PREFACE

Conditions of life and work of the labour force in a developing industrial economy have always attracted the attention of economists. This is specially because in its early phase capitalism is supposed to grow by extracting ‘sweated labour’. Advanced countries, fearing or facing competition from their developing rivals, have long sought to spotlight this aspect, whether in Lancashire’s condemnation of the Bombay textile industry a hundred years ago, or in West’s demand for ‘fair labour practices’ in the context of GATT. But, irrespective of this partly motivated position, it is important for the sake of any useful understanding of the problems of Indian industrial development that the role and conditions of the working class in it should be studied.

This research into the conditions of the working class in the textile industry of Kanpur, during 1970-1990, was undertaken as a kind of sample study for the larger view. Two specific features make our sample a little ‘atypical’, but I hope, not less relevant for the broader debate. First, the period is one in which the textile industry at Kanpur, declined with accelerating pace; and, secondly the larger part of the industry passed under the Public Sector.
Though I must admit to a sympathy with the textile workers of Kanpur, I have tried to keep myself as unbiased as possible. I went to Kanpur repeatedly to obtain materials and carry out a survey of workers employed in the textile mills on the basis of a questionnaire. This survey has supplemented the information collected from the old records (registers, files etc.) at the textile factories and the Labour Commissioners' Office at Kanpur, and from much secondary material.

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Ghazala Saghir