CHAPTER V

Communalism and Colonial Reformism in the Labour Agitation

In the pre-war phase recruitment of labour on the railways on community, caste and religious basis had become a regular practice. The encouragement of Anglo-Indians as a loyal category and the potential racial tension in railway work operation had resulted in the sedimentation of opposition personalities: The race-conscious loyal whites, opposed to the colonial railwaymen fighting for their rights and swaraj. Post-war phase labour agitation both in its anti-colonial and reformist strands, had advocated the dismantling of the colonial structure of railway work force. 1

I Railway’s Response to Militant Agitation

Railway labour had formed 'political and seditious' unions which were to act as small organizational bastions for the fight

1 Following recommendations made by the Acworth Enquiry Committee in 1921 recruitment of natives in the railways was demanded by the public. For details see Chapter I.
for aware.² The Railway Board and Government of India had resen
ted these gains of the labour agitation.³ Its policy was to arrest
this agitation and its development along anti-colonial lines. Firstly,
the railway administration attempted to promote the reformist strand
of this agitation to the complete exclusion of the political current.
Though no conscious attempt was made by the Railway Board in the
post-1922 phase to destructure the colonial railway work force,
Indianization of the superior and upper subordinate posts was sugges-
ted. This was to act as a mild corrective to a distorted workforce
structure.⁴

The labour agitation of 1919-22 had forced the railway admin-
istration to accept its right to strike and to form unions with the

² Prominent amongst these unions were the N.W.R. General Workers'
Union, the All India Railway Labour Union, S.N.R., the E.I.R.
Indian Labour Union and the G.I.R. Railwaymen's Union. All
these unions had some common features. The leadership of these
unions was directly intertwined with those of the anti-colonial
mass agitation. The growth of these unions and their political
affiliations have been discussed in some detail in Chapters III
and IV.

³ The railway labour agitation posed very specific problems to
the railway administration; Firstly, the railway labour move-
ment was of an all India character and had evolved its all
India organizational forum — the A.I.R.F. Secondly, with in
the A.I.R.F. and outside it politically very vocal labour
leadership had emerged which was at once nationalist and anti-
imperialist. Thirdly, under communist influence this leader-
ship had successfully called major strikes thus expanding
their political and social base. Fourthly, the growth of an
all India anti-colonial railwaymen's agitation, especially
under communist influence, was seen to be fraught with dangers.

⁴ For the effect of Indianization on the colonial workforce of
the railways, see Chapter I.
object of struggling for a fair wage. Secondly, the potential growth of quasi-political unions was sought to be curbed by encouraging sponsored reformist unions which were allowed to operate within a narrow constitutional terrain of non-political labour activity. The formal recognition given by the Railway Board to the A.I.R.F. was a culmination of this policy.

The strike of 1925, under the leadership of the formidable communist union, was a major event in the railway labour agitation. During the years, 1925-1930, several attempts were made to curb communist influence amongst railwaymen. The most significant measure was directed at promoting communal divisions along religious lines amongst native labour and to encourage the current of labour reformism in the A.I.R.F., and in other railway labour unions all over India. Thus as a counterpoise to the growing communist influence and the tendency of militant general labour unionism, the railway administration promoted communalism, colonial reformism and administrative reform.

II Growth of Communalism in Railway Services

The existing historical environment of 1926 provided a ripe

5 For a discussion of wages see Chapter II.

6 The A.I.R.F. was formally recognized by the Railway Board at the time of the enquiry of the Whitley Commission in 1929. This recognition was part of a general policy to encourage reformist non-political labour associations so as to counteract the growing communist influence.

7 For a general discussion of the problem of communalism, see Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, forthcoming.
opportunity for the idea of communal representation in the railway services to grow and acquire a crystallized shape. The widespread communal tensions of the late 1920s also made its perverse inroad into the workshop labour in particular of Kharagpur. This was to accelerate the process of sedimentation of the communal identity amongst railwaymen. Communalism raised its ugly head simultaneously as communal rioting in the workshops and as an agitation for the reservation of jobs in the railway services.

The demand of Indianization of the railway services was a step in an attempt of the indigenous civil society to acquire control

---

8 Serious communal rioting occurred in Kharagpur on 29 June 1928: 8 killed, 14 wounded. At the new railway settlement 3 were murdered. At Chattispara, 1 was killed and 1 was injured, both Mohammedan and Hindu. On the 30 June, non-Muslim workmen came to the shops carrying steel rods. 2 were killed in the rioting. The local police, along with the Auxiliary Force of India and Eastern Frontier force were called to the workshops. Trouble extended to the villages outside Kharagpur. Several Muslim houses were burnt down. 9 Hindus were arrested. Workshops opened on 9 July 1928. R.L., Procs., B. Asa. 1929, p. 147/1-22. "Communal trouble at the Kharagpur workshops, 1928." A fresh wave of rioting occurred in September 1928. 5 Muslims were killed, and 20 injured in the rioting on 2 September 1928. Cause of this rioting was the killing of a cow and cutting the tongue of a Brahmini bull. Bombs and cigarette pieces were also found in the Gurudwara. Ibid., District Magistrate Midnapur to the Commissioner, Burdwan division, Chinsurah, 2 September, 1928; Statement, 5 September, 12 September 1928. On 21 September, workshops reopened but no Muslims were present. Englishman, 21 September 1928. Muslims asked for the segregation of their residential areas. Resolutions were passed at a Muslim mass meeting, 19 September 1928. It asked for security from the Hindus and Sikhs. They demanded that the railway assure them against any further communal trouble. Also Muslim proportion in the workshops should be raised to 33 per cent of the total workers.
of the colonial state. As the colonial state did not deny this principle of self-government it attempted to communalize the process of Indianization by creating community based divisions. Railway services was one such area where the government sought to promote communal divisions so as to splinter the emerging politicalized current of labour agitation and fragment the power of civil society and the people over the colonial state. This policy was directly connected with the process of formation of the new civil society in colonial India. As the emerging civil society was primarily constituted by the Hindus, the marginal religious minorities — Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees and Anglo-Indians — attempted to find a place in the apparatus of the colonial state by demanding proportional reservation of jobs.

The demand for recruitment of Muslims in the railway services was a part of a larger policy advocated by the communalists in the Legislative Assembly for the reservation of superior posts in public services on community basis.

Indianization of civil services and other governmental services was proposed by the Indians not just to meet the middle class unemployment problem. The demand was a first step of the indigenous civil society in acquiring full control of state apparatus.

For a discussion of the concept of civil society and the state see Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, pp. 12-13, 260-3.

For details see representations to Legislative Assembly during 1919-1930; Also see R.E., Proos, A., May 1929, n. 3966/2-22. "Muslim Representation on Railways"; Also see Representation of Muslim in the Railway Services, 1933.
From May 1929, one-third of the vacancies were reserved for the redress of marked communal inequalities. The purpose of this directive was that "... no branch of railway service would be reserved for any one class or community, but members of all classes of communities possessing the necessary qualifications should be eligible for appointment to any branch." However, this policy was not to be strictly applied "to inferior servants and to skilled artisans." 13

Even the issue of representation of Muslims in the railway services began as one of reservation for higher posts in 1924. In order to secure public support for this demand the issue was posed in the late 1920s in terms of general Muslim representation in the railway services with particular weightage to Muslim majority provinces. Once the issue was generalized to all aspects of railway services, it was taken up by the Muslim Associations and resolutions were passed in the Legislative Assembly. Since 1924 questions were asked in the Legislative Assembly and resolutions were passed by Mohammadan Associations and representations were sent. In April 1924, Maulvi Abdul Karim enquired into the number of Muslim officers employed in the agency, locomotive, carriage and wagon and stores departments of the Indian railways. Again in November 1925, Abdul Karim complained in the Legislative Assembly regarding the insignificant appointment of Muslims on the N.W.R. A resolution was passed by the committee of Central National Mohammadan Association, in October 1925, demanding appointment of Muslims in superior posts on the railways. For details of Muslim representation see R.E., Progs, B, May 1929, n. 3966/2-22; Also see R.E., Progs, B, May 1932, n. 530/1-9.

12 "Representation of Muslims in the Railway Services." R.E., Progs, B, December 1929, n. 2395/4-9, pp. 4-9.

13 Ibid.

14 Since 1924 questions were asked in the Legislative Assembly and resolutions were passed by Mohammadan Associations and representations were sent. In April 1924, Maulvi Abdul Karim enquired into the number of Muslim officers employed in the agency, locomotive, carriage and wagon and stores departments of the Indian railways. Again in November 1925, Abdul Karim complained in the Legislative Assembly regarding the insignificant appointment of Muslims on the N.W.R. A resolution was passed by the committee of Central National Mohammadan Association, in October 1925, demanding appointment of Muslims in superior posts on the railways. For details of Muslim representation see R.E., Progs, B, May 1929, n. 3966/2-22; Also see R.E., Progs, B, May 1932, n. 530/1-9.
service, Muslim public opinion began to pressurize the government. In the Indian owned Muslim communal press the issue of reservation of jobs in the railways for the Muslims began to grow in importance by the 1930s. The implementation of the policy of communal reservation faced serious problems: In 1930, the first priority of the Railway Board was to give employment to the G.I.P.R. ex-strikers. This demand could not be ignored as the A.I.R.F. and the communists were threatening as all railwaymen's general strike on this issue. The second problem was the demand of the Anglo-Indians to secure a

15 R.E., Proos. A, May 1929, n. 3966/2-22. Local level complaints were made : Ahmadiya Anjuman-I-Ishtiaq-I-Islam, Lahore demanded the recruitment of Muslims in the office of the Agent N.W.R. Muslim Association, Peshawar, asked for more employment to Muslims on the N.W.R., R.E., Proos. B, June 1932, n. 3966/ (Part II)/88-101; Also see R.E., Proos. B, September 1932, n. 917/1-10. Representations were received from Maulvi Sir Mohammad Yakub regarding the employment of Muslims in the Lucknow division of the E.I.R. Muslim Unity Board, Karachi also demanded greater Muslim reservations in the railway services.

16 Star of India, 3 July 1935; Eastern Times, 13 August 1935; Railwayman and Muslim Outlook also carried several articles; Also see Weekly Mail, 16 September 1935.

17 The re-employment of the G.I.P.R. ex-strikers and the retrenched workmen continued to attract attention. For details see R.E., Proos. B, May 1937, n. 269/77-80. "Representation made by the A.I.R.F. at the seventh half-year's meeting between the Railway Board and the Federation," Also see R.E., Proos. B, June 1937, n. 1/1-67; Also see Bombay Chronicle, 11 July 1933. "G.I.P. Railway and Workers."

18 R.E., Proos. A, July 1931, n. 360/1-28. "Resolutions passed by the A.I.R.F. to declare an All India Strike on Railways on account of retrenchment of staff."
The Muslim communal leaders were to realize that a simple policy of reservation did not assist their cause.

Reservation of a certain percentage of appointments for the redress of communal inequalities had done more harm to Mussalmans than good. This had resulted in the Mussalmans being placed at the level with smaller communities like the Sikhs, who were a branch of the Hindus, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Parsees. Its practical effect was that the posts reserved for minority communities were often filled by candidates from other minority communities to the total exclusion of the Mussalmans. While on other occasions only one out of three or four appointments reserved under this rule was given to the Mussalmans and the rest to the members of other communities.

Here the issue of reservation placed the Muslims in a still more precarious situation. The liberal Muslim communists desired representation in the colonial state not to become an appendage of it but an important segment of the emerging civil society. The Muslim intelligentsia suggested first that the representation of "Mussalmans be treated separately from that of the other minorities of India." Secondly, they demanded that a higher percentage be

---

19 R.E., Procs. A, October 1934, n. 660/4-16; Also see Chapter I.
21 Ibid., R.E., Procs. A, May 1929, n. 3922/2-22. Muslim members of the Legislative Assembly, Muhammad Khan Sheik Sadiq Hasan, Major Nawab Malik, Teliq Mohammad Khan, Sir Zulfiqar Khan, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, Abdullah Syed Musa'in Iman, Mian Muhammad Shah Nawab, Maulvi Mohammad Ya'qub, Muhammad Sahib Bahadur and Khan Bahadur were active in fighting for proportional representation for the Muslims.
fixed in those provinces in which they were numerically larger and educationally superior, for instance in Punjab, Bengal and United Provinces. 22 Thirdly it was suggested that provincial Muslim committees be established within each of the railways as to "assist the railway administration in protecting the interests of the community in matters of recruitment and promotions." 23 It was also argued that as the Muslim population was 22 per cent, the same proportion of appointments in the railway services should be allotted to the Muslims. 24 This proportion could only be attained if Muslims were appointed on a favoured basis in the grades of Rs. 250 and above. It was argued that as long as recruitment continued to be in the hands of non-Muslims, the Muslims would always be discriminated. 25 This was an attempt to acquire a favourable and competitive position vis-à-vis the other communities in the growing civil society of the new nation. However, such an attempt was to become

22 R.E., Proc., A, August 1934, n. 3966/1-29. This demand was opposed by the Rajputana Provincial Hindu Sabha which asked the Agent B.O. & C. I.R. that as the Hindus constituted 75 per cent of the total population an attempt to reserve 33 per cent of the jobs for the minorities may be unfair and would create serious tensions if put into effect.

23 Ibid., p. 22; Also see Representation for greater employment of Muslims on the N.W. Railway from the Muslim Association Peshawar, R.E., Proc., B, June 1932, n. 3966 (Part II) /68-101. A meeting of the Association was held on 5 June 1932, which demanded recruitment of Muslims not only on community basis but also on a provincial basis. Representatives from the Muslim League, Lahore also asked for fixation of a percentage for the Muslims on the railways.


25 Ibid.
problematic for two reasons: First, the Muslim intelligentsia and middle classes could not secure a favourable competitive position without the support of the colonial state. Second, such a support would anyhow alienate them from the rest of the indigenous civil society. Such was the historic predictament of a social group which was a late comer to the historical scene.

(a) Emergence of Communal Labour Unions

A significant corollary of this agitation, for the reservation of jobs for Muslims on the railways, was the growth of sectarian unions. On the northern and eastern railways, Muslim railwaymen's associations were formed. In 1931, the All India Muslim Railway Employees' Association came into existence. This combination consisted of Muslim railwaymen's unions on the A.B.R., E.B.R., E.I.R., B.N.R. and N.W.R. The government did not extend official recognition to this association but accepted its salient demand of communal reservation on provincial lines: Muslims were given 25 per cent

26 R.E., Procs, 8, July 1934, n. 135/8-30. The prominent amongst these was the E.I.R. Muslim Employees' Association with Dr. Zia-ud-din Ahmed as its president and Maswood Ahmed as its vice-president. It published a fortnightly from Lucknow, The Railwayman.

27 This association demanded recognition from the Railway Board at par with the A.I.R.F., which by 1930 had come to be dominated by the communists. R.E., Procs, 8, July 1934, n. 135/8-30. For its demands see Statement, Dr. Zia-Uddin Ahmed, president, All India Muslim Railway Employees' Association, R.E., Procs, 6, May 1933, n. 3966/101-33. It was only the current of Muslim communalism, and of course the Anglo-Indians, which was able to secure effective government support. Follow-
reservation on the railways in all provinces. In the Punjab and Bengal the Muslims were given a proportional weightage of 60 and 45 per cent respectively. 28

This fixation of a percentage for Muslims occurred after a long drawn agitation had been launched. 29 Representation from Muslims through the E.I.R., E.B.R. and B.M. Railway Muslim Employees' Unions continued to highlight railway appointments showing the need for adequate Muslim recruitment. N.W.R. Muslim Association, Peshawar

Cont'd... f.n. 27

ing the sanction of proportional representation to the Muslims and other minority communities mainly Anglo-Indians, other social groups also began agitating for proportional recruitment. Ramgarhia Central Federation, Punjab made a representation on behalf of the Ramgarhia community. On the E.B.R. depressed classes in subordinate services asked for a greater share in upper subordinate jobs. R.E., Procs. B, December 1935, n. 158/1-6. Similarly, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, asked for reservation of jobs for the Sikhs, Orriyas and the Buddhist Association, Chittagong also demanded proportional reservation of railway jobs for their respective communities.

28 R.E., Procs. A, December 1935, n. 120/1-10. After the Minority Committee Report, 1932, the Muslims middle classes agitated to get proportional representation in lower railway services. On the N.W.R. as the Muslims were represented on a large scale in the lower grades block retrenchment was bound to affect this community more than others. The issue for recognition of Muslim employees' associations was directly linked to retrenchment. The militant communist led railway labour agitation of 1929-30 had failed to annul the retrenchment proposals of the Railway Board. The workers now shifted to communal organizations as to avoid the axe of retrenchment. It was in this context that Muslim communal organizations were formed and they did benefit those workers who were Muslims. In fact this fact was to become the basis of communal riots in the Kharagpur and Gorakhpur workshops. R.E., Procs. A, May 1932, n. 830/1-9.

29 R.E., Procs. A, August 1935, n. 113/1-32. "Fixation of the percentage of Muslim and other minority communities in subordinate and superior railway services."
had earlier made similar representation in 1932. This agitation for Muslim recruitment was confined to superior and subordinate posts, such as clerks and store-keepers — the vocal colonial petty-bourgeoisie. These associations became the watch dogs of 'Muslim' interests in different regions. Mosque Committee, Kharagpur, complained in 1936 against the non-appointment of Muslims in various offices of the B.N.R. The Indian Railway Muslim Employees' Association demanded in 1936 that night training schools for shunters and firemen be restarted at locomotive sheds. It also complained against the alleged excessive retrenchment of Muslim workshop employees on the N.W.R. As these communal bodies became spokesmen of sectional interests, it created aSigned in the railway workforce which worked to the advantage of the employer.

In this way though the government did not give formal recognition to Muslim communalism as existing in various railway unions; it allowed this current to grow as a loyalist counterweight to the A.I.R.F. and various communist controlled unions. This exercise was aimed at weakening communist led anti-colonial railway

30 R.F., Procs. 8, June 1932, n. 3966 (Part II)/58-101; Also see Star of India, 6 July 1935; Weekly Mail, 16 September 1935.

31 Resolutions passed by the All-India Railway Muslim Employees' Association, R.F., Procs. 8, August 1936, n. 19/1-9.

32 Dr. Zia-ud-din Ahmad of the All India Muslim Employees' Association and G.W.A. Gidney, representative of non-Indian railwaymen, proposed in September 1937 to start a corporation of Railway Unions, which would be formed by amalgamating the All India Muslim Employees' Association and the National Union of Railwaymen of India and Burma, a non-Indian railwaymen's union. R.F., Procs. 8, October 1937, n. 134/1-5.
labour agitation. Promotion of communal divisions in the railway labour agitation was only one of the methods employed. Fostering an environment of colonial reformism, recognizing the liberal reformists in the A.I.R. and banning communist led unions all over India were the other methods.

III Colonial Reformism

In the post-1930 years the railway labour agitation had entered a new phase. The post-war agitation of 1919-22 was entirely spontaneous. However, during its course strike committees or embryonic forms of associations emerged on all railways. Some of these associations, specifically those representing the railway petty-bourgeoisie, clerical and lower supervisory grades, had emerged in post-1922 years as formed trade unions.33 The communist initiative of the late 1920s had also assisted the process of crystallization of militant strike committees into general labour unions representing all grades and categories.34 However, communist led strikes on the N.W.R. in 1925, on the C.I.R. and S.I.R. in 1929 and on the G.I.P. R. in 1930 failed to procure any substantial economic gains.35

33 For a history of the trade unions, see written and oral evidence of the trade union leadership. RGIA, VIII, I, II.
34 See Chapter IV for details of these militant general labour unions.
35 Ibid.
Railway Board and the Government of India in collaboration with the
colonial reformists — N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, Diwan Chaman Lall and
others — initiated a phase of labour reform. Implementation of the
recommendations of the Whitley Commission was the culmination of
this policy.

Colonial labour welfare measures and promotion of communal
divisions in the railway workforce were an adjunct to the current
of colonial reformism which grew up as an opposition to the growing
communist influence. It was a genuine attempt at articulation and
struggle for redress of grievances of railwaymen. 36

(a) E.I.R. Union, Moredad

During 1919-20, the non-workshopmen, especially those paid
higher than Rs. 30 and employed in non-intensive categories of
traffic, loco-running and engineering departments, tried to improve
their conditions of work and life by forming stable trade unions which
adopted forms of protest and representation within the given consti-
tutional terrain. Often alternating between two countenanced —
strike and non-strike — course of action. On all railways after
1926 under the Trade Union Act of 1926 recognized unions got cry-

36 In the Legislative Assembly this current found in N.M. Joshi
its natural proponent. As early 1924 N.M. Joshi moved a
resolution for the appointment of a committee to probe into
the grievances of railway subordinates. A similar resolu-
tion was also moved by M. & S. M.R. Employees' Union in its
meeting of 18 August 1924. N.M. Joshi Private Papers, File
stallized.

On the E.I.R. in Lucknow, Khagaul, Moradabad and Lillooah the E.I.R. Union, after the 1929 strike, became influential. The basis of this union had been laid in the 1922 general strike and by the O.R.R. Union. With the amalgamation of the O.R.R. with the E.I.R. in 1924 the Workers' Union of Lucknow also found affiliation to the E.I.R. Union. The most articulate section of this union was the Moradabad branch. Over the course of years this branch established for itself a reputation of being the spokesman of a current of colonial reformism. All the railway trade unions demanded attention of their respective administrations on issues, such as, recruitment, dismissals, medical re-examination, hours of work, low wages and deductions from them, adequate over time payment, apprentice system and blocked promotion line. In this section an attempt has been made to probe into the structure of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of problems faced by railwaymen in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of these problems, mentioned above, were common to all sections of railwaymen all over India. Here we have probed in some depth the spectrum of problems raised by the E.I.R. Union, Moradabad. This union was representative of the current of
colonial reformism which stood for negotiations, conciliation and non-militant mode of labour agitation.

(b) Recruitment and Discharge

The railway recruitment and promotion policy was found wanting because it was based on "... differential treatment and racial partiality." for instance in the loco-running the vacancies of "F" class assistant station-masters, deputy controllers and mail drivers were reserved for the non-Indians. According to this union, appointments were made to the higher grades directly at the cost of even the most senior and deserving candidates in the lower grades. The issue of arbitrary dismissal and discharge and complaint against the inbuilt insecurity of railway service continually figured in the union correspondence with the E.I.R. and other

38 R.C.E., VIII, I. Written Evidence, pp. 464-66. Indians could not become station-masters. To become an assistant station-master an Indian had to first pass the telegraph, train passing, goods coaching, block and interlocking examinations and serve as a signaller for some time. Even if the Indian was appointed to this post he received only Rs. 40 with an annual increment of Rs. 3 rising to Rs. 55 per month. In contrast an Anglo-Indian was appointed at a bigger station with starting pay of Rs. 260 and with a periodic increment of Rs. 10.


41 Ibid. The E.I.R. Union also published its journal, the Weekly...
labour leaders. 42

In case of the skilled railway work force, unaffected by seasonal migration, a complex structure of variables — arbitrary modes of recruitment, discharge and dismissals along with planned retrenchment — had influenced labour turnover. Discharge or dismissal of a worker occurred when he violated the 'service agreement bond'. 43 The service regulations were implemented by the upper subordinate staff — the foreman in the workshops and the traffic controller in the traffic department. Invariably, in the pre-1930 phase, these posts were held by Anglo-Indians and the domiciled Europeans who were not unknown for their hostility to their subordinates. 44

Cont'd... f.n. 41

Mazdoor, edited by K.C. Mitra, in which corrupt practices of the E.I.R. were continually brought to the notice of the public.

42 Commenting on the Weekly Mazdoor, N.M. Joshi wrote to K.C. Mitra, its editor, "In your newspaper you should continue to ventilate grievances of your members; but avoid as far as possible, at least for sometime, undertaking upon yourself the duty of exposing the shortcoming of the officers in other matters. That is the business of the general public and not of the union." N.M. Joshi Private Paper, file n. 19, 12 July 1924. Following continual denunciation of the E.I.R. by the Mazdoor, recognition of the union was withdrawn.

43 See for the provisions of the service agreement, R.C.L. VIII, I, Appendix (D). Not only the Indian workers but also the Anglo-Indian subordinate railway employees demanded a uniform service agreement applicable to all sections of the railway workers. Memorandum Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Railway Employees, R.C.L. VIII, I, pp. 632-33. The Agent G.I. P.R. regarded the issue of insecurity of service "a burning question." D.S. Burn Agent G.I.P.R., R.C.L. VIII, II, K 2980, This service agreement regulation had been invariably used to terminate the services of union leaders and of workers...
Another cause of discharge of a worker was the spreading of discontent amongst the railway employees. Discharge of trade union officials was quite common; in all railway systems, invariably, the services of trade union officials and militant workers were terminated not only on an individual basis, but also in the late 1920s, as a part of a generalized policy of retrenchment.

Formally, dismissal or discharge of workers occurred due to unauthorized leave. The overstaying of leave or absence due to ill health or failing to do the required task with the desired efficiency was considered a serious offence. The conditions of work were severe as in case of the running staff. A refusal to go out with a train, ...

Cont'd... f.n. 43


44 On the B.N.R. following the dismissal of M.V.R. Naidu, an union official, a spontaneous strike occurred in August 1927. Of course the underlying cause of this strike was the proposed retrenchment of 435 workmen. One of the salient demands of the strikers was the abolition of service agreement bond and demand for security of service. For details of this strike see, R.E., Proce. B., September 1928, n. 5556/52-56.

45 John Miller, an ex-European guard, and president N.W.R. General Workers' Union was dismissed in 1920 prior to the threatened Saharanpur strike. N.W.R. General Workers' Union, R.C.L., VIII, I, p. 397.

46 A block discharge of 91 workers occurred after the 1927 strike in B.N.R. at Kharagpur, B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, R.C.L., VIII, I, pp. 533-35; About 17,000 workers were replaced during
except in case of sickness certified by a competent railway medical authority, would render a driver or a fireman liable to summary dismissal or prosecution. 47

(c) Medical Examination and Health

The problem of medical examination 48 had been a continual source of tension in railway work operations. Every specific quality of work made the workers prone to peculiar strains and stress of the industrial system. In case of the running staff, long working hours, resulted in the occurrence of ailments of the respiratory organs and those of the eyes. On the N.W.R. primarily because trains passed through long dusty tracts, the workers were prone to such ailments. 49 On the G.I.P.R. instead of being given adequate medical relief or appropriate rest to recover, some categories of ailing workers had to undergo medical re-examination. In fact it was alleged that because of bad eyesight they were down-graded or even

Cont'd... f.n. 46

the N.W.R. strike of 1925. The Tribune, 11 June 1925, Agent's Communiqué. Also see Chapter II for details of the retrenchment effected in the workshops in the late 1920.

47 I.C. Clarkeon, Secretary, National Union of Railwaymen of India and Burma, R.C.I.L., VIII, 1, p. 458.

48 A mass meeting of the E.I.R. Union Lucknow also protested against the prejudicial medical examination imposed by the railway administration. R.E.I. Progs., B, May 1927, n. 13/1-2.

49 This issue had acquired agitational proportions on the G.I. P.R., especially on the Nagpur branch. For details see, Chapter IV.
A generalized demand of the unions was that all kinds of ill health arising out of conditions of work, must be looked into by medical experts, and the expenses be recovered by the workers through the Compensation Act.  

The railway unions, in general, advocated a scheme of sickness insurance. In fact, they desired that the scheme be made compulsory for all sections of railway workers including those who were part-time agricultural workers. Ratification by the government of the International Labour Convention on sickness insurance was demanded. Compensation and benefits were considered by the railway workers a necessity in case of unhealthy stations on the E.B.R., N.M.R., A.S.R. and B.B. & C.I.R.  

On the E.I.R. the existing medical facilities could have ameliorated the conditions of living of the workers and improved their efficiency at work but for the perverse bureaucratic practices: to become a victim of a disease for a railway worker was a curse. He not only faced the hazards of procuring adequate medical benefits to retrieve his health but also confronted the danger of being down-


manner of rationalization of work was objectively so structured as to break up the strength of the growing railway labour movement of the workshops men. 60

It was, primarily, the loco-running staff who faced very specific problems regarding hours of work. They worked in two shifts. Night's work was not considered different from the day work, and the period of rest was not adequate. 61 Formally, the running staff worked up to 60 hours a week; effectively the hours of work went up from 60 to 80 hours on goods trains. The long continual hours of work imposed a serious strain on the health and efficiency of the workers. 62 It was suggested by workers that a triple shift system be introduced; this of course implied an increase in the work force. The running staff was aware that such a system would have meant less money per head; but it ensured better health, and lesser breakdowns and accidents, as well as more employment. 63

60 B. Shiva Rao, The Industrial Worker in India, pp. 192-93; Also refer to the Report on Trade Disputes Act, 1929.

61 Workers were prone to night fatigue and as a consequence many accidents occurred. R.C.L., VIII, I, N.W.R. General Workers' Union, p. 408; Memorandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 63-91.

62 General Report R.C.L., pp. 159-60.

A general complaint from the workers was that even from the low wages the numerous deductions caused a further cut in real wages. The system of fining was a part of the railways' mode of functioning. According to the administration, fining allowed for "caution, diligence and regularity." Fines were imposed on account of non-authorized absence, bad work due to negligence, refusal to work, coming late to work, breaking of rules, and loss of tools, etc. The railway trade unions demanded abolition of fines. They also charged the railway administration with arbitrariness in the imposition of fines. They argued that not only fines were imposed unfairly and without any formalized procedure but also there existed naked favouritism in their imposition. Railways disbursed these fine funds in the form of aid to hospitals, children's schools, Christmas sports, educational grants, recreation clubs, and religious institutions. As the Anglo-Indians and domiciled Europeans availed these facilities, the fines paid by the laboring men were invariably

64 Memrandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 136-40.
65 Memrandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 136-40.
66 Memrandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 136-40.
used for the benefit or recreation of the upper layer of the railway staff. The Indian workers objected most to the existence of fines and to their utilization for the collective enjoyment of the superior European and Anglo-Indian staff. It was suggested that the fines be spent in general for the benefit of the strata who paid them.

(f) Technical Education

A generalized grievance, articulated by the native workers in all railway systems was that no efficient system of technical education existed which allowed workers in lower grades to move to the higher posts. It was argued that the absence of educational facilities — technical and academic — allowed the Anglo-Indians to monopolize the superior posts. In fact, agitation for technical schools was conducted in the 1920s, by all sections of the railway workers on the E.I.R., E.B.R., N.W.R., G.I.P.R., S.I.R., M. & S.M.R. and B.B. & C.I.R. Following this agitation, a policy of technical education for all sections of the railway workers was adopted; nevertheless the Anglo-Indian labour aristocracy continued to get a preferential treatment, not only in the processes of recruitment for

apprenticeship but also after it.69

However, E.I.R. unions drew attention to the most compelling problem — service agreement — of the railwaymen all over India. Service agreement or the terms of labour contract allowed the railway administration to use its arbitrary authority to dismiss or discharge individual workers on a month's notice. The reformist current of the labour agitation, even involving the whites, grew up as a response to the tyrannical work-contract with the Leviathan.70

(g) Grass-root level complaints of Railwaymen

In the Moradabad division, the E.I.R. union had grass-root level organization. Some evidence exists regarding the nature of railwaymen's complaints in this division according to individual categories and various stations. The complaints of the staff from Moradabad, Bareilly and Pratapgarh have been made available. It has been possible to examine the station-level and individual basis of this union. The most vocal section of the railwaymen of the E.I.R. Moradabad division seemed to be the traffic categories.71

69 R.C.L., VIII, I, Memorandum E.I.R. Union Lillooah, p. 478; Memorandum B.B. & C.I.R. Workers' Federation, pp. 427-28; Rai Sahib Chandrika Prasad, p. 432; Memorandum E.B.R. India Employees' Association, pp. 511-12; Association of Carriages and Wagon Indian Apprentices in B.B. & C.I.R., p. 433; Memorandum A.I.R.F., p. 643; Memorandum G.I.P.R., Staff Union, p. 445; Memorandum E.I.R. Union Moradabad, pp. 474-76; Memorandum N.W.R. Union, pp. 359-60. Also see Table n. 5 for a statement of the promotion lines open to the Indian workers on the N.W.R.

70 R.C.L., VIII, I, Appendix (D). "Service agreement of the Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Natives. This issue was given a formal consideration following recommendations by the Royal Commission on Labour. For details refer to R.L., Procs. B, June 1935, n. 1401/1-22. "Recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour."

railway station staff and the loco and carriage staff of the Moradabad division protested against the appointment of some of the senior officials to these places. The common complaint was that the officials had meted out 'harsh and unsympathetic treatment' to the Indian staff in the past.\footnote{Ibid.} A barrage of protest had accumulated from all sections of the loco employees regarding frequent changes in the engines used. It was also stated that the engines in use were not properly repaired which resulted in frequent engine failures and accidents. Those loco-men who had been complaining about the irregular functioning of the loco-department were allegedly demoted and punished in several other ways.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Bareilly loco, carriage, traffic and electric staff demanded adequate sanitary facilities.\footnote{Ibid.} The railwaymen housed in Bareilly complained about inadequate repairs of their quarters.\footnote{Ibid.} The shunters, Jamadars and pointsmen complained of being overworked to 12 hours as a result of the reduction of the strength of the work-

\footnote{Ibid. It was alleged that M.C. Tosh, a permanent way inspector, Bareilly, in 1930, used his trolleymen for harassing the gangman and gangmates. He even assaulted a gangman and later on had him dismissed.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid. Also see E.I.R., Union Moradabad, R.C.L., VIII, I, p. 464.}
force in their categories. 76 The Lucknow Indian staff complained against the 'unsympathetic and discourteous' treatment meted out by medical officers, who failed a number of the employees in the eye-sight test. 77 The ticket-sorting staff Lucknow demanded new uniforms and complained against the paucity of holidays. 78 Pratapgarh station staff complained that leave and passes were not granted at the required time. The blocking of promotions lines amongst the higher clerical staff at Pratapgarh had created tensions amongst the lower staff. 79 Besides category and grade complaints individual grievances centred around the question of recruitment, vacancies, transfers, blocked promotions, provident fund, uniforms and deduction of fines. 80

III B.N.R. Indian Labour Union and Left National Reformism

The B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, since its inception, had been a militant union influenced by congressmen. Its leadership, though opposed the intrusion of communist ideology into the labour agita-

76 Ibid. Also see C.I.R. Union Moradabad, R.C.L., VIII, I, p. 464.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid. In Pratapgarh, amongst the loco-running staff the shortage of uniforms was also being resented.

80 At Rosa, the station staff who had been allotted quarters were demanding electricity and some sort of security arrangement at night. In Pratapgarh, the turners and fitters complained of inadequate housing facilities. R.C.L., Proc., 8, May 1930, n. 101/75-100.
tion, did not oppose the politicalization of railwaymen. In fact under its aegis, in the late 1920s, militant trade union agitation was launched. V.V. Giri, the leader of the M. & S.M.R. Employees' Union, and general secretary of the A.I.R.F. was also affiliated to this union. This current of railwaymen's agitation could be characterized as an experiment in national reformist labour struggle. Here we have examined some of the problems which the B.N.R. Indian Labour Union sought to redress. These problems were common to all categories of railwaymen and hence their significance.

On the B.N.R. too, the B.N.R. Indian Labour Union Kharagpur expressed its grievances regarding the railway policy of recruitment in which racial discrimination was prevalent especially in the recruitment of apprentices and drivers. This union complained that at one stage in 1924 excess staff was recruited and later on block-retrenchment was carried out. \(^{81}\) The object of this mode of recruitment was to continually shuffle up the workforce on the railways thus disallowing the growth of group solidarity and class consciousness. As the whites provided the more stable workforce for the intensive operations, the

\(^{81}\) Retrenchment was an effective tool to remove undesirables railwaymen from a particular railway. R.C.H., VIII, I, B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, p. 546. In the workshops retrenchment was carried out as to rationalise the workprocess. N.W.R. General Workers' Union, pp. 401-02; Rai Sahib Chandrika Prasad, p. 433; B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, pp. 533-34. For details of the strike, protesting against retrenchment on the B.N.R., see R.F., Procs., 8, September 1928, n. 5556/92-56; "Kharagpur Workshop Strike." Another strike occurred on the same issue on the B.N.R. in 1937. R.F., Procs., 8, July 1937, n. 12/1-5 (Part I).
Indians in the non-intensive grades could be through dismissals, discharge, retrenchment, transfers and communal divisions continually 'shunted' about.

One of the main complaints of the B.N.R. Indian Labour Union was the victimization of its union officials. Several officials of the B.N.R. Indian Labour Union had been dismissed without a chargesheet or enquiry. Similarly on the M.& S.M.R. and B.B. & C.I.R. strikes occurred in which railway workshopmen put up a stiff resistance to the policy of block retrenchment. On the B.B. & C.I.R. in end August 1928 a plan was made to transfer the workshops from Parle to Dhand. The railway administration offered special terms for voluntary resignation.

(a) Protest against the Employment of Contract Labour

This union made a representation regarding the use of contractual labour. On the B.N.R. and B. & N.W.R., by the 1920s the railways

---

82 This had been a general complaint of railwaymen's unions all over India. The railway administration had not been sympathetic towards the emerging trade unions. R.C.L., VIII, 1, E.B.R. Indian Employees' Association, p. 523; B.N.R. Union, pp. 773-74; N.W.R. General Workers' Union, pp. 399-400, 424-27. W.V.R. Naidu, Kharagpur, branch secretary, Indian Labour Union; B.N.R., was discharged in 1927; S.S.N. Murty, branch secretary, Shojindih of the same union was discharged but was reinstated on the condition of future satisfactory service. Sheikh Yusuf of Palasee loco-shed, executive member of the same union was also discharged. R.C.L., VIII, 1, pp. 532-33.

83 For details refer to R.L., Proce., 8, September 1930, n. 114/1-52. On the M.& S.M.R., too the strike commenced in the Parambur Workshop on 24 October 1932 and spread to Arkanam and Hubli by early November. The strike continued till January 1933. For
had begun to employ a considerable percentage of labour through contractors. On the B.N.R. contract labour came to be used for coaling engines, unloading coal in sheds and as cheap labour during strikes. Contractors were notorious in providing blacklegs in breaking strikes. In Kharagpur, the railway administration in its efforts to lessen dependence on the turbulent workshopmen contracted out work for the manufacture of loco spare parts to private firms.

The obvious cause for contracting out work was to save on the employment of a large workforce and the necessary amenities to be provided to it. The union complained that irregular shuffling of the workforce disturbed the 'stability of service'. As regards contract labour the railway had no control over its living conditions.

Cont'd... f.n. 83


84 Workmen were employed through contractors, as it was simpler to tackle them during strikes. They could be just dismissed without any notice. ReCa, VIII, II, Statement Guruswami. B.& N.W.R. Railwaymen's Association suggested the abolition of this mode of labour recruitment. ReCa, VIII, I, B. & N.W.R. Railwaymen's Association, p. 498. Cruickshank was of the view that it was necessary to have labour employed through contractors, but such labour should be eligible to provision of housing and other such amenities; also see "Representation from the A.I.R.F. against the substitution of contract for department work." ReCa, Proag. B, July 1937, n. 23/1-3.

85 ReCa, VIII, I, B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, pp. 540-41; All India Railwaymen's Federation, pp. 639-60; N.W.R. General Worker's Union, pp. 423-24.

"which were a menace to the improvement of conditions of the railway labourers." 87

This union also agitated for a complete overhaul of the recruitment policy of the B.N.R. It asked for the establishment of free public employment agencies including equal employer and employee representation on every railway. Secondly, the union demanded that no surplus hands be recruited and; lastly it demanded that full enforcement of Washington convention regarding unemployment be enforced. 88

(b) Technical Education

In case of promotions this union demanded the abolition of institutionalized racial discrimination. It asked that technical education should be standardized. Furthermore 'the incumbent employees, illiterate and semi-skilled' be allowed to qualify themselves for superior jobs through higher studies pursued in technical institutes opened by the railways. On the railway system where 80 per cent of the railway employees began their careers as unskilled workers with minimal or no education, the issue of education for

87 Ibid. "We will save in not having to spend a large amount of capital in building quarters at Kharagpur for, if we can make a substantial reduction in the number." Letter from the Managing Director, B.N.R., to the Agent B.N. Railway, Calcutta Workshops, in *R.C.L.*, VIII, I, p. 506. The abolition of contract labour was one of the main demands of railway unions.

These workers were of crucial significance; and not only for the workers whose promotion, leave and wages depended on acquiring technical skill and formal education but also for the railways. For the optimum efficient functioning of the railways, skill and high levels of literacy among the workers was a pre-requisite. Railways had shown indifference to the degree of education and skill acquired by Indian railway workers still 1920. Workers having realized the need for education had agitated for it. In fact in the strike wave of 1919-22, it was one of their salient demands. It is only after 1922 that the railway administration took initiative: by 1930 in N.W.R., two experimental schools were being run at Lahore and Sibi, to give liberal education to the loco staff. On E.B.R., 9 night schools were run by the railway administration. In 1930, on the E.I.R., there were 19 primary schools and 37 schools for the workers of the operating department. On S.N.R., 14 schools for giving primary education and teaching workers reading, writing and elementary mathematics, had come into existence by 1929. The Asanaul school was begun in 1921. The Central School of Chandauli was

89 Memorandum Railway Board, pp. 77-83.

90 The superior subordinate grades — Anglo-Indians — had special technical training institutes exclusively run for them in India. Need to educate Indian staff was only accepted by the railway administration after a decade long agitation, conducted not only by the workers and their representatives but also by various political organisations. As early as 1911 Mr Gokhale had moved an amendment to the Factories Act of 1911 to compel employers to offer free education for all needy employees for three hours a day. Memorandum A.I.R.F., R.C.L., VIII, p. 64.

91 Memorandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 77-83.
opened in 1925. It coached 100 refresher students annually, 40 at a time. Nine institute started in 1926; providing training and education to 395 students per year. Kotelkhpat school began in 1928. It was initially situated at Lyallpur, and imparted technical education to 583 students.92

(c) Wages and Piece-Work

The Indian Labour Union B.N.R. made the most stringent critique of the railways in its policy of wages especially the piece-work system prevalent in the engineering department and in the machine shops. Piece work had become unpopular because it created serious disparities among the workforce and began to effect the health of the majority of the workshopmen. Sickness on account of piece-work meant a lose in earnings of daily rated men who were not given such leave with pay so as to recoup their health. Piece work also allowed harrassment by rate fixers and estimators.93 Besides the peculiarities of the wage structure there existed serious anomalies in the mode of payment. Mode of payment of wages on the railways was by the day or by the month. In case of the workshops of several railways, piece-work had been in vogue.94 In the B.N.R. workshops, the piece-work rates were 33.5 per cent above the basic rate. But the mode of fixing the rates was arbitrary, allowing for favouritism and

92 Ibid.
94 Memorandum Railway Board to R.C.L., pp. 142-43.
all the railways the growing desire for improvement expressed itself
in the growth of the reformist current of labour agitation. Political
affiliations and leanings of the railwaymen did not at any stage
side track the issue of reform. But as political trade unionism was
not acceptable to the railway administration dissociation of politics
from reformism was a corollary of the Railway Board's policy. 100

IV Radical Current of Labour Reform and Politics

As different from the current of colonial and national reform-
mism, the N.W.R. labour agitation, especially its politicalized sec-
tion, proposed a structure of demands. Though these demands may
have been utopian, in the given historical situation, they presented
a projection of the dreams and hopes of railwaymen and Indian labour.
In this section the programmes of the two N.W.R. unions are detailed
as to bring out, by contrast, the radical proposals put forward by
the N.W.R. General Worker's Union, giving an outline of a new
conception of labour politics of 'labour aware'.

On the N.W.R. the current of political trade union got splin-
tered after the 1925 strike. The en mass retrenchment of nearly
17,000 workers including some of the most militant leaders of the

Cont'd... f.n. 99

and oral evidence are the most valuable records available that
give us a glimpse into the spectrum of problems faced by rail-
waymen in the 1920s and 1930s.

100 For a detailed discussion of the response of railway adminis-
tration to the political agitation of railway labour, see
Chapter VI.
labour agitation brought a near collapse of the N.W.R. labour movement. The refusal by the railway administration to recognize a powerful representative union and its willful suppression of the 1925 strike was an attempt to subvert the growth of independent organs of people's power in the colonial society.101 The policy of large scale dismissals during the 1925 strike was pursued so as to remove the militant workers from the labour agitation. This was done by simultaneously promoting the reformist union, the N.W.R. Union, in opposition to the General Worker's Union of the N.W.R. reconstituted in 1928. However, both these unions were by 1928 advocating the cause of labour reform on the railways.102

The N.W.R. union, representative of the upper subordinate Indian railwaymen on the N.W.R., made education and allotment of quarters as the main planks of its agitational programme.103 In particular the issue of education of the children and the adequate promotions, schooling facilities drew attention of the railwaymen working on far off railway stations.104 The railwaymen, employed in bigger cities as Karachi, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan, who demanded subsidized residential facility, found the N.W.R. Union a sympathetically.105

101 R.C.L., VIII, I, N.W.R., Union; Also see Statement N.W.R. General Worker's Union; Also see Statement Ladkram and M.A. Khan, oral evidence, R.C.L., VIII, II.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.
the employers, because the question of demand and supply does not arise, the employer having got the full control of the market in his hand.\footnote{109} The union demanded that the trade unions should be associated in the procedure of recruitment. This demand was of significance especially after the mass retrenchment of workshopmen due to the closing of the Rawalpindi and Karachi workshops.\footnote{110} It proposed that an unemployment insurance act be enacted in India as to assist the labourers in times of mass unemployment. The union suggested that the N.W.R. keep a register of these retrenched workmen and steps should be taken to re-employ the retrenched workmen on a priority basis.\footnote{111} On the issue of leave the union agitated for the grant of sickness leave and other holidays to the unskilled, semi-skilled and subordinate staff. Besides laying emphasis on issues such as health, hours of work, housing, maternity benefits and sickness insurance, the union asked for the restoration of gratuity of those who had struck work in 1925.\footnote{112}

The most significant reform advocated by the union was the acceptance of the demands put forward by the Central Labour Federation of Punjab of 1926. In this memorandum the salient demand was

\footnote{109} Statement N.W.R. Union, \textit{R.C.L.}, VIII, I. \footnote{110} \textit{Ibid.} \footnote{111} \textit{Ibid.} \footnote{112} \textit{Ibid.}
the acceptance of the principle of general adult franchise. It was suggested that the property qualification should be relaxed and 'every member of a registered trade union should be given the right of voting for provincial and central legislators'. The General Workers' Union, N.W.R. advocated that joint electorate with multiple transferable vote should be introduced. The allotment of seats should be fixed according to the proportion of the strength of each community. The memorandum demanded that one fourth of the total seats should be reserved for labour. Half of these reserved seats were to be filled in by nomination to be made by labour organizations and the other half by election in special labour constituencies. The underlying principle of this demand was that labour was playing a productive role in the reconstruction of the country so it should be given a role in its administration.

This memorandum also suggested that the office of the Secretary of State should be abolished. All heavy industries should be nationalized. All governmental services should be Indianized; and only technical expertise should be imported. The object of these reforms was to proceed in steps towards a constitutional labour government in India. This current of labour reform while emphasizing the

---

113 Statement General Workers' Union N.W.R., R.C.L., VIII, I; Also see Oral evidence M.A. Khan.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
peculiar needs and demands of railwaymen made general proposals extending to the working people as a whole. This current of labour reformism on one side demarcated itself from the section of better paid railwaymen who were the votaries of colonial reformism; on the other hand it did not support the communist demand of a proletarian revolution of the 1928-34 years. 117

The N.W.R. labour agitation of the post-1925 phase had given up its anti-imperialist political bias. In fact in 1928 the same leadership of N.W.R. union had realized, after the mass retrenchment of 1925, that the practice of political trade unionism had resulted in the liquidation of their popular trade union. The colonial state did not allow the growth of a current of political trade unions which agitated for the emergence of an anti-colonial people. In fact it ruthlessly crushed such forms of agitation. 118 So within the existing correlation of social forces the railwaymen could only evolve as a powerful current of constitutional agitation and labour reform but indirectly associated with anti-colonial politics.

V All India Railway Federation

The current of colonial reformism had acquired crystallized organisational form in the All India Railway Federation, by 1924. 119

117 For more details of the communist agitation in the Punjab, see Bhagwan Joshi, op. cit., pp. 73-78, 91-98.

118 For a detail review of railway response to strikes by all categories of railwaymen, see Chapters III, IV, VI.

119 For details of the formation of the A.I.R.F. and its agitational programme see Chapter III; Also refer to Memorandum A.I.R.F. in
The growth of communist political influence amongst railwaymen in late 1920s 'assisted' further the consolidation of this segment of labour agitation. The segregation in the railway labour agitation along class lines had resulted in the formation of general trade unions on reformist and militant agitational programme. The Indian railwaymen in the non-intensive grades — the colonial petty bourgeoisie — stirred towards a non-political constitutional mode of agitation. In contrast the intensive grades, the workshopmen and the lower paid railwaymen drifted towards the militant labour nationalist and communist modes of anti-colonial agitation. The railway administration which had shown a luke warm treatment to reformists in the early 1920s, had begun to patronize them in the 1930s.120

(a) A.I.R.f. and the Railway Board

The A.I.R. f. had by September 1928 evolved a well constituted structure and had adequate representation from various unions all

Cont'd... f.n. 119

Ref: VIII, I. N.M. Joshi's efforts were crucial to the formation of the A.I.R.f. "N.M. Joshi was planning to federate all unions of all categories of railway workers including Europeans." Letter Charles T. Wheeler, General Secretary, A.S.R.S., dated 20/8/1924 in N.M. Joshi Private Papers, File No. 13, I; in the same file also see of other correspondence of N.M. Joshi with the editor of the Railway Times, organ A.S.R.S.

120 In 1920s, the object of railway policy was to discourage all forms of unions, especially those unions which had political leanings. Even though, the railway administration accepted the need for labour representation it created staff councils of all railways with the object of creating organs of railwaymen patronized by the white railway bureaucracy. The workshopmen had...
over India. It had approached the Railway Board with a general set of demands and problems regarding conditions of work and living of the railwaymen. These demands had been in detail outlined by the A.I.R.F. deputation during its meeting with the Railway Board on 18 September 1928. Railway bureaucracy's response to the A.I.R.F. demands was one of immediate apathy and indifference. However, it agreed to enquire into the question of wages, daily rated workmen, hours of work, leave, quarters, house rent, provident fund and gratuity, utilization of fine funds, free passes, periodical medical examination and medical certificates. These issues, along with many others, were to come up for repeated discussions between the A.I.R.F. and Railway Board in the coming years.

Cont'd... f.n. 120

especially resented the railway administration's move in promoting staff councils. Staff councils, committees and welfare committees evoked a varied response from railwaymen. These committees were generally looked upon as rival organizations to popular trade unions. Hence continual friction existed between the trade union leadership and railway administration over the issue of staff councils. A.I.R.F. VIII, I, p. 924; E.S.R. Indian Employees' Association Memorandum A.I.R.F., p. 636; E.I.R. Union Moradabad, p. 665; E.I.R. Union Lillooah, p. 680; M. & S.M.R. Union; pp. 551, 559; R.C.L. VIII, II, oral evidence, Surrndra Nath, K 3583-91; Bhatnager, K 3603-8; Pandey, K 3634-41; T.V.K. Naidu, K 5772; Also see R.L. Proc. 8, July 1930, n. 219/2-3. "Proceedings of the first half-yearly meeting of the Railway Board with the A.I.R.F."


122 Ibid. For details of the demands put forward by the A.I.R.F. see an amplified statement of the A.I.R.F., 3 May 1929; In the same file also refer to presidential speech of V.V. Giri at the annual conference of the G.I.P. Wadi Bunder Staff Union, Bombay, 28 April 1929.

123 Ibid.
In the pre-1930 years the Railway Board's attitude towards the A.I.R.F. was one of administrative expediency. Following the split in the A.I.T.U.C. in 1929 and the predominance of the non-reformists, largely the growth of communist influence, in the G.I.P.R. labour agitation had compelled the Railway Board to adopt a conciliatory posture toward the A.I.R.F. The issue of reinstatement of the G.I.P.R. ex-strikers, about 10,000 in number, had begun to acquire support from even the reformist unions. The G.I.P.R. Wadi Bunder Staff Union, the leading section of the G.I.P.R. Staff Union, had called for an all India railway general strike if the G.I.P.R. did not reinstate the ex-strikers. The General Council of the A.I.R.F., at its Hubli meeting of 20 April 1930, had also expressed similar views.

The A.I.R.F. was essentially a federation of all unions, it was dominated by reformist unions, such as, the B.B. & C.I.R. Employees' Union led by Jamunadas Mehta, B.N.R. Indian Labour Union led by V.V. Giri, and G.I.P.R. Staff Union led by G.C. Joshi. However, in the General council of the A.I.R.F., the militant trade unions, such as, the N.W.R. Union led by M.A. Khan, G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union led by R.S. Ruiker and dominated by the communists, were also represented. Though the executive was controlled by the reformists, the radical factions were able to influence it on 'burning issues' such as the re-instatement of the G.I.P.R. ex-strikers. In 1930 the General

125 Ibid.
Council was forced by the militant unions to adopt a path of confrontation by proposing an all India railway general strike as to check Railway Board's policy of retrenchment. It was in this context of the growing influence of militant factions in the General Council of the A.I.R.F. that the Railway Board agreed to meet the A.I.R.F. on regular half-yearly basis, beginning in September 1930. After 1930, till the end of our period, the A.I.R.F. regularly met the Railway Board representatives to debate, discuss and negotiate. The issues that came under discussion in these years had already been listed by A.I.R.F. in its memorandum of September 1928. Major issues, such as, wage revision, hours of work, retrenchment of staff or dismissals, problems regarding recognition of railway unions, insecurity of service, medical examination, and minor issues, such as, quarters, leave rules, free passes, staff councils and welfare committees, and representation of individual cases, continually figured in these meetings.

(b) Wage-Reduction and the A.I.R.F.

Reduction of scales was one of the major demands. Since 1928, this issue had figured in the discussion of various railway unions with their respective administrations, during the queries of the Royal Commission on Labour and after it. The Railway Board had

126 Ibid.
agreed to enquire into the wage-structure of the lower paid railway employees following recommendations by the Royal Commission on Labour. However, the workshopmen were to be kept out of the purview of this enquiry. The A.I.R.F. had suggested that the Government should accept the recommendation of the International Labour Conference of 1928 and appoint a commission to fix minimum wages.

The A.I.R.F. had also suggested to the Railway Board to completely re-organize the railway services, basing them on a general classification of work, with a minimum scale for all categories of men doing similar work all over India; however, giving additional allowances in more expensive areas. The Railway Board, on the contrary, argued for a wage rate, as determined by local and regional labour markets. Of course the main suggestion of the A.I.R.F. was that it should be consulted in the entire process of minimum wage-determination. One of it suggestions was that the workshop employees should not be included in the emergency-cut in wages. More so wage-cut should be based on actual earnings and not on the assumed monthly rate. It had suggested that wage-revision should

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
occur along classification of the lower paid employees into unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled grades. Time scale with a definite starting pay and increments was suggested as a solution to blocked promotion lines. The A.I.R.F. had also recommended that the railway wages should have parity with the Post and Telegraph Department, though taking into consideration standardisation of wages with due regard to differences in work. Following strike protest by individual railway unions the wage-structure was, however, modified.\(^\text{133}\)

(c) A.I.R.F. and Hours of Work

In its first half-yearly meeting in 1930, and in subsequent meetings, the A.I.R.F. had suggested to the Railway Board to implement hours of work conventions as suggested by the International Labour Conference of 1919. The A.I.R.F. had posed the problem of hours of work as related to the general condition of employment—differentiating between nightwork and day work, duration of work, overtime allowance and weekly rest, hours of work as influencing health of railwaymen and safety of railway travel. However, the Railway Board saw the problem as one of financial expediency. The Railway Board had excluded the workshop staff from the perview of Hours of Work Regulations, as the hours of work of this category of workforce were regulated by the Factories Act.\(^\text{134}\)

---

\(^{133}\) Ibid.

\(^{134}\) R.L., Proc. B, March 1931, n. 302/1-18. "Hours of Employment Regulation for Railway Servants." As some of the railway administrations did not regulate the hours of work of the workshop-men in accordance to Factories Act, the A.I.R.F. demanded that the Railway Board include this category in its Hours of Work Regulations.
The A.I.R.F. criticized the operation Hours of Work Regulations and the Factories Act for inadequately dealing with the work problems of railwaymen. According to the Railway Board's work regulations, railwaymen were divided into two sections — intermittent workers and others. The A.I.R.F. was critical of this division and the differential attention given to each of the sections. It advocated a uniform policy of work regulations for all categories of the workforce. It asked for the constitution of an Employers' and Workers' Organization to suggest differential solutions for the resolution of the problems emerging out of the implementation of Hours of Work Regulations.

The A.I.R.F. suggested a weekly maximum of 60 hours for intermittent workers and 48 hours for others. It also recommended a minimum of 32 consecutive hours every week as rest for non-intermittent and 24 consecutive hours rest period every week for the intermittent workers. Also 14 consecutive hours rest daily for the former and 12 hours for the latter was suggested. Any breach in the rest period was to be compensated by giving double pay to the required workmen. It had demanded that continuous night duties under ordinary circumstances were not be required from the workmen. As regards workshopmen and other daily rated staff the railways should also pay these workmen for holidays and Sundays. Furthermore the A.I.R.F., had suggested that the entire procedure should be regularly scrutinized by a joint committee and adequate solutions found for contingent situations.

In short the A.I.R.F. had suggested that the Hours of Work Regulations should be so implemented that on one hand efficiency of the railways did not suffer; and on the other hand the human condition of railwaymen was adequately preserved and overwork adequately compensated. 137

The A.I.R.F. during its meeting with the Railway Board, detailed most of the problems of the railwaymen and suggested ways and means of redress. The Railway Board though gave a patience hearing to all the grievances of railwaymen it worked out its own mode of resolution keeping in view the industrial efficiency of the railways and its financial exigencies. Only on two issues that the A.I.R.F. demonstrated its capacity to confront the employer and force issues as to elicit an immediate resolution.

In 1930 the A.I.R.F. agitated for the re-instatement of the strikers of the G.I.P.R. It called upon all trade unions in India to observe 26 October 1930 as a G.I.P.R. striker’s day as to pressurize the government to re-instate over 10,000 dismissed workmen of the G.I.P.R. It suggested that all additional vacancies arising out as a consequence of the implementation of the Hours of Employment Regulations should be filled by the ex-strikers of the G.I.P.R. 138

137 The Railway Board took note of the recommendations made by the A.I.R.F. and investigated into problem. Detail financial estimates were made. Even a commercial, as different from a human, mode of implementation of the work regulations required elaborate rostering, additional staff, more quarters and other facilities which would have increased cost of staff at a time when the railways were pursuing a severe economy drive. Hours of Work Regulations were implemented in phases allowing the Railway Board to adjust its increasing costs of staff to its budgetary requirements. R.L., Progs. A. January 1931, n. 282/1-21.

However, the railway administrations expressed their inability to re-instate the workshop staff as retrenchment was already in progress all over India. More so, the Railway Board suggested an elaborate procedure for the re-employment of the ex-strikers, such as, re-employment after medical re-examination, loss of previous gratuity and service, temporary appointment or re-appointment on a lesser pay scale.  

VI Retrenchment on the Railways

Between 1928-29 and 1936-37 there was a reduction of railway staff by nearly 130,473 or about 17 per cent was carried through on all the railways. This reduction occurred in several phases; it effected all sections of the railway staff, engineering, mechanical, transportation, traffic and miscellaneous departments of all the railway companies. In each of the departments all categories of staff, superior, subordinate, inferior and menial were retrenched as a part of railway policy to achieve financial viability by cutting costs of staff. Another reason for retrenchment was to rationalize

139 For more details regarding the conditions offered to the G.I.P. R. ex-strikers by the railways, refer to R.L. Progs, B, November 1929, n. 269/32-37; Also see in the same file annexure A, giving details of the progress in re-employment of the G.I.P.R. ex-strikers; Also see G.I.P.R. Union Herald, 6 June 1930. "Little hope for unemployed strikers."

140 See Table n. XIX, detailing the total number of railway staff. This table is taken from L.A. Natesan, op. cit., p. 360.

141 Ibid., pp. 358-60; Also see Report of the Railway Retrenchment Sub-Committee of Retrenchment Advisory Committee, 1931.
work operations by introducing sophisticated technology. Hence
reducing the unskilled and semi-skilled workforce, but also increas-
ing the proportion of supervisory staff in relation to the work-force.
But these measures were implemented in the railway workshops follow-
ing the recommendations of the State Railway Workshops Committee,
1926.142 Though a generalized reduction of the labour-force was
carried out in these years, the decrease in the supervisory staff
was marginal.143 The axe of reduction fell on the laboring men and
especially the workshopmen who were becoming votaries of militant
general labour unionism and anti-colonial protest.

(a) Workshop Retrenchment
Under the scheme of workshop reorganization in all the major
workshops staff retrenchment was carried through. On the N.W.R.
retrenchment of 17,000 men occurred during the 1925 strike. In the
following years as the Karachi workshop were closed more staff was
discharged or kept on the waiting list.144

142 For details refer to Report, State Railway Workshops Committee,
1926; For details for the change in the ratio of supervisory
staff to the labour force refer to Table n. XXII Appendix(I).

143 For details refer to Table n. II showing the number of upper
subordinates on the railways between 1914-1937.

144 The N.W.R. Union demanded, in 1931, for the setting up of a
Court of Enquiry or Board of Conciliation under the Trade Dis-
putes Act to probe into the retrenchment of staff and other
grievances. R.L., Procs. R. January 1931, n. 241/4-7; Also see
Representation made by the A.I.R.F. in this regard. R.L., Procs.
B. October 1932, n. 412/1-4. For more details of retrenchment
on the N.W.R. refer to R.L., Procs. B. August 1933, n. 56-74. R.L.,
Procs. B. June 1934, n. 381/1; R.L., Procs. B. May 1936, n. 13/
1-5.
On the E.I.R., on the whole 6,552 workmen were discharged during the E.I.R. strike of 1928. Following the Report of Messrs Rogers and Tomilson on Lillooah retrenchment, 2,580 men in Lillooah and 440 men from carriage and wagon shops from Lucknow were discharged. The remaining retrenchment occurred in all departments and divisions, largest being from the running staff. In the running department there were also 826 demotions; 926 were discharged on account of being inefficient. 157 men resigned voluntarily. As a consequence of this reduction the Lillooah Union, lost its entire membership and ceased to exist.

The workshops on the G.I.P.R. accounted for half the discharged on this railway. 2,134 were also laid off from the transportation department and the remaining from other departments. Those demoted the largest number 931, were from the running staff. Thus the bulk of those retrenched during 1930-34 were from the workshops and the transportation departments, those most active in the G.I.P.R. strike.


146 R.E., Progs. B, November 1932, n. 331/1-5.

147 R.E., Progs. A, March 1934, n. 396/1-3; Also see R.E., Progs. B, July 1934, n. 528/1-11.

148 R.E., Progs. B, July 1934, n. 528/1-11. The arbitrariness of this retrenchment lay in the fact that nearly 1,585 new hands were also recruited to meet the needs of the Hours of Employment Regulations.
of February 1930. Similarly on the B. B. & C. I. R., following the Report by the Rogers and Tomilsons, staff retrenchment in the Ajmer carriage and wagon workshops, and Broad Gauge Wagon shops Mahalakshmi and Running Shed, Paral, was carried through.

On the B. N. R., S. I. R. and M. & S. M. R. retrenchment of staff began in 1927 and continued till 1934. On the S. I. R., in July 1928, workshop staff at Golden Rock, Podenur and Negapatam struck work protesting against the reduction of staff. Similarly on the B. N. R. workshopmen of Kharagpur were on a prolonged strike from early September till December 1927 as a protest against the proposed retrenchment. On the B. N. R., the bulk of the retrenchment in the workshops occurred during 1927-29. In 1930-31, the largest section of the retrenched workmen were from the engineering establishments.

149 Jhansi Carriage building shops had been closed down and surplus labour at Paral and Matunga were retrenched by 1 April 1930. R.L., Progs, B, December 1930, n. 233/1-5; R.L., Progs, A, March 1934, n. 396/1-33. For details of terms offered to the retrenched workshops refer to R.L., Progs, B, March 1934, n. 454/1-55. There were a large number of ex-strikers of the G.I.P.R., who had been re-employed after the strike but were again discharged. R.L., Progs, B, May 1933, n. 269/7-80. Also see R.L., Progs, B, August 1934, n. 454/56-74. On one side the G.I.P.R. reduced staff in the Paral, Matunga and Jhansi workshops. On the other side it attempted to revise pay-scales of the lower paid workmen. R.L., Progs, B, April 1934, n. 222/19-21.


151 R.E., Progs, B, March 1929, n. 5589/1-3.

152 R.E., Progs, B, September 1928, n. 5556/52-56.
except for the workshopmen of Walair wagon shops, which were closed
down in 1932.  

On the M. & S.M.R. retrenchment began in the Arkanam engineer-
ing workshops. M. & S.M.R. Employees' Union suggested that surplus
staff should be absorbed in connection with the application of the
hours of employment regulations. The railway administration failed
to concede to this demand, thus precipitating a strike in the work-
shops at Perambur and Arkanam. Similarly on the A.B.R., on the
E.B.R., Kanchrapara workshops, in the loco and carriage shops, B.&
N.W.R. and on R.K.R., surplus staff was discharged.

(a) A.I.R.F. and Retrenchment

This issue of re-instatement of the G.I.P.R. strikers was linked
to the more general question of the arbitrary policy of retrenchment
pursued by the railways in the post-1928 years. The A.I.R.F. made

Union asked for the appointment of a conciliation board to
settle disputes arising out of the retrenchment proposals. R.I.P.,


155 R.I.P., Progs. B, July 1932, n. 359/1-5. For more details of this
labour agitation see R.I.P., Progs. B, November 1932, n. 454/1-3;
R.I.P., Progs. B, July 1931, n. 475/1-3. However, fearing an all
India railway general strike some concessions were given to
this union in the implementation of retrenchment proposals.
R.I.P., Progs. B, May 1934, n. 344/1-30; Also see R.I.P., Progs. B,
January 1934, n. 343/1-32.

156 R.I.P., Progs. B, July 1933, n. 487/1-5; Also see R.I.P., Progs. B,
February 1933, n. 452/1-5; R.I.P., Progs. B, February 1933, n.
420/1-3; R.I.P., Progs. B, July 1933, n. 408/1-14; R.I.P., Progs.
a consistent effort at blocking the Railway Board's scheme of retrenchment. At the third half-yearly meeting the Railway Board and representatives of the A.I.R.F. in detail discussed this issue. At this meeting though no long term solution was found, temporary respite in retrenchment was effected. This meeting's central concern lay with the issue of retrenchment, demotion, shorter hours of work hence loss in emoluments. A special convention of the A.I.R.F., on 27 June 1931, in Simla, under the presidentship of Jamunadas Mehta, resolved to stop further retrenchment by organizing an all India railway general strike before 1 August 1931. This meeting was attended by Jamunadas Mehta, V.V. Giri, S.C. Joshi, R.S. Ruiker, Diwan Chaman Lall, V.R. Kelappa, Marcell Fernandez, K. Vireswamy and Abdul Khader. It called upon the Indian public, Indian National Congress, all trade unions, "to give moral and material support to the helpless railway workers in their struggle against the autocratic and unsympathetic employers, viz, the Railway Administrations, the Railway Board and the Government of India."\textsuperscript{157}

As a result of the strike threat, the Railway Board agreed to suspend further retrenchment till next October 1932. These orders did not apply to those already under a notice of discharge, such as, those engaged for purely temporary purposes, the workshop employees and the superior officers. Following discussions with the A.I.R.F., the process of discharge of surplus men was now to be carried through

\textsuperscript{157} R.l., Proc. A. July 1931, n. 360/1-28. "Extracts from discussion at the third half-yearly meeting the Railway Board and the representatives of the A.I.R.F."
consultations with the recognized unions. Workmen were given the option to continue short time with no discharge of staff or full time with the discharge of surplus staff. The A.I.R.F. did not in principle oppose the proposed retrenchment but suggested greater remuneration to those retrenched; phased retrenchment and accommodation to those retrenched, re-employment on other railways at a further date. Above all the A.I.R.F. must be duly consulted in the processes to be followed in future retrenchment.

The A.I.R.F. had been the chief negotiator on the issue of retrenchment in case of each of the railways, as well as an all India representative of railwaymen. From its first half-yearly meeting with the Railway Board the A.I.R.F. demanded for the appointment of a Board of conciliation under the Trade Disputes Act, 1929, as to settle disputes emerging out of the implementation of the retrenchment proposals. It suggested several measures, such as, phased retrenchment, liberal remuneration to those retrenched, promise of re-employment, absorption of surplus staff to meet the additional demand for staff as a consequence of the implementation of hours of

158 Even in case of individual block discharge, such as the closing of the signal shop and the discharge of surplus staff, the A.I. R.F. made representation to the Railway Board. However, the Railway Board in this case did not give the A.I.R.F. request any sympathetic treatment. The Railway Board did not desire that the A.I.R.F. directly negotiate or represent cases of individual railways, as it did in case of N.W.R. where the recognized N.W. R. Union had alleged of cases of unfair discharge. The Railway Board policy was not to allow the A.I.R.F. to interfere in the affairs of individual railways but to confine its dealings, on general issues, with the Railway Board only. R.L. Pracs. B, October 1932, n. 412/1-4. "Representation of the A.I.R.F. regarding unfair discharge on the N.W.R."


Though these demands seemed of not great significance; as racial discrimination was practiced in the allocation of these facilities, the Indian railwaymen resented most this discriminatory aspect of railway policy. \textsuperscript{164}

The A.I.R.F. argued that as the railway gave free passes to non-railway servants employed on work connected with the welfare or even recreation of the superior staff, it should be in the discretion of the agents to grant passes to the office bearers of the recognized unions, whether they were railway employees or not. The agents, however, opposed this process because passes were or could be used for undesirable non-union activity. However, the N.W.R. Union had been granted such passes for travel. \textsuperscript{165} Following queries by the Railway Board even on the N.W.R. this facility was withdrawn. \textsuperscript{166} Relations between the administration and the trade unions were sought to be promoted through the implementation of certain proposals. Trade unions demanded that they be given official information regarding staff matters. It was demanded that special leave may be given to trade union officials. The Government Service Conduct Rules should be modified allowing for the rights recognized by the Trade Disputes


\textsuperscript{165} R.L., Procs. B, January 1930, n. 64/1-6.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
The Railway Board had agreed to meet the A.I.R.F. on a half-yearly basis from 1930. These meetings were conducted in a cordial manner. The A.I.R.F. was represented by the leadership of various affiliated trade unions. The general council of the A.I.R.F. further selected its representatives, normally important office bearers of major railway unions, such as Jamunadas Mehta of the B.B. & C.I.R. Employees' Union, V.V. Giri of the B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, V.R. Kalappa, General Secretary, B.N.R. Indian Labour Union, J.K. Chatterjee, E.B.R. Employees' Association, Vireswamy, Secretary, M. & S.M.R. Staff Union, Marcel Fernandez, General Secretary, B.B. & C.I.R. Employees' Union, Matharani, Vice-President, N.W.R. Union, R.S. Ruiker, President, G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, S. Guruswamy, Assistant Secretary, A.I.R.F. constituted the negotiating team. So the inbuilt structure of the A.I.R.F. eliminated the possibilities of radical factions to find representation at the national level executive.

However, these faction, such as, the communists, influenced the functioning of the general council. They even forced the council to adopt a path of confrontation and proposed an all India general strike as to stop the process of retrenchment. The proceedings of


A.I.R.F. meetings with the Railway Board were published and were available for limited circulation for the officials of the affiliated trade unions.

In fact the A.I.R.F. discussion with the Railway Board was conducted not from a position of strength. The representatives often pleaded for compensation and sympathetic treatment. On the contrary the railway bureaucracy discussed and negotiated from a vantage position. They often found faults with the functioning of the railway unions and admonished the A.I.R.F. that the unions were still to evolve a proper mode of conduct. Only when it was acceptable to the railway bureaucracy that a particular union functioned along required constitutional lines concessions could be given, as well attempts could be made to redress grievances. The A.I.R.F. officials too accepted the narrow definition of a proper trade union and conducted their discussions accordingly.173

VIII A.I.R.F. and its Leadership

The A.I.R.F. had by 1930 become the most vocal spokesman of the railwaymen's agitation at all India level.174 It had started as a


The A.I.R. leadership was constituted by a spectrum of labour leaders — N.M. Joshi, S.C. Joshi, Jamunadas Mehta, Diwan Chaman Lall, Mukandilal Sarkar and V.V. Giri. N.M. Joshi was at one end of this spectrum. N.M. Joshi, along with Mukandilal Sarkar, Saklatwala, S.C. Joshi, R. Bakhla and others, represented the labourite current or 'Government' in the railway labour movement; hence his continual fluidity and balancing between the communists, nationalists and the colonial state, who all had programmes for the organization of labour other than its immediate welfare. As different from N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, Jhabwala, Girwala and R.S. Ruiker had sought to introduce into the railway labour agitation militancy and passive anti-colonial sentiments.

If it benefitted labour, N.M. Joshi had stood for 'responsive cooperation' with the colonial railway bureaucracy. However, this must not be seen as an attitude of collaboration. According to N.M. Joshi and other colonial reformists, labour in India could become an effective force only if it operated within the existing constitutional form (attempting to change this form through legislation, through memorializing but always through negotiations and conciliatory methods) and not by adopting a path of confrontation. In contrast V.V. Giri, R.S. Ruiker adopted militant non-cooperation or strike action to press for railwaymen's demands. Though they made no self-conscious

176 N.M. Joshi Private Papers and Correspondence, 1924, File n. 13; Also see File n. 61, 1930; File n. 68, 1932.

177 V.V. Giri, My Life and Times, I, pp. 46-75, 76-92.
effort to politicize the railway labour agitation they never opposed the existence of politics in it. Communists however failed to demarcate between these two poles of the spectrum and adopted a recalcitrant attitude towards N.M. Joshi, the A.I.R.F. and towards the Congress, and propagated for an all India general strike and proletarian revolution.

The communist agitation of the post-1930 phase exploited the inherent ambiguities in the A.I.R.F.'s relationship with the workshopmen's agitation on one side and the Railway Board on the other. During the strikes of 1929-1930 in all the major workshops, the communists, as militant agitators, had made substantial inroads. By 1930, however this policy of sectarian action had resulted in splits in the A.I.T.U.C., in the G.I.P.R. and B.B. & C.I.R. railway labour agitation. Ruthless governmental offensive against the communists in the workshopmen's agitation, especially on the N.W.R. and G.I.P.R., had isolated the communist current. This current after having failed at the individual railway level strike action, continually agitated for an all India railway general strike. The communist proposal of a general strike was not so much concerned with particular railwaymen's demands, such as, the retrenchment in the workshops or with the failed G.I.P.R. strike; it was a part of a general utopian strategy against the British in India. The A.I.R.F., however, only partially accepted this proposal.


the government seeing the waning influence of the communists, attempted to ban the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union and the B.B. & C.I.R. Worker's Union. The leftward shift of the communists conversely also compelled the A.I.R.R. to shift closer to the railway administration. It was in this state of polarization that a new current of radical labour politics had the potentiality of crystallization on the railways and in the Indian labour agitation.

A meeting of all labour reformers and socialists was called by Ruikar at the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru. The object of this meeting was to form a socialist party, a labour forum, which was to work for 'labour awesom' but within the broad spectrum of anti-colonial agitation led by the Indian National Congress. This current had its antecedents on the railways in the new General Workers' Union on the N.W.R., in the Indian Labour Union B.N.R., and in the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union led R.S. Ruikar and Ginwala. This current was later to evolve into the Congress Socialist party, and play an important role in nationalist agitation.

The Communist failure to creatively associate with this segment of the labour agitation had varied repercussions on the railways. The A.I.R.R., and the organic reformist railway labour agitation, had adversely reacted to the communist strategy of revolution and opted for colonial reformism. Communist suspicion and hostility towards the A.I.R.R. created the future potentialities

---
180 Subodh Roy, co.cite, pp. 101-105.
of a split in the railway labour agitation, which allowed it to remain weak and fragmented. Only this socialist segment in the Congress, with communists as its active members, had the potentiality of steering the railway labour agitation, towards a path of creative anti-colonial opposition and positive working class reform.