CHAPTER III
THE INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS AND
THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT
IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY, 1928-1939

The Industrial Workers had come to be receptive to
the changing ideological and political developments in
Madras presidency. For instance, the intense nationalist
political activity was actively supported by the Industrial
Workers in Madras city between 1918 and 1922 period. ¹

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Leaders of the Indian National Congress appealed to
Industrial workers as they appealed to other sections of
Indian society to shoulder the responsibility of winning
independence for India from British Government. But the
nationalist leaders also explained that workers' partici-
pation in the national struggle must be based on the method
of non-violence. Gandhi, addressing the workers in Madras
on 16 September 1921, appealed: "I would like you all,
you and your wives and your children to take your share
in the great national movement that is sweeping across

¹. K. Venugopal Reddy, The Industrial Working Class and
the Indian National Movement in Madras Presidency,
1918-1922, M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Hyder-
abad, Hyderabad, 1985, see 4th Chapter, pp.77-120.
the length and breadth of the land"; but he asked them further: "I would like you to swear before God that we shall not resort to violence for the freedom of our country." ²

In the struggle for independence the National Congress hoped to mobilise all classes of people without any distinction. For its leaders the liberation of India was primary and all other issues were secondary. The focus on the growing poverty of the masses was also used to emphasize the need to hasten the liberation of India at all costs. Lala Lajpat Rai, for example, said in 1928: "We have reached the lowest depths of misery and degradation imaginable. There can be nothing lower than that, and if the British government think that by their withdrawal we shall be warring with each other, I shall welcome even that condition, because after all after the years of warring and quarrelling, an even bloodshed, we shall be settling down and forming some kind of government, which will be our own handiwork, and which we can improve later on." ³

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The growing militancy of the workers and peasants all over India and the growth of left and radical thought helped bring about a transformation in the outlook of the Indian National Congress. There was a greater concern for the toiling classes of India, viz., peasants and workers. The radicals within the Congress campaigned for its acceptance of a radical programme. Gradually, the Congress began to adopt a more and more pro-poor attitude. The Congress leaders also began to lay greater emphasis on organising the workers and peasants and mobilising them in the struggle for Independence. Independence also came to be defined in terms of its relevance to the improvement in the conditions of life of the toiling masses. For example, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, Chairman, Reception Committee of the 42nd session of Indian National Congress, held at Madras 1927, said "The organisation of


5. F.No.G-34/1927, AICC Papers, Note: A resolution was moved by K.N. Joglekar at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee to accept the programme of organising the Industrial working class and to work for various demands of Industrial workers.

labour is another vital matter. The Congress must stand fearlessly and wholeheartedly by the labouring population, industrial and agricultural. The Congress must co-operate with the All-India Trade Union Congress and help it to secure human conditions for India's labour. By enlisting their active assistance, the cause of swaraj could be tremendously advanced." M.A. Ansari in his address as the President of Congress in 1927 defined the goal of the National Struggle as that of "a free and self-governing India, offering equal opportunities to all and recognising and guaranteeing the just and legitimate rights of all sections and classes." The interest of the Congress in the problems of workers and in bringing them closer to the national movement grew stronger. Motilal Nehru, presiding over the Calcutta session in 1928, stated that Indian National Congress must strengthen working class organisations and promote them "as part of the work of national consolidation."

7. Reel No.7: Reports of the Proceedings of the 42nd Session of the Indian National Congress, NAI.
8. Ibid.
The growing transformation in the outlook of the Congress in this respect was strikingly evident in the presidential addresses of Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel in 1929 and 1931 respectively. Jawaharlal Nehru, as President of the 44th session of the Indian National Congress at Lahore in 1929, made a powerful plea for greater identification of the Congress and national movement with industrial workers and peasants. He said that "the measure of the strength of our national movement will be the measure of their adherence to it. We can only gain them to our side by our espousing their cause which is really the country's cause."  

About the working class, he said: "The industrial labour is only small part of India, although it is rapidly becoming a force that cannot be ignored." Vallabhbhai Patel in his Presidential address at the Karachi session of Indian National Congress in 1931 observed: "Let everyone realise that the Congress represents and exists for the toiling millions and it will become an irresistible power working not for greed or power but for the sake of common humanity."

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10. Reel No.7: Reports of the Proceedings of 44th session of Indian National Congress, Lahore, 1929, NAI.
11. Ibid.
The growing pro-working class attitude of the Congress could also be seen in the resolution passed at its Karachi session in 1931. The provisions from 2 to 6 in the Resolution on Economic Policy and Fundamental Rights passed as amended by the A.I.C.C. in August 1931 at Bombay related to the welfare of the industrial workers. The industrial workers were ensured a decent standard of living, suitable legislation covering a living wage, healthy conditions of work, limited hours of work, suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workers, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and employment, freedom from serfdom, protection of women workers, prohibition of employment of children in mines and factories and the right to form unions to protect their interests. 13

Gandhi in his article on "Mills and Labour" wrote in 1931 that "the Congress lives for the labourers and for the capitalists in so far as the latter subserves the former purpose.... the Congress can never allow the labourers to be exploited.... The peaceful road to Swaraj lies through co-ordination not antagonism of all national effort." 14 Similarly, in his letter to Emerson,
Secretary, Home Department, Government of India on 9 April 1931 Gandhiji wrote, after the Karachi session of INC had passed its resolution on Economic Policy and Fundamental Rights that "the Congress, as I told you, is primarily a peasants and workers organisation."\(^{15}\)

Local Congress leaders worked to bring the industrial workers closer to the national movement in several parts of Madras presidency. For example, speaking at a meeting in July 1928 at Tuticorin, Kuppuswami Mudaliar explained that independence should be secured for the poorer people and that it was only through 'satyagraha' that it was possible for the people to secure independence of India. He was sentenced to 15 months simple imprisonment for his speech.\(^{16}\) Local Congress leaders were also active among the industrial workers in Chittivalasa during their strike in January 1929.\(^{17}\) In March 1929, Digumarti Ramaswamy and Kodi Ramamurti addressed 5,000 strong industrial workers in a meeting at Chittivalasa and explained to them about the conditions of the workers in India and other countries. The meeting ended with slogans like

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15. F.No.P-1/1931, AICC Papers, NMM&L.
In January 1929, the Andhra Patrika commented: "Labour organisations cannot but seek the assistance of national leaders for sometime to come ... labour unions have helped the cause of the national movement by boycotting the Simon Commission. The labour awakening will certainly help the attainment of swaraj... labourers must, therefore, help the attainment of the freedom of the country besides seeking to promote their own interests." Similarly, it observed in April 1930 that "it is necessary at this juncture that all the people should assist the attainment of independence without any distinction whatsoever."

Congress leaders appealed to the industrial workers to support the national movement and also to become members of the National Congress. A. Govindachary, M. Narasimhachary, G. Jagayya and M.D. Krishnamurti, addressing a well attended workers' meeting in Ellore in February 1930, appealed to them to enlist themselves as members of the Congress. Addressing workers in a meeting at

18. Andhra Patrika, 5 March 1929.
19. Andhra Patrika, 26 Jan. 1929, NNPR, TNA.
20. Andhra Patrika, 28 April 1930, NNPR, TNA.
Vijayawada in April 1930 Dr. Sharma, Dr. Govinda Rajulu
Naidu and D. Venkata Siva Rao appealed to them to show
solidarity with the national movement and exhorted them
to abstain from drinking.22 Similarly, Ganapathi Pillai,
a local Congress activist in Coimbatore, appealed to the
workers in July 1930 to assist the Congress in its work.23

Emphasis on mobilising the industrial workers and
broadening the mass base of national struggle grew stronger
after the Karachi session of the Congress. The message of
the Karachi Resolution was propagated throughout the presi-
dency of Madras by means of leaflets and lectures by the
local Congress leaders.24 In pursuance of the Karachi
Resolution, the Congress issued appeals to the managements
of the Mills and sought their co-operation to see that the
workers employed in their mills had no legitimate grievan-
ces.25

From 1931 on, the Congress leaders further intensi-
fied attempts to integrate the working class with the

22. Anghra Patrika, 11 April 1930.
23. S.F.No.685, 28 July 1930, Extracts from the Secret
   Reports relating to C.D.M. (1930-35), TNA.
24. G.O.No.844, Pub. Dept., 6-6-1932, TNA.
25. Ibid.
national movement. There was increasing association of the Congress with the industrial workers in Madras presidency too. Provincial Congress leaders such as K. Bashyam, S. Satyamurthi and T. Prakasam began to take an active interest in 1931 in kerosene oil workers' union and railway workers' unions. S. Satyamurthi asked the retrenched railway workers to become members of the Congress and to supply picketters for Congress work in the Madras city.

At one of the meetings of Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Employees' Union in May 1931, Sen Gupta remarked that the Congress was now on the side of labour and praised "Purna Swaraj" as the panacea for all ills. The Congress leaders tried to convey the message to the working class that it could hope for better economic, social and political conditions in independent India. S. Satyamurthi, addressing the workers of M&SM Railway in 1933, told them that "with the advent of Swaraj all their troubles would come to an end."

In fact, several Congress leaders in their later interviews with me stated that the Karachi Resolution on

27. Ibid.
29. The Hindu, 31 July 1933.
Fundamental Rights gave a definite direction to the task of integrating the industrial workers with the national movement. V. Gopala Krishnaiah, a prominent Congress leader from Guntur, said that the provisions of Karachi Resolution were explained by the Congress leaders at length to the workers. He considered Karachi Resolution a forerunner of socialism. He added: "Socialism was expected after nationalism." Similarly, P. Chengalva Rayan from Madras said that "Karachi Resolution gave a direction." He added that Karachi Resolution was one document of the Congress which showed what free India would be like. In his own words, "Karachi Resolution was our magna carta." It must also be noted that Karachi Resolution was viewed quite favourably by the left-wing working class leaders. K. Murugesan said that Karachi Resolution was a major contribution by the national Congress. Other contemporaries also saw the resolution as signifying the growing leftward orientation of the Congress.

30. Interview with: V. Gopala Krishnaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
31. Interview with: P. Chengalva Rayan, 28-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
32. Ibid.
33. Interviews with: K. Murugesan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu; Also N. Krishnaswamy, a working class leader from Trichinopoly, observed that Karachi Resolution was "mainly economic". N. Krishnaswamy, 10-7-89, Trichinopoly, Tamilnadu.
34. New India, 9 April 1931, NNPR, TNA. F.No.22/1931, Advance, 9 April 1931, AICC Papers.
intensified activity of the Congress leaders among the industrial workers, especially during the times of heightened nationalist activity, became a source of concern for the government in the presidency.  

The Congress leaders not only emphasized the non-violent participation of the people in the national movement but also appealed to all people irrespective of religion, caste or class to join it. The right wing leadership of Indian National Congress considered the fight for political independence of India to be the primary task of all Indian people rather than of a particular class. They argued that promoting class contradictions and class struggle would only weaken the national struggle for India's independence. For instance, Rajendra Prasad at a meeting in October 1935, in Madras explained that the National Congress was a national organisation representing all classes and all communities and therefore it could not be expected to take up any class demands. Nor, he said a few days later, could the Congress be a party to the exploitation of workers.


independence, he added, was essential before the Congress could be expected to do anything for the workers; it was therefore necessary for the Industrial workers to support the Congress in its struggle for independence.  

Similarly, he declared at Trichinopoly in November 1935 that Congress was an open organisation and thus there was room for everyone to come and influence its course.  

S. Satyamurthy, in his address to the members of the European Association on 20 May 1936 in Madras, explained that Congress did not believe in confiscation and class war or in the concept of socialization of means of production. It stood for harmonious regulation of social relations between classes.

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38. Ibid.


40. Fortnightly Report for the second half of May 1936, Home Dept. Poll., NAI. Cf. The Congress Working committee at Bombay in June 1934 passed a resolution: "that confiscation and class war are contrary to the Congress creed of non-violence. At the same time the working committee is of opinion that the Congress does contemplate wiser and juster use of private property so as to prevent the exploitation of the landless poor, and also, contemplates a healthier relationship between capital and labour."

All India Congress Committee, The Indian National Congress: 1934-36. Being the resolutions passed by the Congress, the All India Congress Committee and the Working Committee during the period between May 1934 and April 1936, Allahabad, 1936, p.21.
Other right-wing Congress leaders too consistently insisted that the Congress being a national organisation not a class organisation belonged to all classes. But these Congress leaders also argued that Congress stood for the welfare of the peasants and workers. Many of them asked the workers to support the constructive activities of the Congress. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, speaking to the workers of Chittoor Labour union in September 1937, urged the workers to wear Khaddar and use Indian goods only. H. Sarvothamarao, presiding over the Madras Government press workers' meeting in June 1938 in Madras, told the workers to become members of the Congress and take up its constructive programme. C.N. Muthurang/Mudaliar lauded the press workers for opting for national flag as their flag. Similarly, B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya speaking to the jute workers in Chittivalasa in June 1938, asked them to engage in spinning as it would add to their income "at least three annas per day."

42. Andhra Patrika, 2 Sept. 1937.
44. Andhra Patrika, 11 June 1938.
45. Ibid.
46. The Hindu, 7 June 1938.
The radical section of the National Congress defined independence in more radical terms. Foremost among this section of the leadership was Jawaharlal Nehru. Jawaharlal Nehru's speech as President of the 44th session of the Indian National Congress at Lahore in 1929 was an important indication of the growing socialist trend within the Congress. Even earlier, making a plea for cooperation between labour and the Congress, he had said on 18 August 1929, during Tinplate workers' strike in Jamshedpur: "Congress was the strength of politics and hunger the strength of the labour. Congress and labour should combine to remedy the evil, i.e., to obtain Swaraj." Nationalist Press in South India also made a similar plea for cooperation between Congress and labour. The working class was asked to strengthen the Indian National Congress and the national movement, as it would ultimately mean helping the working class movement. It was also argued that the co-operation between the Congress and the working class movement was essential to strengthen the working class movement and to finally secure independence for India.

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47. Reel No.7: Reports of the Proceedings of the 44th Session of the Indian National Congress, Lahore, 1929, NAI.

48. S.F.No.698, 30-10-29, Extracts from Secret Reports Relating to C.D.M., 1930-35, TNA.

49. Andhra Patrika, 26 Jan. 1929, NNPR, TNA.
The co-operation between the two was considered necessary also because the British imperialism was a common enemy of them. While addressing the All India Trade Union Congress in 1933, Jawaharlal Nehru elaborated the idea further: "As a matter of fact the labour problem and the national problem were both coming nearer to each other and had to face the same ultimate issues - that is to say, the removal of British imperialism from India. No other solution will satisfy either or bring relief to the masses. He hoped therefore that there would be an increasing amount of co-operation between the two great movements..."

Addressing the Madras Labour Union in 1936 he defined independence ultimately as meaning the power "to redress the grievances of the people.... Therefore, it becomes necessary for the workers to work and fight for swaraj." He also explained that as the National Congress was the only organisation fighting for independence it was necessary for all classes to support the Congress.

50. Mathrubhumi, 23 March 1929, Calicut, NNPR, TNA. Al-Ameen, 24 March 1929, Calicut, NNPR, TNA.
51. S.No.25, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers: Report on Jawaharlal Nehru Speech at AITUC, NMM&L.
52. The Hindu, 8 Oct. 1936.
53. Ibid.
The Lucknow session of National Congress held in 1936 was significant particularly because the presidential speech of Jawaharlal Nehru mirrored the growing socialist urge for a revolutionary transformation of Indian society. It also represented to some degree the changing outlook and approach within the National Congress. In his speech, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in socialism.... I see no way of ending poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary change in our political and social structures." 54

Pointing to the linkage between the working class movement and the nationalist movement he stressed the need for greater co-operation between the two movements each preserving its own identity. 55 He hoped that as a result of unification of the socialist and nationalist forces, the National Congress would become more socialistic and proletarian. 56

Nehru's sentiments were echoed by many others. For example, Sri Prakash, Chairman of the Reception Committee

54. Reel No.7: Report of the Proceedings of Indian National Congress 49th session, Lucknow, 1936, NAI.


of the Lucknow session, 1936, said:

Great individuals as such have ceased to interest me. The only person who I think matters, is that unknown but most important person – the common man in field and factory, in the cottage and the street, on whom falls the heaviest load of life... so far as I can see, I have no doubt that we of the Congress today stand for a reconstruction of society.... It is no more possible to tolerate excessive wealth in the hands of a few on the one hand, and crushing poverty of the vast masses on the other, unlimited power for a handful and the condition of slaves for the rest. We definitely stand for an equitable distribution of work, wages, and comforts for a society of freedom and of love. 57

Similarly, Subhas Chandra Bose as President of the 51st and 52nd sessions of the Indian National Congress held at Haripura and Tripura in 1938 and 1939 respectively, declared that though the main problem facing India was that of political independence, socialist propaganda was necessary to prepare the country for socialism after India won political freedom. 58 He also laid stress on greater co-operation between the Congress and the working class and peasant movements. 59

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57. Reel No.7: Report of the Proceedings of Indian National Congress, 49th session, Lucknow, 1936, NAI.


59. Reel No.7: Report of the Proceedings of the 52nd Indian National Congress Session, 1939, Tripura, NAI.
The result of Jawaharlal Nehru's and other radical leaders' advocacy of socialist ideas was that they gained wider currency and popularity. Socialist ideas also began to influence some of the traditional Congress leaders and the working class leaders in Madras presidency. 60

B.

The radical working class leaders too wanted the working class to be a part of the national movement because they too believed that political independence was a precondition for the establishment of socialism in India. M. Singaravelu Chetty had been arguing from 1920s that workers as a class had an important political role in the struggle for freedom of India. 61 During the strike in South Indian Railway in 1928, Mukundalal Sircar appealed to the Congress leaders to help the workers' struggle against British capitalists and thus mobilise them in the Simon Commission boycott movement. 62 Further in 1932, he appealed to the industrial workers in Madras to resist any attack by the British government upon the elementary rights of citizenship specially in matters like the freedom of speech,

60. Oral Interviews with:
P. Chengalva Rayan, 28-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
N. Krishnaswamy, 10-7-89, Trichinopoly, Tamilnadu.

62. G.O.No.660, Pub. Dept., 6-8-28, TNA.
association and press. He was arrested on 25 May 1932 as the government feared that his presence and appeals would have great impact on the workers in Madras city.

There was an increasing trend towards the integration of the working class movement and the national movement in the Madras presidency with the growth of the Congress Socialist Party and the increasing activity of the Communists. N.G. Ranga, President of the Andhra Provincial Congress Socialist Party, observed in June 1934 at Bezwada that the main object of the party was to convert the Congress to Socialism. There was also widening of the anti-imperialist consciousness and understanding of the working class. The working class was asked to lend its support to the anti-imperialist movement. T.V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, President of Madras Labour Union, exhorted the workers to join the Congress and thus support the anti-imperialist movement. Quite notably, A.S.K. Iyengar was arrested and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment for his speech on the occasion of the

64. F.No.18/8/1932, Home Dept. Polll., NAI.
65. F.No.18/6/1934, Home Dept. Polll., NAI.
66. Letter No.2247L, PW&LD, 16-10-35, TNA.
'Independence Day' celebrations in Madras.67

The left leaders assigned a very prominent part to the industrial workers in the ongoing political struggle in India.68 Speaking to the workers of M&SM Railway Employees' Union at Bezwada in March 1936, Kamala Devi Chattopadhya explained that the workers were destined to play a very important part in the ongoing political struggle.69 In September 1936, the Andhra Provincial Press Workers' Union urged upon the Congress the necessity of providing collective affiliation to trade unions, peasant organisations, and other anti-imperialist organisations so that the Anti-imperialist United People's Front could be effectively developed on broad and militant lines.70 Addressing the Harbour and port workers in a meeting in December 1936 at Vizagapatam, Cherukuvada Narasimham and Tenneti Viswanathan dilated upon the trade union movement and asked the workers to support the Congress as the Congress was truly championing the interests of the workers.71

69. The Hindu, 19 March 1936.
70. The Hindu, 23 Sept. 1936.
The National Congress was seen by the left leaders as a symbol of the "evolution of the idea of nationalism" in India, and therefore, they wanted the workers to support the Congress and strengthen the national movement. Speaking at a workers' meeting in Nandyal in November 1937, P. Ramachandraiah and others underlined the workers' role in hastening the dawn of independence by supporting the Congress. The Congress Socialists were convinced that the task of the left forces was to make the Congress a powerful anti-imperialist organisation by broadening its mass base. They also firmly believed that by mobilising the organised and unorganised working class and making them influential in the National Congress, they would be able to turn it into a real mass organisation. Strengthening the Congress was felt necessary because the minimum demands of the working class could not be secured unless India was independent. P. Venkateswarlu, a radical working class leader from Andhra, addressing at Bezwada on 1 May 1936, explained to the workers that

73. **The Hindu**, 11 Nov. 1937.
76. **Congress Socialist**, 23 May 1936.
British imperialism must be fought before socialism was established in India. 77

The left leaders too held that the struggle of the Indian people for freedom from foreign rule and that of the working class for emancipation from capitalist exploitation were complementary and would strengthen each other. 78 They also believed that the movement for the overthrow of British imperialism and the movement for establishing socialism could be carried on simultaneously in India. 79 After explaining the ideals of socialism to the workers of an alluminium factory in Madras, M.R. Magani, the socialist leader, asked the workers to become members of the Congress organisation for independence had to be first won before socialism was established. 80

The left leaders argued that the Indian national movement a revolutionary mass movement led by the National Congress and was an embodiment of interests of all classes. 81 They also saw the national movement before


78. Congress Socialist, 12 June 1937.


80. Andhra Patrika, 12 July 1937.

81. New Age, April 1937, NMM&L.
1939 as representing the growing democratic consciousness of the Indian people. It was further felt that the National Congress, as the main anti-imperialist organisation, was able to promote the growing unity of the Indian people "on the basis of a programme which corresponded to the needs of the overwhelming majority of Indian people." 

The period between 1934 and 1939 in Madras presidency was significant for the greater integration of economic problems of the working class with that of the political independence of India by the left leaders. Speaking at a meeting in Madras organised in connection with the 'Independence Day' by the Madras Congress Socialist Party, Madras Press Workers' Union, Madras Electric Tramway Men's Union and the Madras Toddy Tappers' Union on 26 January 1937, M.K. Swamy stated: "You must understand that the British Government is our enemy today. It is only when the British Government becomes extinct, there is no poverty, no disease and no suffering.... We take a pledge today that we will

82. New Age, June 1938.
83. Ibid.
organise the vast masses of workers and peasants, hold meetings, organise unions, and carry on the fight with a United Front."  

Similarly, P. Jeevanandam, in his speech to the members of Nellikuppam Labour Union in August 1938, at Nellikuppam told the workers that in their endeavour to end capitalist exploitation, they should first work for the replacement of British imperialism. Speaking at a meeting of the Madras Electric Tramways and Supply Corporation Employees' Union in December 1938 in Madras, Jai Prakash Narain asked the workers to rid themselves of foreign rule in order to improve their lot substantially and appealed to them that they should join the Congress and make it really representative of the working classes. Similarly, the Congress socialist leaders, Manjunatha Rao, P. Krishna Pillai and K.P. Gopalan, speaking at the 5th annual conference of the Textile Workers' Union at Calicut in July, 1939, explained to the workers the necessity of strengthening the struggle against British imperialism while fighting for their own class demands. They also

84. G.O.No.547, Pub. Dept., 17-3-37, TNA.
85. G.O.No.2162, Dev. Dept., 2-9-38, TNA.
86. G.O.No.194, Dev. Dept., 23-1-39, TNA.
appealed to them to become members of the National Congress and strengthen the Congress in its fight for independence. 87

This aspect was brought out by several left and working class leaders in recent interviews with me. K. Nagaiah, a working class leader from Guntur, explained that what made a significant impact on the ideological terrain of the workers was the message that "out country would be believed. Our perpetual poverty would go" once India won independence. 88 Y. Vijayakumar, left leader from Visakhapatnam, stated that the British imperialist exploitation of India and the British capitalist exploitation of Indian workers were the issues emphasized in workers' meetings. He further explained that before independence of India the workers had two types of class consciousness: "One was trade union consciousness and the other was political but that was for freedom so that their lot could be bettered." 89

P. Venkateswarlu, a prominent left leader of the 1930s in Andhra, said that the workers had the understanding

87. The Hindu, 19 July 1939.
88. Interview with: K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
89. Interview with: Y. Vijayakumar, 7-8-88, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
that if India became independent and Indian National Congress came to power, they might be liberated and their demands could be met. He further said that for the workers the National Congress was the national movement for its aim was to drive out the British and win independence. J. Satyanarayana, from Vijayawada, said that the National Congress and other left leaders in their speeches and educational campaigns explained to the workers the necessity of ending the exploitation of India by the British. He said that this idea was strongly conveyed to the workers. He stated that the economic discontent and the nationalist political activity in the 1930s contributed to the "militant mood" of the working class. K. Murugesan, a prominent left leader of the 1930s in Tamilnadu explained that the problems of the workers along with the National problem were addressed to the workers in their meetings. The distribution of leaflets and literature was used as the means to enhance the political awareness of the workers. Similarly, the National and Red flags were used by the leaders to appeal to the sentiments of the workers. He emphasized

90. Interview with: P. Venkateswarlu, 17-8-88, Jaggayapeta, Andhra Pradesh.

91. Interview with: J. Satyanarayana, 7-6-88, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.
that working class movement and National movement were helping each other. He argued that "those who refute this do not understand what had happened in our country."\(^92\)

M. Arjunan, a left leader who joined Buckingham & Carnatic Mills as a half timer in 1927, said that the issues of economic exploitation and the economic backwardness of the country and the workers' economic conditions were explained to the workers in their meetings. While explaining these issues, they also underlined the need for the workers to struggle for national freedom.\(^93\)

P.C. Narayana Nambiar of Cannanore in Malabar observed that "as a left Congressmen we stood for complete independence." He said that it was explained to the workers that it was the foreign rule that was the main enemy of the country. He further said that the role of the British imperialist exploitation in the underdevelopment of industry was also emphasized. They, therefore, stressed in the workers' meetings that independence was necessary for any economic improvement in the conditions of the workers in the country.\(^94\)

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93. Interview with: M. Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.

94. Interview with: P.C. Narayana Nambiar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.
K.K. Nayayar, from Cannanore, stated that the necessity of securing independence of India for redressing the political and economic grievances and for bringing about socialism in India was explained to the workers in their meetings. The issues of economic exploitation of the workers and the foreign domination were explained in the workers' meetings to promote anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas among them. He further said that they also sought to promote socialist urge among workers.95 The left leaders were thus convinced that the national movement was representing the political and economic urges of the Indian people and therefore the working class should strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle. Poverty, hunger, exploitation of the working class by the British capitalists and police repression under the British Government were the common issues on which the left and working class leaders appealed to the workers in mobilising them in the national struggle for independence. Thus the radical left and working class leaders actively attempted between 1934 and 1939 to bring about a closer relationship and mutual co-operation between the industrial working class and the National Congress.

C.

The moderate working class leaders also combined economic and political issues in their appeals to the

95. Interview with:
K.K. Nayar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.
workers. They too emphasized that political independence was necessary to bring about any improvement in the economic conditions of the workers. Workers should, therefore, participate in the struggle for independence of India in their own interests.

The moderate working class leaders, such as, V.V. Giri, B. Shiva Rao, G. Chelvapathy Chetty and S.R. Varadarajulu Naidu, asked the industrial workers to take their share in the national movement while simultaneously fighting for their demands. They too linked British imperialism and British capitalist exploitation to the miserable conditions of the working class. They explained to the workers that British imperialism was actively aiding the capitalists in their exploitation and, therefore, it was essential, first of all, to overthrow British imperialism. Therefore, strengthening of the national movement was to be seen as strengthening the working class movement.\(^{96}\) They argued that unless independence of India was won, it would not be possible for the working class to improve their economic conditions. Also the British imperialism was seen by them as the main stumbling

\(^{96}\) Letter No.836L, PW&LD, 13-3-30, TNA. G.O.No.1815L, PW&LD, 27-8-32, TNA.
block in the path of the growth of the working class movement. Therefore, they wanted the workers to support and play their part in the struggle for independence. 97

According to P. Varadarajulu Naidu, a Congress leader as well as a working class leader, any activity against the national movement was considered "unpatriotic". 98 He wrote in 1930: "Somehow or other Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress have brought about a momentum in the country and it would be unpatriotic on the part of anybody to disturb it." 99

The moderate working class leaders also told the workers that there was a similarity of interest between workers and other social groups and classes as far as securing independence. V.V. Giri argued that it would be possible for the country to win independence only when the capitalists, workers and others stood united in the struggle. 100 Explaining that the national movement was an expression of the democratic aspirations of the people of India, he repudiated the theory that working

98. P. Varadarajulu Naidu to C. Vijayaraghacharier, 22 July 1930, Madras, C. Vijayaraghava Chariar Papers, NMM&L.
99. Ibid.
100. Andhra Patrika, 19 July 1930.
class had no politics. He argued that the economic well-being of the working class was dependent on its political role in the national movement. Therefore, it was necessary for the workers, first of all, to work for political independence of India if they wanted to bring about the social and economic transformation in Indian society. Similarly, on his return from the Second Round Table Conference, he told the workers that to secure their Fundamental Rights, they should work "first and foremost for Swaraj." Again, in 1936, he emphasized that there could be no political or economic swaraj unless the independence of the nation was assured.

The moderate working class leadership considered the Congress to be the main anti-imperialist organisation fighting for independence of India. Workers should, therefore, strengthen it. Jamnadas Mehta, addressing the National Federation of Trade Unions held at Nagpur, in December 1935, stated that the Indian National Congress could not be expected to become a purely labour or socialist organisation. It must maintain its distinctive role,

102. G.O.No.273, Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 28-3-33, TNA.
103. The Hindu, 11 June 1936.
i.e., "the consolidation of all classes." He added: "It will therefore be impolite to attempt to turn the Congress a class organisation."\textsuperscript{104}

We may sum up here the basic differences between the left-wing and moderate working class leaders regarding their attitude towards the national movement. The left leaders, while explaining to the workers the need to participate in the national movement, also simultaneously tried to impart a socialist consciousness to the workers. For them the struggle for India's independence was a necessary precondition for launching a sustained fight for bringing about socialism in India. They, therefore, saw the fight for independence of India as an inseparable aspect of the workers' fight for socialism. The left leaders wanted that the industrial workers must, as a class, for their own benefit, contribute to the winning of independence for India.

The moderate working class leadership in their appeals to the workers emphasized the better economic conditions that would exist for the workers in independent India. Socialist Vision was however missing in their appeals to the workers. They, however, believed that

\textsuperscript{104.} F.No.L-2/1936, AICC Papers.
independence of India was necessary for bringing about any improvement in the economic and social condition of the workers. They emphasized that working class equally with other social groups or classes was capable of playing its part in the struggle for independence.

D.

There was another section of working class leadership which was however not dominant in the Madras presidency as the working class was mostly led by the moderates or left radicals. This section believed that the working class should not have any politics. It also held that the national movement was confined to the upper classes. It advanced the argument that workers being poor should not take part in the national struggle which was not relevant to them or their interests. C. Basudev, who represented this trend, told at a Madras kerosene oil workers' union on 24 May 1930, that the labour movement was in its infant stage and consequently the workers had to be very careful in choosing the methods of their action. He referred to the civil disobedience movement and advised the workers not to gather and crowd in the streets and thus add to confusion. He advised that as each one of the workers was "the bread-winner" of a family they should keep away from the movement.\textsuperscript{105} His views were severely

\textsuperscript{105} Letter No.1798L, PW&LD (MS), 19-6-30, TNA.
criticized in the radical press.\textsuperscript{106}

II

The spread of anti-imperialist ideology affected the industrial workers as much as it affected the other classes of Indian society. The growth of anti-imperialist movement helped sharpen the political consciousness of the industrial workers. The Government's open support to the capitalists during strikes also helped in the crystallization of anti-government feelings among the workers.

There was revival of the anti-imperialist movement following the arrival of the Simon Commission in India.\textsuperscript{107} In Madras, a body named the Simon Boycott Propaganda Committee was formed under the Presidentship of Satya-murthi. It issued appeals to Indians to observe Hartal on 3 February 1928, which was the day of the Simon Commission's arrival in India.\textsuperscript{108} 3 February 1928 was

\textsuperscript{106} Munnetram, 30 May 1931, Madras, NPPR, TNA.
\textsuperscript{107} Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947, Delhi, 1985, pp.254 and 261.
\textsuperscript{108} Fortnightly for the second half of Jan. 1928. Selected Extracts from Fortnightly Reports, History of Freedom Struggle in Andhra, 1928-29, APSA, Hyderabad.
seen as a test for India; there were also appeals to the workers to join others in stopping their work on that day.  

Madras observed complete Hartal on 3 February 1928. Violence on the day led to police firing which resulted in the killing of one person and wounding of three.  

Guntur town observed Hartal on the day of Simon Commission's arrival on 23 February 1928. All the factories were closed.  

The violent incidents, which took place on 3 February 1928, the day of the Hartal in Madras city, would raise the question whether the industrial workers also formed part of the "riotous mob". There are no definite sources to determine who constituted the mob or the people. It is however difficult to accept the conclusion that "industrial workers were not involved" in the incidents of 3 February 1928.  

with the arrest of five persons. The Commissioner of Police writes: "The mob, consisting of all sorts and conditions of men and boys ranging from educated students to the riff-raff of George Town approached and attacked the law college police station hurling stones in all directions and demanding the release of the arrested men.... The Chief Presidency Magistrate and Commissioner of Police warned the mob of the fact that the police would open fire... the only answer was an angry shout of 'shoot' 'shoot us', 'shoot us'. Here we are 'kill us', etc., and further volleys of stones which hit both the Chief Presidency Magistrate and the Commissioner of Police." 113

On the same day, the "riotous mob" also resorted to stone throwing on their way to attend a public meeting on the beach of Tripilicane. 114 S. Satyamurthi observed that the thousands of "poorer people" stopped their work on the day of Hartal making it a complete success. 115

It can be observed that the "riff-raff" of the George Town were the industrial workers. These were the people who earned their living by working in the Harbour or in the mercantile firms of George Town, or by way of casual

114. Ibid.
work. T.S. Ramaswami Aiyar, President of the Madras Corporation, observed in 1932, "...It is a common spectacle in George Town to see many of these people who earn a living by casual labour or by working in the Harbour or in the Mercantile firms of George Town spending their whole time both day and night under the trees or in streets."\(^{116}\)

We may surmise that it was no other than the industrial workers and other lower classes who were contemptuously referred to as "riff-raff" by the British administration or the British police. The British police officials and the administration used certain terms like "unruly", "noisy", "rowdy", "hooligans", "violent" and "dangerous class", to describe the presence and the militant participation of industrial workers and the other lower classes.\(^{117}\) Therefore it becomes extremely difficult to rule out the industrial workers' involvement in the incidents on the day of Hartal in February 1928.

\(^{116}\) The Hindu, 16 July 1932.

\(^{117}\) Dipesh Chakrabarthi, "Trade Unions in Hierarchical Culture: The Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1920-50" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies; Writings on South Asian History and Society, Vol. III, Delhi, 1984, p.146; David Arnold, Police Power and Colonial Rule, op. cit., see Chapter 5, pp.150-84.
While the preparations for the boycott of the Simon Commission's visit to Madras city on 18 February 1929 were on, the moderate working class leaders also asked the workers to take their share in the political struggle. B. Shiva Rao, addressing a workers' meeting in Madras in 1929, appealed to them to hold high the honour of the working class movement by intensely continuing the boycott of Simon Commission.\textsuperscript{118} A call for Hartal on 18 February 1929 was given by the Congress leaders on the arrival of Simon Commission in Madras city.\textsuperscript{119} Interestingly, there was a sudden strike by some of the corporation's conservancy workers on 17 February 1929 without advancing any demands. The strike ended on the same evening after the arrest of 15 leaders.\textsuperscript{120}

A complete Hartal was observed on 18 February 1929 with processions of blackflags organised by the Congress. The main procession was led by S. Sreenivasa Iyengar. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, S. Satyamurthi and others.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} Andhra Patrika, 12 Feb. 1929.
\textsuperscript{119} The Hindu, 14 Feb. 1929.
\textsuperscript{120} Fortnightly Report for the second half of Feb. 1929, H.F.M., TNA.
\textsuperscript{121} The Hindu, 19 Feb. 1929; Andhra Patrika, 19 Feb. 1929; Tamilnadu, 24 Feb. 1929, Madras; Lokopakari, 21 Feb. 1929, NNPR, TNA.
T. Prakasam in his statement on the Hartal in Madras, said: "I proceeded at once to the meeting which was very large and comprised all classes and communities although there was no previous announcement. It was a splendid demonstration of the feelings of the people against the Commission."\(^{122}\)

The Madras Labour Union started a separate political fund in 1929. The primary purpose of the fund with contribution from the workers who were members of the MLU was to assist the ongoing national political struggle for India's independence. But the fund was soon abandoned due to the weak financial position of the workers. An official publication was to observe later that "the failure to form political funds does not however mean that trade unions in India are not interested in politics. Owing to the general poverty of the workers, the trade union movement can hardly be expected to provide the funds required for a vigorous political campaign, although with unscrupulous leadership the movement has been known to provide the rowdy elements for many a political demonstrations."\(^{123}\)

\(^{122}\) The Hindu, 19 Feb. 1929.

\(^{123}\) F.No.1524(17), Dept. of Industries & Labour, 1932. Note on the Working of the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926 for the year 1930 with comparative statistics for three years, 1927-28, 1928-29, 1929-30, NAI.
The growing involvement of the workers in the nationalist movement cautioned the British government to be fully aware of the "danger of labour trouble being fermented for political purposes." It was worried that the National Congress on realising the importance of the part that organised labour could play in the anti-imperialist movement might try to co-opt the industrial workers in the political struggle. The growing political awareness of the industrial workers and the active involvement of the Congress and working class leaders in mobilising the workers in the national movement strengthened the apprehensions of the British government. The Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill, which were born out of the British government's apprehensions, were clear indications of the growing sense of insecurity of the government regarding the involvement of the industrial working class in the


125. Ibid.
political struggle.

The nationalist movement gained a real momentum with the Independence Day celebrations on 26 January 1930 and the breaking of the salt law in several parts of Madras presidency. 127 11 out of 32 volunteers under the leadership of Singaravellu Chetty, a prominent communist of South India, proceeded to Agastyampalli Swamp and picked up salt. 128 A complete and successful hartal was observed in Bezwada on 22 April 1930 following the imprisonment of the local Municipal Chairman, A. Kaleeswara Rao. All rice mills, shops and markets were closed and

126. Note: Public Safety Bill was designed to empower the British Government to summarily deport foreign communists such as Philip Spratt and Ben Bradlee helping to organise Bengal and Bombay workers.

Trade Disputes Act of April 1929, established a system of tribunals to settle industrial disputes. It was also an attempt to ban strikes undertaken for reasons other than trade dispute. Trade disputes were banned, if they were used to coerce Government or inflict hardship on the public.

Tamilnadu, Madras, 19 Feb. 1929, NPPR; Andhra Patrika, Madras, 12 Feb. 1929, NPPR; Mathrubhumi, Calicut, 23 March 1929, NPPR; Al-Ameen, Calicut, 24 March 1929, NPPR; File No.613, Under Secretary Secret Safe Files (henceforth, USSSF), 14 March 1929, TNA.


all business was stopped. In Madras city, Satyagraha meetings, conducted on 21 April 1930, was well attended by the Choolai mill workers who were on strike following the refusal of the mill management to concede their demand for enhancement of their wages. There were two processions on 21 April 1930. One procession of Satyagrahis was led by T. Prakasam and the other procession of Choolai Mill workers was led by Congress workers from Choolai through George Town to the High Court Beach. The procession of Choolai workers started with 400 to 500 "strong and noisy" people but by the time it reached the beach it was joined by Congress workers, "riff-raff" and "somasris", about 1,500 in all. Workers and others, after breaking the salt law and on their return from the beach, clashed with the police which resulted in the battle of "brick bats and stones and police lathis."

Madras city observed Hartal on 22 April 1930 and a huge public meeting was conducted protesting against the arrest of the Congress leaders Nageswara Rao, Rangayya

129. The Hindu, 23 April 1930.

130. F.No.683(A), 30-4-30, F.R. for the second half of April 1930, USSSF, TNA.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid.
Naidu and Bashyam Chetti. 133 The Choolai Mill workers in
were also conspicuous satyagrahis on the day. 134 There
were also violent incidents resulting in clashes with
the police. The Commissioner of Police observed on
23 April 1930: "The people who gave the trouble are
said to have been mostly strikers belonging to the card-
ing section of the Choolai mill." 135 In fact, it was a battle
between
the workers and the police. C.B. Cunningham, Inspector
General of Police, in his communication to the Chief
Secretary to Government of Madras, commended the role
played by a sargeant of the police in the incidents. He
observed: "He led his men personally in the important
dispersal of the 22nd. It was a great disappointment
to him that he missed the big fight." 136 T. Prakasam
was convicted and sentenced to one year simple imprison-
ment. 137

The continuous presence and support of industrial
workers created a certain nervousness in the British

133. Ibid.
134. Fortnightly Report for the second half of April
1930, Extracts from Fortnightly Reports, 1928-1939,
HFM, No.72, TNA.
135. S.No.683(A), USSSF, op. cit., TNA.
TNA.
137. Fortnightly for second half of April 1930, op. cit.,
HFM, TNA.
administration. The Commissioner of Police observed on 26 April 1930, one day before the big battle of the industrial workers with the British police, that "I have been a little anxious about the mill coolies - the Choolai strikers (2,200) as well as the Buckingham & Carnatic Mill workers (11,000) and Perambur Railway Workshops workers (6,000?) Since 22-4-30 as there has been persistent private propaganda among these men by Congress agents who are said to have boasted that they felt sure of success and alarmist rumours have been flying about." 138

It became clear that the fears of the British government were not unfounded. Even G. Selvapathy Chetty, moderate working class leader of Madras, addressing an All Party Public meeting on 27 April where industrial workers were also present, spoke with great militancy: "What should be done to the whiteman (who) has acted so wickedly? We should pack him up this day to England.... Our sisters were dragged by the hand and put to shame." He said he had 10,000 labourers under him who would come forward "to vindicate justice and die in this wicked regime." 139 The public meeting which was held as a protest against the incidents of 22 and 23 April 1930

138. S.F.No.683(A), USSSF, op. cit., TNA.
139. Ibid.
was attended by both Congress leaders and working class leaders, namely Venkatachallam Chetti, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, Mrs. Wood, Mrs. Cousins, S. Satyamurthi, K. Bhashyam, V. Chakkarai Chetty, Dr. Natesa Mudaliar and P.T. Kumaramswami. A very important aspect of the meeting once again was the attendance of Choolai mill workers. 140

The All party public meeting indicated the active support of the working class leaders to the national struggle for freedom. The police interference with the public meeting on 27 April provoked a serious clash with the police 141 in which the industrial workers played a significant and vital role. As a government note noted, as the result of the insidious teaching of Congress leaders in meetings and through the press, large numbers of workers from the Choolai mills, Perambur workshops and other factories took part in the disturbance on the Marina on the 27th of April. Number of them received injuries at the hands of the police."142 The details of those who were dead and injured are as follows: 143

141. Dravidan, 28 April 1930, Madras, NPPR, TNA.
142. G.O.No.215-16, Pub. Dept. (Gen.), 2-3-31, TNA.
143. S.F.No.683(A), USSSF, op. cit., TNA.
The persons, who died, were:

(1) Chinna Kannan, fisherman family; (2) Ramakrishna Naicker, ex-employee of Madras Tramways; (3) E.K. Govindaswami Mudaliar, an advocate. The persons, who were injured, were: (1) Vaidivelu Mudaliar, cleaner; (2) Syed Yusuf, watchman; (3) Kathayee, jutka-driver's wife; (4) Krishnan, coolie; (5) Virasami, rickshaw-wallah. 130 workers of Choolai mill, who could not rejoin the mill on its re-opening because of the injuries sustained in the incidents of 27 April, rejoined the mill on 1 May 1930. The details of injuries to the police force on the day were: Assistant Commissioner 1; Inspectors 5; Sub-Inspectors 9; Sowars 7; Head Constables and men 55.

The officials commended policemen for "the greatest gallantry, restraint and good discipline in the prolonged struggle on 27th evening." There was also appreciation of the role of the police in the incidents of 27 April by the Viceroy of India and Governor of Madras Presidency. The Madras Government in its communique on the incidents of 27 April 1930, observed that "...the conduct of all

144. Ibid.

145. G.O.No.303(S-27), Pub. (Police) Dept. 28-5-30, C.D.M. in Madras city 22 to 27 April 1930, TNA.

146. Ibid.

147. S.F.No.683(B), 20 July 1930, USSSF, TNA.
ranks of the force throughout is not only not blame-
worthy, but in the highest degree commendable.\textsuperscript{148} But
the police action on 27 April was widely criticized in
public and press.\textsuperscript{149}

The incidents of 27 April 1930 were a culmination
of the series of clashes with the British police which
started in the second half of April 1930. These inci-
dents amply demonstrated the militancy of the Industrial
workers in their involvement in the on-going nationalist
struggle.

Working class in Madras continued to identify
itself with the nationalist struggle. The workers of
the Perambur workshop, public works department stores
and other places stopped their work in the afternoon of
6 May 1930 when Hartal was observed. This also resulted
in the closing of more shops.\textsuperscript{150} Another serious inci-
dent occurred when a meeting scheduled for 18 May 1930
was prohibited by the orders of the police.\textsuperscript{151} The offi-
cials noted that "a small riotous element composed of

\textsuperscript{148.} The Hindu, 14 May 1930.

\textsuperscript{149.} Andhra Patrika, 28 April 1930; Ananda Bodhini,
30 April 1930; Lokopakari, 1 May 1930; Tamil Arasu,
1 May 1930; Navasakti, 30 April 1930; Congress,
29 April 1930; Samadarsini, 30 April 1930; Dravidan,
7 June 1930, NNPR, TNA.

\textsuperscript{150.} S.F.No.683(B), USSSF, 20 July 1930, TNA.

\textsuperscript{151.} Fortnightly for the second half of May 1930, Extracts
from Fortnightly Reports, 1928-39, H.F.M., TNA.
mill hands and workers in presses - began stone-throwing - five small bombs also thrown." The people were dispersed by a heavy police lathi-charge. Four people were arrested, two of them later got 6 month rigorous imprisonment. 153

The constant support of the Industrial workers to the nationalist movement posed serious problem for the British government. The hartal declared by the Nationalist presses on 20 and 21 troubled the British police because the closing of presses "would mean that about 3,000 workers will be idle." Necessary arrangements were made to preserve peace and to guard Government presses. 155 The pressure by the constant involvement of the Industrial workers led the Commissioner of Police to request the Government for an extra Magistrate as he wished to start a campaign against the "rowdies" of the city, who were the "chief danger" at present. 156

Several people including "the mill hands and the labourers of all sorts" gathered on 25 May anticipating

152. S.F.No.683(B), USSSF, 20 July 1930, TNA.
153. Ibid.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. Ibid.
a public meeting at the Triplicane beach of Madras. The police rounded up some of the people and it was found that seven of them, who were labourers, had stones concealed on their person and in bundles. They were arrested and sentenced to 6 month rigorous imprisonment. 157

The M&SM Railway Employees Union, at a special meeting held on 1 May 1930, passed a resolution condemning the police action in Madras city. 158 In other meetings held in the month of June 1930, workers passed resolutions expressing resentment against the holding of the Round Table Conference without Gandhi; and they also appealed to all workers to pray to God for an amicable settlement between Gandhi and the Government. 159 Twelve workers, at Kerosene Oil Workers' Union meeting in June 1930, came with taklis and one of them remarked that "it was a good thing to keep themselves so engaged as it would provide an addition to their slender income." 160 V.V.Giri,

157. Ibid. Also see Fortnightly for the second half of May 1930, Extracts from F.Rs. 1928-39, H.F.M., TNA.

158. Fortnightly for the first half of May 1930, Home Dept., NAI.

159. Letter No.2067, PW&LD, 16-7-30, TNA. Fortnightly for the second half of June 1930, Home Dept., NAI.

160. Ibid.
speaking at a meeting of M&SM Railway Workers in April 1930, asked the workers to assist the national movement by weaving khaddar or by giving up drinking. Later was witnessed the sight of the volunteers of the M&SM Railway Workers' Union donning pure khaddar, the symbol of non-violence, during their strike in 1932 in Madras city.

The National Congress started a systematic propaganda in the districts of East and West Godavary, Kiśña and Guntur on 11 May 1930. In Ellore, 6,000 people gathered including 500 women in an open space opposite to the Jute Mill and about 50 pots of salt water were boiled. Earlier in the month of February 1930, a well attended workers' meeting was held under the auspices of Ellore Town Congress Committee. A. Govindachary, N. Narasimhachalam and G. Jogayya spoke on the khaddar and the evils of drinking. D. Krishnamurthi appealed to the workers to enlist themselves as members of the national Congress. The arrest of Congress leaders in Ellore

161. G.O.No.1489, PW&LD, 19-5-30, TNA.
162. The Hindu, 29 Nov. 1932.
164. The Hindu, 19 Feb. 1930.
in the month of June provoked a serious, violent incident comparable to that of the events of Madras city in April 1930. The news of the arrest of the Congress leaders led to a gathering of a large number of people mostly workers. The police attempt to disperse the people by force infuriated the people and they turned violent and resisted the police lathi-charge. Most of the crowd of 3,000 consisted of "cooly class from the Ganulapeta and Kotapeta (commonly classed together as Turupupeta) localities - brandishing stickers."\(^{165}\) The encounter between the people and the police force resulted in injuries to 14 people one of whom subsequently died in the hospital.\(^{166}\)

Most of those injured in the police firing were workers. The District Magistrate of West Godavari later observed: "So far as is known fourteen of the mob were injured and I understand thirteen of them belonged to the cooly class."\(^{167}\) The District Superintendent of Police, West Godavary, also noted that "of the 14 persons, 13 are from Turupupeta and one from the town proper. The 13 persons are all labourers living by cooly work or engaged in the

\(^{165}\) G.O.No.796 A-1(S-21), Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 2-7-30, TNA.

\(^{166}\) Ibid.

\(^{167}\) Ibid.
local jute mill if the mill were working." He attributed the strong working class reaction to "the instigation by some Congress leaders that they should stand up against the lathicharges." The events of 24 June 1930 were seen by the British government as part of the National Congress's programme to bring the industrial working class into the national struggle. G. Satyanarayana, a working class leader from Ellore, also provided information on police firing in June 1930 in Ellore in an interview with me. He described in detail how the working class in Ellore was mobilised in nationalist movement. He said that whenever there was a call by the nationalist leaders, the workers in Ellore used to get aroused. During the evening hours the workers would come and support the boycott and picketing of foreign cloth shops. Similarly, when the Congress leaders were arrested in June 1930 at the Congress Sibiram, workers in Ellore organized a demonstration against it. Consequently there was police firing resulting in the death of one of those 14 persons injured in the incident. In my interview with him, he provided information on police firing incident in 1930.

168. Ibid.; Banka Chinappalaswamy was one of those 14 persons injured in the incident. In my interview with him, he provided information on police firing incident in 1930.

169. Ibid.

170. Ibid.

171. G. Satyanarayana, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.
of a person who was a worker in a jute mill in Ellore. Banka China Appalaswamy, one of the persons injured in the police firing in June 1930 in Ellore, told me that a struggle took place in June 1930 in Ellore and that one worker died in its course. 172

The spread of the nationalist movement brought the weavers of Gudiyattam, North Arcot district, also into the national movement. On 7 July 1930, a large group consisting largely of weavers clashed with the police following the arrest of local Congress leaders. The clash resulted in police firing leaving one dead. 173

An instance similar to those in Madras, Ellore and Gudiyattam occurred in Madurai when Congress picketing programme assumed a greater degree of momentum. The Congress picketing programme of 17 July 1930 at Madichiyam attracted about 4,000 people - a "very large and violent mob" which also contained "strong rowdy elements". 174 Police lathicharge was responded to with stone pelting by the people. Heavy lathicharge was made on the people.

172. B. Chinaappala Swamy, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.

173. Fortnightly for the first half of July 1930, Home Dept. Poll., NAI.

174. G.O.No.1115, Pub. (Gen.) Dept. (Confdl), 30-8-30, TNA.
A pitched zig-zag battle between the police and the people ensued. Five people were injured in police firing. The District Magistrate of Madurai noted that "the attack on police station was evidently of a still more determined character made as it must have been by the worst elements of the two mobs which had originally collected at the Mount Road toddy shop and the Blackburn light." He further added: "It is impossible to predict in a town like Madurai which contain a very large undesirable rowdy elements, exactly what will happen from day-to-day." Though, in this context, a direct reference to the industrial workers was not available, their involvement could again not be ruled. As our earlier analysis of the composition of the "rowdy elements", "undesirables" and "riff-raff" brought out, these terms were used by the officials to describe contemptuously the militant character of the industrial workers and other lower classes. Moreover in the light of the pattern of the action specific to these class of people, one might venture to say that the industrial workers did take active part in the events at Madurai.

175. Ibid.
176. Ibid.
As elsewhere, the national movement brought about an awakening among the workers in Vijayawada. Nearly 300 workers attended a meeting convened and conducted by the local Congress leaders in early April 1930.\textsuperscript{177} Earlier in April 1930, 400 workers took an oath not to drink at a meeting conducted by the Congress.\textsuperscript{178} Vijayawada observed a complete hartal following the spread of the news of Gandhi's arrest in May 1930 when all factories along with other establishments were closed.\textsuperscript{179}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Andhra Patrika}, 11 April 1930.
\item \textit{Andhra Patrika}, 9 April 1930.
\item \textit{Andhra Patrika}, 8 May 1930.
\end{enumerate}

Note: K. Nagaiah working class leader from Guntur observed that the meetings organised by the Congress leaders in Guntur were largely attended by the workers from small workshops, beedi industry, tobacco industry, municipal works and other trades. Workers also joined political demonstrations. He also said that personal contact with the Congress leaders greatly influenced the workers. J. Satyanarayana, working class leader from Vijayawada, said that the workers in Vijayawada and other towns joined the meetings organised by the Congress leaders. In fact, whenever appeals were made by the Congress leaders, the workers responded. He added that the workers believed that their fight against the employers who were supported by the British government was also part of the struggle against British imperialism.

Oral interviews with:
K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
J. Satyanarayana, 7-6-88, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.
Also see P. Venkateswarlu, 17-8-88, Jaggayyapeta, Andhra Pradesh.
In Tuticorin, in August 1930, a batch of Congress volunteers, donning coloured badges and ribbons, went round the town singing patriotic songs and delivering speeches. As was observed by an official, "their speeches and songs tempt some of the unemployed men and make them join the movement in large numbers."\(^{180}\)

The Congress leaders tried to arouse industrial workers in Coimbatore, a major textile centre of the presidency. In July 1930, Ganapathi Pillai addressed a meeting of workers and appealed to them to join the picketing at the coming liquor auctions.\(^{181}\) In December 1930, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Coimbatore observed: "I had reliable information that some people who had assembled at the Town Hall meeting held on the 26th (December 1930) were armed with knives and other dangerous weapons with a view to retaliate and to cause violence if the police interfered on that day."\(^{182}\) "Undesirables" and "riff-raff" continued to be a part of the meeting conducted by the Congress leaders in Coimbatore during

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180. G.O.No.1398, Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 17-10-30, TNA.


the first half of January 1931.\footnote{Ibid.}

What occurred at Madurai on 5 October 1930 revealed an interesting example of the co-operation between the industrial workers and Congressmen during the national struggle. Prior to the incident, the working class leaders, who were mostly nationalist minded, were encouraging the dismissed workers of the Madurai Harvey Mills and others to become Congress volunteers and participate in the picketing activities of the Congress in Madurai. The local Congress leaders, however, hesitated because, as the earlier incidents in Madurai had shown, the industrial workers' involvement tended to ultimately turn the movement violent.\footnote{G.O.No.1454L, PW&LD, 30-5-31, TNA.}

Picketing was attempted by two batches of 13 and 25 Congress volunteers at Puttutope and Semattipuram respectively on 5 October 1931. Police numbering about 100 armed with lathis and guns made a lathicharge on the volunteers who were picketing toddy shops at the two places. The police lathicharge left 15 people injured.\footnote{G.O.No.1218, Pub. (Gen.) Dept. Confldl., 3-12-31, TNA.} These picketers were mostly the dismissed workers of...
the Madurai Mills. Discussing the lathi-charge, S.R. Varadarajulu Naidu, acting President of the Madura Labour Union was to write: "But Puttutope being very close to living quarters of the majority of the workers of the textile mills who are mostly members of the union, I feel it my duty to bring to the notice of the public, the manner in which the lathicharge was made... I may further add that the picketing on that day was done mostly by the ex-workers of the Madura Mills. One of the seriously injured persons whose wrist has been fractured is also an ex-worker." 186 According to the account of G.H.P. Bailey, District Superintendent of Police, Madurai North, "the presence of known rowdies among the picketters was also reported...sixteen picketters were employed there at Puttutope.... There was no stone throwing at the dispersal of the picketters at Puttutope, but a lathi-charge was necessary to effect complete dispersal." 187 The District Magistrate of Madura also commented that "known rowdies joined the regular Congress volunteers (at whose instance I cannot say)." 188 A public meeting was later held at Madurai condemning the police action against the picketers. 189

186. Ibid.
187. Ibid.
188. Ibid.
189. Ibid.
Kerala Provincial Congress Committee called for a demonstration in Calicut on 27 September 1931. The demonstration was started with 100 volunteers from the Congress Office on 2 October. The demonstrators marched through the town with the usual accompaniment of swaraj flags and shouting slogans such as "victory or death". On the way their number increased to 4,000 to 5,000 with the joining of "mill coolies". Similarly, on 23 September 1931 the picketing activity of the Congress in Ranipet district attracted about 500 people most of them being "rowdies" and "hooligans".

Undaunted by government repression, industrial workers continued to participate actively in the national movement. Workers of Choolai Mills in Madras absented themselves without leave on the afternoon of the 20 January 1931 on account of "Independence Day", forfeiting a full day's wages. Workers in the workshop of M&SM Railway in Madras refused to work and performed Satyagraha in the workshop on 18 June 1931.

190. S.F.No.718, 6-11-31, History of Freedom Movement in Malabar, TNA.
The co-operation of the working class organisations with the nationalist movement also expressed itself through resolutions passed by working class organisations expressing solidarity with the movement. The M&SM Railway Workers' Union and Kerosene Oil Workers' Union passed resolutions in February 1931 condemning police lathicharges, expressing condolences at the death of Motilal Nehru and demanding general amnesty for all workers and leaders in jail including the Meerut prisoners. The Madras Electric Tramways Supply Corporation Employees (13th) Conference passed resolutions on 3 January 1931 appreciating the efforts of the Round Table Conference to realise India's legitimate aspirations.

As we have seen the Karachi Congress resolution on fundamental rights was symbolic of the increasing association of the Congress with Industrial workers. The message of the Karachi Resolution was received with a new enthusiasm by Congressmen as well as working leaders. It was spread through lectures by the local Congress


leaders and through wide distribution of leaflets. For instance, B. Shiva Rao explained to the workers of the Madura Labour Union the terms of the Karachi Resolution. The news of Gandhi's arrest on 4 January 1932 invoked tremendous response from the people. The government resorted to prohibitory orders banning demonstrations and holding of meetings. However, spontaneous processions and public meetings were held in most of the towns. Hartal was observed in Madras city, Anantapur, South Kanara, Kistna, Madura, Nellore, Ramnad, Tinnevelly. Workers in Perambur workshop observed Satyagraha on the afternoon of 5-1-1932 as a protest against Gandhi's arrest.

The frequent use of Section 144 Cr. P.C., the press ordinance, the Unauthorized Newsheet Ordinance, forcible dispersal of 'unlawful' assembly with the use of Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance,1930, and prevention of Molestation and Boycott Ordinance (No.V of 1932) did limit the

197. Letter No.1436L, PW&LD, 28-5-31, TNA.
198. F.No.5/81/1932, Home Dept. Poll., NAI.
199. P.19/1932, AICC Papers.
200. G.O.No.273, Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 28-3-33, TNA.
201. Ibid.
growth of the movement,\textsuperscript{202} and the Congress was forced to take to secret propaganda among the people. One of the important aspects of the British repressive regime was that the laws designed to curb the national movement also affected the working class activity and its movement. The British government made it illegal "to criticize or condemn" the policy of the government during the Civil Disobedience Movement.\textsuperscript{203} The workers' meeting proposed to be held in May 1932 under the auspices of Madras Provincial Central Labour Board was banned by the Commissioner of Police by imposing Section 144 of the Cr. P.C. because it was believed to be in sympathy with the Disobedience Movement.\textsuperscript{204}

In 1932 too, local Congress leaders continued to carry on nationalist propaganda in the areas inhabited by industrial workers. N.S. Varadachary, ex-Branch Secretary of the All India Spinners' Association, organised in August 1932 picketing and processions in Madras

\textsuperscript{202} Report on the Administration of Madras Presidency, 1929-30, Madras, 1931, XV. S.F.No.664, 10-5-30, USSSF, TNA. G.O.No.273, Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 28-3-33, TNA.

\textsuperscript{203} The Hindu, 31 May 1931.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
and tried to enlist the sympathy of the people in the mill area. He was arrested and convicted for his activities.\textsuperscript{205} The League of Youth under the Presidentship of Lakshmipathi continued its propaganda in Madras and organized procession in the workers' area of the Perambur barracks exhorting the textile workers to join the Congress, the creed of which, they said was beneficial to workers. The league directed most of its activity, propagating swadeshi and prohibition, in the "Cherries" i.e., the areas of inhabitation by workers.\textsuperscript{206}

In the face of repressive measures, local National Congress leaders adopted various kinds of tactics to carry on nationalist propaganda. Their propaganda among the Industrial workers included the distribution of leaflets and staging of magic lantern performances in the mill areas. Congress volunteers of Choolai took out a procession on 24 April 1932. Information regarding magic lantern performance in the maidan opposite to the Choolai mills at 5 p.m. was circulated through leaflets. About 100 gathered to witness the show. A. Sundaram, a Congress worker, suddenly, began to address the people gathered there regarding the Congress session held at Delhi. The

\begin{footnotes}
\item 205. Fortnightly for the second half of August 1932. \textit{Home Dept.}, NAI.
\item 206. G.O.No.844, \textit{Pub. Dept.}, 6-6-32, TNA.
\end{footnotes}
crowd began shouting "Gandhiji Ki-jai" with some more people joining the procession shouting jai's. The procession then dispersed.\textsuperscript{207} Singing national songs during the procession was also part of nationalist activity.\textsuperscript{208}

The All India Trade Union Congress, at a meeting of its Executive Committee, held at Nagpur from 9 to 12 May 1932, expressed its support to the national movement by announcing the observation of 26 May 1932 as "All India Protest Day".\textsuperscript{209} Mukundalal Sircar, accordingly, appealed to all labour organisations in Madras to observe 26 May 1932 as "All Indian Protest Day" to express workers' strong protest against the government suppression of the national movement and to show its solidarity with the national struggle.\textsuperscript{210} The government, apprehensive of the impact of Mukundalal Sircar's appeal, banned all meetings and processions by workers; and Mukundalal Sircar was arrested on 25 May.\textsuperscript{211}

\textsuperscript{207} The Hindu, 25 April 1932.
\textsuperscript{208} The Hindu, 30 May 1932.
\textsuperscript{209} G.O.No.597, PW&LD, 10-3-33, TNA.
\textsuperscript{210} F.No.18/8/1932, Home Dept. (Poll.), NAI.
\textsuperscript{211} F.No.6/1932, AICC Papers.
153 workers in the Roving Department of the Choolai Mills refused to work on the afternoon of 25 May 1932, one day before the observance of the All India Protest Day on the pretext of protest against the punishment of a workman for his irregular attendance. They repeated this tactic the next day after entering the mill. The management was forced to close the mill; and the mill reopened only on 28th when the workers resumed work.212 The workers of the M&SM Railway during their strike in 1932 wore "pure khaddar" as a symbol of non-violence.213 The working class leaders extended their solidarity to the national movement and explained to the workers the need for a workers' participation in the Movement at the Trade Union Unity Conference and the meeting of the Indian Trade Union Federation held in the month of July 1932 in Madras.214

It is interesting to note the assessment of the British officials regarding the growing awareness of the national movement among the industrial workers of the Madras presidency. The District Magistrate of Malabar

212. Fortnightly Report for the second half of May 1932, Home Dept. (Poll.), NAI.
213. The Hindu, 29 Nov. 1932.
214. G.O.No.1815L, PW&LD, 27-8-32, TNA.
observed in May 1932 that "in the larger towns, there is undoubtedly a rowdy element of have-nots' who feel that their lot is unhappy and have a vague idea that any change of government would be worth trying."  

Similarly the District Magistrate of Madura observed in May 1932 that the Civil Disobedience Movement was welcomed "by the rowdy elements particularly the rowdy elements of the Madura Town as affording frequent opportunity for the display of their rowdism."  

The National Movement declined in its intensity by 1933. The attempts at organising demonstrations or meetings and other forms of activity by Congressmen were met with prohibitory orders by the government. Any kind of activity which was aimed at attracting the people was disallowed. The temporary suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in May 1933 saw a lull in the national movement; but some activity among the workers continued. In July 1933, S. Satyamurthi addressed the 8th Annual Conference of M&SM Railway workers and told the workers

215. G.O.No.736(S-17), Pub. (Gen.) Dept., 12-5-32, TNA.
216. Ibid.
that with the Independence of India all the problems of the workers would come to an end.\footnote{The Hindu, 31 July 1933.} The fourth conference of the Madras Branch of the M&SM Railway Employees Union which was held on 20 July 1933 under the presidency of V.V. Giri passed a resolution demanding a constitution containing adult franchise, freedom of association, etc.\footnote{F.No.18/8/1933, Fortnightly Report for the second half of July 1933, Home Dept. (Poll.), NAI.}

The growth of the Congress Socialist Party and the Communists in the Madras presidency and the United Front strategy of the Communists further strengthened the links between the working class and the National Congress and the national movement. The left radical leaders, while building the working class movement in the presidency during the later half of the 1930s, also appealed to the workers to strengthen the Indian National Congress and the National Movement and thus sharpen the struggle against British Imperialism. Workers were constantly told that winning independence was a precondition for the establishment of socialism in India. They were asked to strengthen the national movement while simulta-
neously struggling for their economic demands.  

The leadership of Madras Labour Union in their letter to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1936 referred to the fact that the working class was by and large with the national movement. The Madras Press Workers' Union, the Madras Labour Protection League, the Madras Snuff Workers' Union, the Tramway Workers' Union, the Congress Socialist Party and the Madras City Youth League celebrated the "Independence Day" on 26 January 1936. In January 1937 too, under the auspices of the Madras Congress Socialist Party, the Madras Press Workers' Union, and the Madras Electric Tramway Men's Association, the workers observed the "Independence Day". A public meeting was also held condemning the ban on the publication of the Independence Day pledge.

221. Oral interviews with:
   K. Murugesan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
   M. Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
   E. Dalavai, 14-7-89, Vikramasinhapuram, Tamilnadu.
   G. Satyanarayana, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.
   J. Satyanarayana, 7-6-88, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.
   K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
   K.K. Nayar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.


The election campaign of the National Congress during 1936-37 further promoted anti-imperialist consciousness among the workers. It was explained to the Industrial workers by the National Congress leaders that support to the National Congress in the elections was an extension of their support to the cause of the struggle for Independence. The working class of the Madras presidency responded with full support. In the elections of 1937, the Congress won six labour seats in the Madras legislature.

It was decided at the Faizpur session of the Congress in late 1936, to observe a hartal on 1 April 1937 as "Anti-Constitution Day" to express Nation's protest against the unwanted constitution. The working committee of the Indian National Congress which met at Wardhaganj on 28 February 1937 issued a call to give effect to the proposed hartal on 1 April 1937. The All India Congress Socialist Party also gave a call for a nationwide hartal or general strike on 1 April 1937.

225. G.O.No.547, Pub. (Gen.) Dept. (Confdl.), 17-3-37, op. cit., TNA; G.O.No.240, Pub. (Gen.) Dept. (MS) Confdl., 30-1-37, TNA.

226. The working class representatives elected to Madras Legislative Assembly were G. Chelvapathy Chetty, G. Krishnamurthy, V.V. Narasimham, N.G. Ramaswamy Naidu, P.R.K. Sarma, K. Subba Rao.

The General Secretary of All India Trade Union Congress appealed to the organised and unorganised workers to participate in the national hartal. The Provincial Congress Committees of the presidency appealed to all classes of people to participate in the hartal and make it a big success.

The hartal was observed in several parts of the presidency. Congress Socialist and Youth League led demonstrations in Vizagapatam, Cocanada, Rajamundry, Ellore and Guntur while in other places like Bezwada and Tenali the demonstrations were jointly organised by the Congress and Congress Socialists. In Madras city, hartal received tremendous response from the people. It was noted that more than 50,000 people joined the procession. The procession organised by the Congress Socialists marched with placards with such inscriptions as "Workers of the World Unite", "Long Live Revolution", "Down with the Slave Constitution". All the mills in and around Coimbatore town were closed on the day.

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228. Congress Socialist, 13 March 1937.
229. F.No.999, 6-4-37, USSSf. TNA. The Hindu, 29 March 1937.
230. Congress Socialist, 10 April 1937.
232. Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1937. Extracts from the Fortnightly Reports, HFM, No.72, TNA.
Several instances reflecting the growing anti-imperialist consciousness of the working class can be cited. Workers organised by the Congress Socialist Party and other trade unions marched in procession with slogans like "Down with Imperialism", "Down with Capitalism" and "Victory to Labour" in solidarity with workers who were on strike in July 1938 in Madras. In June, more than 3,000 workers of the Chittivalasa Labour Union who were on strike marched in procession carrying National Flags and singing patriotic songs. In early February 1938, a batch of 80 labour volunteers went to Tinnevelly from Papanasam carrying placards with the slogans of "Down with Imperialism", "Long Live Revolution" and "Help the Strikers to Success" during the Papanasam mill strike. In July 1938, the manager of a mill in Coimbatore complained that even on a small provocation workers would shout "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" along with "Up with Revolution", "Down with Capitalism" and so forth. In their letter to V.V. Giri, in August 1938, the management of East India Distilleries and Sugar

233. The Hindu, 2 July 1938.
234. The Hindu, 2 June 1938.
235. G.O.No.86, Dev. Dept., 10-1-39, TNA.
236. G.O.No.2059, Dev. Dept., 23-8-38, TNA.
Factory Ltd. reported that workers at their meetings unfurled National and Red Flags and shouted slogans such as "Inquilab Zindabad", "Long Live Revolution", "Down with Capitalism", "Down with British Imperialism." 237

It is clear from our analysis that the working class participated in the anti-imperialist movement in its own way imparting a militant character to the movement. The National Congress leaders and working class leaders made attempts to bring the workers into the National political struggle for Independence. The industrial workers were mobilised in meetings, demonstrations and recruited as Congress volunteers in the picketing programmes. 238 The leaders underlined the issues of economic exploitation of India by the British Government and the British capitalists and the miserable economic standards of living of the workers in their appeals to mobilize the workers into the nationalist movement. They also used the anti-imperialist symbols

237. G.O.No.2162, Dev. Dept., 2-9-38, TNA.

238. Interviews with:
K. Murugesan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
M. Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
P. Chengalva Rayan, 28-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
V. Gopalakrishnaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
G. Satyanarayana, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.
J. Satyanarayana, 7-6-88, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.
K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
K.K. Nayar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.
such as National Flags and Charkha to arouse the Nationalist Consciousness of the workers.\(^{239}\)

At the same time, the Congress leaders asked the workers to adhere to the ideal of non-violence and follow the constructive programme of the Congress.\(^{240}\) It may be noted that the Congress leaders' emphasis on non-violence was perhaps one of the reasons for their reluctance and hesitation at certain times to bring the industrial workers actively into the national movement. They were hesitant because the workers' participation in the movement was often expressed in violent forms which was against the ideological basis of the Congress.

The Congress leaders in Madras presidency vacillated over the question whether the workers should be brought into the movement as an organised force or only in their capacity as citizens. One interesting example is that of C. Rajagopalachary asking V.V. Giri to call for a general strike on the railways in sympathy with the national movement. In V.V. Giri's own words, "Whether I could set up a railway federation and ask for a general

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239. Ibid.

strike in sympathy with our movement. I told Rajaji, I can do that, but at the same time it may lead to terrible violence and Mahatma Gandhi and the whole Civil Disobedience Movement may be in trouble. But if you really want it, I am prepared to do so. He said I entirely agree with you. Only ask them to take a general interest in the movement and if necessary, defy Section 144 if the meetings are held by the railwaymen."241

Though it is difficult to make a study of the working class's perception of the national movement because of dearth of sources, an attempt is made here to probe into this aspect based on reference to the actual context and oral interviews with those who were part of that actual historical process.

The resolutions passed by the working class organisations did reflect, to a certain degree, the growing political understanding of the working class. A resolution against imperialism was passed at the 7th session of the AITUC held at Delhi in 1927. British imperialism was seen as perpetuating class inequalities in India.242 Diwan Chamanlal, as President of 8th session of the

241. F.No.379, Oral Transcript, V.V. Giri, NMM&L.
242. All India Trade Union Congress Bulletins and Reports, 7th Session, Delhi, 1927, NMM&L.
AITUC at Cawnpore in 1927, explained that working class
could neglect taking part in politics only at its peril. The growing political understanding of the working
class was also amply expressed in resolutions passed
at workers' and trade union meetings. The M&SM Railway
Employees' Union in its two meetings in July 1930 and
January 1931, the Madras Electric Tramway and Supply
Corporation Employees' Union in 1931, the Madras
Kerosene Oil Workers' Union in 1931, Madras Port Trust
and Harbour Workers' Union and Madras Engineering
Workers' Union in February 1931, passed resolutions
supporting the Civil Disobedience Movement. A manifest-
tation of the understanding and the growing interest of
the working class could be seen in the All India Trade
Union Congress Executive Committee's call in 1932 to
the working class to express its resentment at the impe-
rialist onslaught and suppression of the national movement.

243. All India Trade Union Congress Bulletins and
Reports, 8th Session, Cawnpore, 1927, NMM&L.

244. Letter No. 2067L, PW&LD, 16-7-30, TNA.
Letter No. 748L, PW&LD, 16-3-31, TNA.

245. Letter No. 407L, PW&LD, 16-2-31, TNA.

246. Letter No. 748L, PW&LD, 16-3-31, TNA.

247. F.No.6/1932, AICC Papers, AITUC Press Bulletin,
NMM&L. G.O.No.597, PW&LD, 10-3-33, TNA.
The 12th session of All India Trade Union Congress held in the month of September 1932, under the presidency of J.N. Mitra at Calcutta, passed a resolution calling upon the working class to demand the immediate withdrawal of the rule by ordinance and to participate in the struggle for national liberation. Also British imperialist exploitation was identified as the root cause of poverty in India. 248

Trade Union's Unity Conference and the Conference of Indian Trade Union Federation, both held in the month of July 1932 in Madras, identified with the ongoing political struggle. 249 Trade unions of India condemned the constitution of 1935 as a "fraud" designed by the British imperialists to perpetuate the exploitation of the Indian people. 250 The General Secretary of All India Trade Union Congress made an appeal to the organised and unorganised working class of India to participate in the national hartal on 1 April 1937. 251

Instances indicating the growing anti-imperialist consciousness of the workers could also be fruitfully

248. G.O.No.597, PW&LD, 10-3-33, TNA.
249. G.O.No.1815L, PW&LD, 27-8-32, TNA.
250. Congress Socialist, 30 March 1936.
gleaned from the anti-imperialist slogans, raised by the workers in their demonstrations on various occasions including strikes during the 1930s. As already noted earlier, in June 1938, more than 3,000 workers of the Chittivalasa Labour Union during their strike marched in procession carrying National Flags and singing patriotic songs. Similarly a batch of 80 labour volunteers went to Tinnevelly from Papanasam carrying placards with the slogans of "Down with Imperialism", "Long Live Revolution" and "Help the Strikers to Success" during the Papanasam mill strike in February 1938. The manager of a mill in Coimbatore noted in July 1938 that workers on even a small provocation used to shout "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", along with "Up with Revolution", "Down with Capitalism" and so forth. These and similar instances would indicate the growing awareness and understanding of the anti-imperialist movement among the workers.

Workers believed that their economic conditions would be improved in independent India and their

253. G.O.No.86, Dev. Dept., 10-1-39, TNA.
254. G.O.No.2059, Dev. Dept., 23-8-38, TNA.
exploitation would also come to an end. Some of the workers saw the national movement as a movement representing the interests of the workers and peasants. The demands of workers and peasants were seen as forming an integral part of the struggle for freedom. Some of the workers defined independence of India in terms of the availability of minimum necessities like food, clothing and shelter. They also felt that if independence came to India, there would be an end to their exploitation. 255

Many believed that National Congress was an organisation fighting for the interests of the workers. Some of the workers were strongly convinced that the Congress stood for the protection of the workers' interest as against the capitalists. This understanding of the workers was there partly because some of the

255. Oral interviews with:
K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
M. Veeraswamy, 11-8-88, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
Ch. Appala Narasaiah, 9-8-88, Chittivalasa, Andhra Pradesh.
I. Jogarao, 9-8-88, Chittivalasa, Andhra Pradesh.
Y. Vijayakumar, 7-8-88, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
G. Satyanarayana, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.
M. Ramamurthy, 8-7-89, Madurai, Tamilnadu.
R. Subramanyam, 11-7-89, Madurai, Tamilnadu.
Murugu Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
T. Lachhirajulu, 10-8-88, Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh.
Gudela Ammannayya, 10-8-88, Chittivalasa, Andhra Pradesh.
P. Venkataswamy, 10-8-88, Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh.
T. Ramulu, 10-8-88, Chittivalasa, Andhra Pradesh.
working class organisations in jute, textile, tobacco and other industries were started by the local Congress leaders. Workers in general accepted the National Congress as the main anti-imperialist organisation fighting for the political independence of India. Many of the workers' leaders I interviewed said that they were influenced to a great extent by the sacrifices of the National Congress leaders. 256

The growth of national movement influenced the working class movement. The impact of the national movement on the working class and its movement can be seen at two levels, i.e., at the ideological level and the organisational level. There was a continuous and active dialogue between the two movements. The anti-imperialist activity of the Congress assisted the growth of political awareness in the working class.

The impact of the national movement at the ideological level can be discerned in certain actions of the working class within and outside factories. For example, South Indian railway workers, during their strike in

256. R. Muthusami, 8-7-89, Madurai, Tamilnadu.
Chokkar Pillai, 8-7-89, Madurai, Tamilnadu.
P. Chidambaram Pillai, 13-7-89, Vikramasinghapuram, Tamilnadu.
E. Dállavai, 14-7-89, Vikramasinghapuram, Tamilnadu.
N. Krishnaswamy, 10-7-89, Trichinopoly, Tamilnadu.
M. Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
K. Nagaiah, 19-8-88, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.
1928, performed Satyagraha at several places as a way of expressing their protest against the British capitalist exploitation.\textsuperscript{257} Workers in Perambur workshop observed Satyagraha on 5 January 1932 as a protest against Gandhi's arrest.\textsuperscript{258} Similarly the workmen of the Burma Oil Shell Company and Tiruvottur Match Factory resorted to satyagraha to protest against the employers' attempts to retrench some of the workers.\textsuperscript{259} The ideological impact of the national movement on the working class can also be seen in the non-violent strike activity of the M&SM Railway workers in 1932 in Madras and other places. During their strike some of the M&SM Railway workers donned "pure khaddar", the emblem of non-violence and a symbol of nationalist protest.\textsuperscript{260}

Influence of the national movement on the working class leaders came to be strongly felt in the initial phase of their trade union activity. In fact, it was the national movement, apart from their concern for the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{257} G.O.No.1087, Pub. Dept., 6-12-28, TNA.
\item G.O.No.968, Pub. Dept., 30-10-28, TNA.
\item \textsuperscript{258} G.O.No.273, Pub. Dept., 28-3-33, TNA.
\item \textsuperscript{259} Fortnightly Reports for the first and second half of July 1932. \textit{Extracts from F.R's HFM}, Book No.72,TNA.
\item \textsuperscript{260} \textit{The Hindu}, 29 Nov. 1932.
\end{itemize}
workers' miserable conditions, which attracted them to active trade union movement. It is also significant in this respect that several local Congress leaders formed several trade unions in the Andhra region. For example, the Chittivalasa Labour Union of the Jute workers of Chittivalasa in Vizagapatam district was organised in January 1929 under the presidency of T. Viswanatham, a local Congress leader. The workers of the tobacco company in Chirala were organised into a union in October 1937 under the leadership of M. Yegnanarayana, President of Taluq Congress Committee, Bapatla. A. Govindachary, a local Congress leader, formed a union for the workers of jute and cotton mills in Ellore in August 1934. In Guntur, the local Congress

261. Oral interviews with:
J. Satyanarayana, 7-6-88, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.
G. Satyanarayana, 17-8-88, Ellore, Andhra Pradesh.
K. Murugesan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
M. Arjunan, 27-6-89, Madras, Tamilnadu.
E. Dalavai, 14-7-89, Vikramasinghapuram, Tamilnadu.
N. Krishnaswamy, 10-7-89, Trichinopoly, Tamilnadu.
P.C. Narayana Nambiar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.
K. Nayar, 22-7-89, Cannanore, Kerala.
K. Krishnan, 20-7-89, Calicut, Kerala.
C. Unniraja, 17-7-89, Trivandrum, Kerala.

262. F.No.L878(16), Dept. of Industries & Labour, 1930, NAI.

263. G.O.No.448, Dev. Dept., 21-2-38, TNA.

leaders made attempts to organise the workers in Guntur Cotton and Jute Paper Mills in 1934 and 1935. 265

The elections of 1937 furthered the anti-imperialist consciousness of the workers in Madras presidency. The formation of the Congress ministry in Madras presidency in July 1937 heralded a new era in the working class movement and imparted it a new dynamism. The psychological atmosphere following the relaxation of repression after the formation of the Congress ministry played a major role in unleashing the forces of working class struggle and in strengthening the organisations of the workers. 266

265. G.O.No.66, PW&LD, 8-1-36, TNA.