'adventurers' and 'demagogues' who lead them astray.

—The *young workers* have urges and expectations of their own, and a wide range of interests. The trade unions have to find the means and methods to approach these youth, and to strengthen their bonds with the movement. Today, cultural and sport activities are rarely a part of our trade union work.

In addition to the young workers who are in employment, there are tens of thousands of others who are out of job. The few who have landed a job, and the larger numbers who are left out, have a bond of sympathy between them. There are for instance, the special problems of ITI-trained boys, the boys under the apprentice schemes, the 'badli workers', the land-affected youth at project sites clamouring for jobs and for setting up technical training institutes at these sites in anticipation of the projects coming up within a few years, the workers affected by closures and retrenchments, and so on. Trade unions have to reckon with the young workers in employment, as well as with the youth who are clamouring at the gates. Otherwise, they will make a present of them either to the extreme right or the extreme left.

—The problem of unionising *women workers*, and taking up their special problems is generally sorely neglected. They are worst paid, victims of social and cultural oppression, and usually the first victims of retrenchment. Apart from maternity benefits, special demands like factory creche, facilities for mothers to feed their babies, facilities for washing and toilet have to be raised on their behalf.

Experience shows that when drawn into struggles, they are the most militant sections. The main thing is to bring up women T.U. organisers, and to see that place of meetings, timings etc. are so fixed for women's meetings that they suit their convenience. Possibilities for unionisation of women have grown at the present time.

—Apart from the problems arising from the changing composition of the class, there are other problems arising from the physical location, the behavioural patterns and the developing needs of the modern working class.

In major industrial centres, we have the problem of 'Suburbanisation'. A few decades back, the task of physical mobilisation was easy, since the big mills and factories employing thousands were located at the urban centres with chawls all around them. The primary method was to catch the mass of workers at the gates, before or after the shifts. TU organisers and leaders were experts in haranguing at gate meetings. Posters put up at the gates and an occasional handbill distributed near the factory, carried the 'message'. This applied also to big offices. The urban explosion has however radically changed city-planning and lay-outs. A huge body of workers and employees has shifted to the suburbs. They have now to spend hours in commuting back and forth. There is a mad rush to catch local trains, buses, or avail of any vehicle to be back home. Few are willing to loiter at the gates after the shift is over. This is so on all weekdays. On holidays, the workers scattered in suburban localities are in no mood to come to town for attending meetings and rallies, unless the movement is already at its pitch. The T.V. media also keeps him tied up at home.

How are these workers to be contacted? One way is the 'lunch hour rallies'. The old method of gate-meetings and posters have of course not lost their usefulness. But speeches have to be more precise and purposeful, and posters have to be more gripping and pasted where they can "catch the eye". In this situation, setting up activists' groups in the scattered localities where the workers can be contacted after duty hours, and bringing out more informative posters, handbills and pamphlets assume importance.

The role of trade union journals and political journals for informing and educating a large periphery of activists and the mass, has also to be stressed. Not all trade unions can publish their own journals. But central and state journals, and industrial journals have to be seriously pushed. The quality of T.U. journals, their frequency, and their distribution have to be improved many times over.

—The industrial map of India is dotted about with thousands of *workers' colonies*. Their number is constantly growing.

There are colonies of defence workers, power workers, steel townships, or colonies of new and modernised mines, oil, petrochemical complexes and the like; government employees' colonies have also come up in major cities.

Workers' colonies are to be found not only in urban areas but also in the countryside, where they stand out as islands in a rural sea.

Industrial workers are also residing in large numbers in the slums and zhopadpatties that are springing up like mushrooms. But here they are mixed up with semi-proletarian and lumpen elements. The problems of organisation and struggle in the slums and zhopadpatties have their own peculiarities. So also in the government housing board colonies where too there is a mixture, though a different type.

Trade union organisers usually encounter workers and harangue them or discuss with them, at the gates of the mills, factories or offices, but very rarely at their place of residence.

And that is where our weakness lies in establishing close links with them, in educating them, in raising their political consciousness and thus consolidating our base.

—The life of the worker does not begin and end with the factory siren. Beyond the eight hours that he spends in the factory or office, he spends the rest of the day in the colony or round about it. That is where his social life and his other associations develop.

When he returns to his quarter and washes off the dust and **grime of the factory**, he is also apt to lay aside all those factors and elements that influence and move him at his place of work. **This is so, except on those rare occasions when the movement is at its high tide, and there is serious confrontation or struggle with the bosses and the government.**

At such moments of course, his whole existence and thinking **is encompassed** by the requirements of the movement. But this happens only occasionally.

For the rest of the days, he gets drawn into activities that are the very opposite of those that can impel him towards class consciousness. These include religious, social, political, cultural, and even caste and communal activities, which in our specific background, exercise tremendous influence on his mind.

Where there is lack of even such activities, sheer boredom drives him to activities that are harmful and negative—especially so, when with the deepening crisis of the bourgeois system, the social and moral fibre in society is degenerating with each passing day.

While the worker himself at least encounters the red flag at the gate, in the union office, or at the maidan, and therefore the two opposite influences vie with each other for taking possession of his mind, his wife and children are not so directly subjected to the message of the red flag.

We thus see the phenomenon that while on trade union issues the workers rally behind the red flag in large numbers, on political, social or communal issues, they and their family members gather under quite a different banner. Even the most militant trade union struggle and the most active trade unions have not been able to radically change this situation.

There are any number of colonies where the majority of the workers are in our unions, under our trade union influence, and yet, if we look at the walls, the slogans or legends written on them these are anything but ours. The activities that go on there, negate our ideology and politics, our revolutionary class outlook.

If we have to change this situation, then along with our trade union work we have to develop many other forms of activity among the workers and members of their families living in the colonies. The existence of large concentrations of workers belonging to the same industry, in fact provides excellent opportunity to planfully undertake these multifarious task.

—In every colony we have to try and set up some sort of 'welfare associations'. In large townships, it may be necessary to set up more than one, according to the sectors.

The associations set up initially through the effort of the trade union and political leadership should be as broadbased as possible. They are necessary and useful for taking up several civic issues, like water, lighting, conservancy, approach roads, schooling facilities or provision of school buses for the children etc.

In some townships, the workers and their family members are denied the civic right to have their own elected local bodies. The union and the broad-based welfare associations have to fight for securing such right.

Incidentally, though the public sector constructs housing colonies, it does not do so for all the workers, but only for a certain percentage. A few workers may be living in their own houses in the adjoining areas or villages. The rest are left to fend for themselves.

We thus see that slums spring up around most of the colonies, and a certain section of workers have to live there. Naturally, they do not enjoy the facilities which their more fortunate brethren get. This is an issue which we have to take up.

Along with it, we must not also neglect the problems of those non-worker sections who flock to the colonies as petty shopkeepers and render service to the workers. It should be our effort to see that our activists take a prominent part in all these activities, and in the work of the welfare associations, for this alone will ensure that the scope of their activities is widened.

—The proliferation of slums in urban areas is a law of capi-

talist development, especially in developing countries like ours, where along with economic growth, pauperism, rural poverty and social and economic exploitation also grow, and lead to large-scale migration from rural to urban areas. As capital marches forward in its relentless drive for super profits, it grabs more and more urban and suburban land, and pushes the working population and the job-seekers into the hell of marshy waste land, snake and vermin infested vacant land, as squatters and slum dwellers. It feeds and maintains a parasitic army of lumpens and slumlords, bootleggers and matka-bookies, "dadas" and "mavalis" to keep the slum population under control, just as it maintains a force of jobbers and overseers to keep them in control in the factories.

It is no part of the obligation of the capitalist to provide housing to the labourer while offering him wages. The bourgeois state does not recognise the right to housing as a democratic, a fundamental right.

The T.U. movement has fought for and won "house rent allowances" for workers and employees in the organised sector. It has secured rise in the HRA on a more realistic basis. It has compelled government to set up housing boards and undertake the construction of industrial housing, low income group and middle income group housing etc. It has forced some employers to build colonies, and some contractors to supply temporary housing material at construction sites. "Housing advances" have been secured by several unions as part of bilateral agreements. And yet, the housing question continues to grow more and more acute in all urban centres and industrial complexes. The *housing question* has therefore to be an important part of trade union work.

—Another urgent task is to bring together the women-folk who reside in the colonies and form them into units of the Mahila Federation. Such women's organisations not only act as reliable reserves in times of struggles and actions, but develop independent activities of their own. The social and moral atmosphere in the colonies is always greatly improved as a result of the activities of the Mahila Federation units.

—Similar attempts have to be made to organise the youth, the sons of the workers residing in the colonies, into units of the Youth Federation and the Young Pioneers. Neglect of this job in every case has very harmful consequences.

While the worker may be a loyal supporter of the red flag, it may happen that large sections of the youth, the sons or younger brothers of the very same worker are carried away or swayed by hostile influences. This poses a difficult problem for the revolutionary trade union and political leadership.

Therefore it is necessary to 'catch them young' and draw them into the work of the Youth Federation and Young Pioneers. The trade union leadership, with the help and cooperation of the AIYF leadership, has to take serious initiative in this respect.

—Attention has also to be paid towards developing cultural and social activities inside the colonies. These include the setting up of clubs or community centres, reading rooms and libraries, and the organisation of dramatic and singing troupes. Help can be sought from the nearest IPTA units.

The thirst for culture is so strong and the material originating from us is so scarce and even non-existent, that our own workers and their families flock to other sources. In the growing atmosphere of reactionary revivalism and communal and caste divisiveness, deliberately aimed at countering the increasingly militant and left-oriented mood of the masses, the influence exercised by these other sources is extremely poisonous.

Every year, during appropriate seasons, there are numerous festivals. On many occasions the issue is : who controls the various associations, clubs or ad hoc bodies that organise the celebrations or functions? The mass of workers and their families take an enthusiastic part in all such festivals.

Should they be left in the hands of those who seek to distort their significance and utilise them for their reactionary and communal aims, or should they be utilised and interpreted by socially progressive forces, so that they may have the old form, but with a new content? Of course, not all such functions by their very nature deserve or call for participation. In this sphere, one has to discriminate and decide.

—On the whole, it is a question of taking up parallel and simultaneous work in several spheres in the workers' colonies—trade union, political, social and cultural—among the workers, the women and the youth. There are ample opportunities here of coordinating these various types of activities and the organisations which are to conduct them.

—In those colonies which are located in the countryside, we must in addition, consciously establish links and contacts with the agricultural workers and the toiling peasantry.

The trade union organisations should lend their resources and cadres to the task of organising these sections into the Kisan Sabha and Khet Mazdoor Union, extend a fraternal hand to them on all occasions, and actively associate themselves whenever their struggles take place. They should rally in support whenever attacks are mounted against the weaker sections by the rural vested interests.

—In an attempt to counter the growing wave of working class actions and mass struggles in which the workers are the main

elements, reactionary vested interests are utilising the ideological stock in trade of obscurantism, religious fundamentalism, communalism, casteism, regionalism,—any and every weapon that divides and disrupts the working masses. On the plea of new challenges in the present day world, bourgeois publicists are preaching among the working class the ideology of class convergence and class peace, of apathy and anti-pathology to 'politics' (which means surrender to bourgeois politics), of 'consumerism' and so on. However, life itself is drawing the working class into more and more political actions, into peoples' struggles on issues of national unity and integrity, in defence of communal harmony, etc.

The task is to integrate the workers' life experience of struggles, with the scientific teachings of socialism. To belittle the ideological work in the trade unions, to neglect it, is to allow the workers to be victims of bourgeois ideology. It is worthwhile recalling Lenin's words: "Bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology... it is more fully developed and it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination".

Trade Union education, ideological schooling has therefore to be undertaken as a task of priority. Camps and schools, study circles and reading groups have to be systematically planned.

—Corruption, petty-thievery, indifferent and irresponsible attitude towards public service and public property, urge for maximum personal gains and self-aggrandisement, such are the 'values' and 'virtues' of a 'free society'. This is spreading an atmosphere of moral degeneration and decadence in public life. Concretely, it is harming our public sector. A struggle against all this can be conducted only by a vigilant working class, which at the same time guards itself from being infected by this contagious disease. The cause of social development can be furthered only by a working class, which is morally strong and equipped with a forward-looking ideology.