The origin and growth of the industrial labour class in Kanpur was a by-product of the slow but steady growth of industries there. During British rule in India the expansion of industries in Kanpur was geared to serve only British interests. Since Independence, however, Kanpur has occupied a place of crucial importance in the process of nation-wide industrialization of the country. Both the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the Government of India have evinced interest in the continued expansion of industries in Kanpur.

Each society is made up of various groups with different interests, and often enough we witness a conflict of interests. The conflicting interests are represented by different organizations, including political parties, labour unions, and pressure groups. These organizations try to influence politics and leave their stamp on society. Though they bring about changes, great and small, in society through politics and through use of the coercive apparatus of the State, society too makes its impact on all those who form part of its structure. Socio-economic factors make a considerable impact on political awareness. They increase political demands and widen political participation. These in their turn weaken the
traditional source of political authority and the traditional political structure. Thus, as a part of society, the industrial workers of Kanpur too are subject to the interplay of a number of different kinds of forces. To understand the problem of Kanpur labour we need to be aware of its place in the economy and society. The industrial labour of Kanpur is but a section of the vast working population of the country. It has its own special problems, but these problems cannot be divided entirely from the context of the general economic problems. That is why a study of the socio-economic factors and of the various forces which act and react upon it, is so essential.

The bewilderingly complex and variegated fabric of Indian society has made a great impact on labour activity by making it well-nigh impossible for industrial workers to get united.¹ Not only is Indian society divided in terms of economic classes, but there are further divisions and subdivisions on the basis of religion, caste, language, region, occupation, etc. (It is interesting to note that although there is unity among the bourgeoisie, regardless of caste,

---

¹ In the beginning of the industrialization of Kanpur and its expansion as an industrial metropolis, labour came chiefly from the villages. The villages were tradition-bound primarily groups which had to adjust themselves in a status-dominated society.
religion, region, etc. to protect its economic interests, there is no unity among industrial workers. Certain elements always manage to stir up the parochial loyalties of industrial workers and divide them. This fragmentation does not allow industrial workers to get united on the basis of their common interest for a common purpose.) The labour class is also not aware very much that these are the tactics adopted by their employers to maximize their profits by creating cleavages within the industrial working class and prevent them from fighting unitedly for their common cause. Socially fragmented societies actually give to the bourgeoisie a chance to divide industrial workers for the maximization of their own profits.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section I deals with such social factors as religion, caste, rate of population growth, education, etc. which influenced and still influence labour activity in Kanpur. Section II deals with economic factors like wages, stages of industrialization, economic system, trade unions, tariff policy, etc. which motivate industrial workers and determine the direction of

2 In Kanpur, where religion, caste, and other socio-economic factors are so divergent, only good leadership can act as a viable motivating force for labour. For details, see S.C. Bhattacharya, "Labour Motivation in India", Labour Bulletin (Kanpur), September 1970.
their labour activity. Both primary and secondary material has been used for writing the present chapter.

A factor which not only divides society but also plays a crucial role in determining social and political consciousness of the people is religion. In his famous study of religion, Max Weber seeks to do three things, viz to examine the effect of religious ideas on economic activity, to analyse the relationship between social stratification and religious ideas, and to ascertain and explain the distinguishing characteristics of Western civilization. He pursues these questions through an imposing series of studies in the influence of religions on economic activity in China and India and Protestant Europe. It is now accepted on all hands that religion was a major factor in the political thinking of a large number of people in the national movement in India.

If we look back to the First War of Independence of 1857, in which Kanpur took an active part, we find that in spite of the working of the British policy of divide and rule cordial relations existed between the two prominent communities, viz the Hindus and the Muslims. Nana Sahib, a Hindu king who rallied his forces against foreign rule, was assisted

---

by his intimate counsellor Azimullah. Both of them fought under the green banner of Bahadur Shah to save the town of Bithur and the Cantonment of Kanpur for the Emperor of Delhi. Both Hindus and Muslims ranged themselves under these leaders without the slightest thought of the difference in their religions. In 1913 the Muslims of Kanpur put up a stout fight against the administration in the context of the demolition of a part of a mosque on Meston Road. They received full support of the Hindus in this fight. In the City of Kanpur the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims were fairly cordial till the 1920s.

While the whole world was undergoing a revolutionary change North India went through a phase of religious revivalism. The revivalist Arya Samaj gained prominence in Kanpur in 1913. Religious revivalism had two negative effects on industrial labour. First, it took the modernizing industrial proletariat back to the world of religion, to the question of ethics and morality, and prevented the growth of a revolutionary upsurge among them. Secondly, it diverted the minds of the workers from economic questions to the wholly non-economic and non-productive question of religion. Religious politics was good in so far as it made the masses political-minded, but to industrial workers it offered little that was positive. In the same way, that the religion-based
political philosophy of the Muslim League and a section of the Congress wielded a retrograde influence on the Indian working class in shaping their class consciousness, the influence of the Khilafat Movement exercised an undesirable influence of the Muslim workers of Kanpur and vitiated their class outlook. The evolution of the class consciousness of the workers is, therefore, to be examined in the background of the vicious influence exerted on them by Hindu revivalism on the one side and Muslim religious fanaticism on the other.

By 1929, after Swami Shraddhanand's assassination, communalism arose as a powerful force in Kanpur, owing to the deliberate efforts of the bourgeoisie, which wanted, above all, to put down industrial unrest in Kanpur. As this unrest had grown particularly after the First World War, the industrialists aroused communal passions on purpose to break the unity of the working force in Kanpur. Shree Ram Ratan Gupta, who was building his industrial empire during that period, was an office-bearer of the local Hindu Sabha and a member of the Executive Committee of the United Provinces Chamber of Commerce.4 It needs to be added that during the 1920s and the 1930s the British Government started pampering

and encouraging commercial interests against the militant national and trade union movements. The Kanpur employees contributed their share by employing a disproportionately large number of workers from the Muslim community and the so-called lower castes, so that a feeling a hatred might develop among the Hindu workers. Working hand in hand with the Indian bourgeoisie, the British bourgeoisie too played up the communal feelings of workers. When, in the later 1920s, workers were organizing under the President of the Mazdur Sabha, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, there was a rise in the incidents of communal conflict. Police officers openly provoked one community against the other. To illustrate the depth of communal feeling, we may mention here an election to the Kanpur Municipality. Dr Murarilal, who was then the President of the Town Congress Committee, was a candidate for the chairmanship of the Municipality against Haziz Aalim, one of the richest Muslims of Kanpur. Not a single Muslim worker voted for Dr Murarilal. This shows that the Muslim workers did not align themselves with the Hindu workers or with the working


6 Barrier, n. 4, p. 244.
class as a whole. They just preferred to vote for the candidate of their own community. In 1931 communalism spread like a wild fire. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, an eminent labour leader of the Mazdoor Sabha, lost his life in one of the worst flare-ups of communal passion. Jawaharlal Nehru then said to the workers of Kanpur: "Communalism among workers is not at all desirable. If you allow it to invade you, then your movement would grow weak." There is no doubt that communal conflicts were a result of the efforts of the bourgeoisie in Kanpur to sow discord among workers. In 1937-38, when the workers' movement was at its peak, there was a deliberate attempt to create differences between the Hindus and the Muslims. Raja Ram Shastri, a worker of the Mazdoor Sabha, and Chief Minister G.B. Pant appealed to the District Collector and other officials to take measures to lessen communal tension but in vain.7 Politics in Kanpur, the second largest city in the United Provinces and the first in industry and commercial importance, was engulfed by religious militancy and nationalist activism. Paradoxically, the Westernization which contributed to the rise and ultimate success of Indian nationalism, also helped foster a new

7 Sangharsh (Lucknow), January 1978.
awareness of religious affiliations as an appropriate base for political action.

Any community which is numerically strong enough can wield a decisive influence on the Government. The number of people, however, should not exceed what is required in society. Otherwise there will be a negative effect.

Though it might appear strange, it is nevertheless true that the rate of population growth, if it is not proportionate to economic growth, can contribute to a deterioration in the conditions of workers in a society. If a region is overpopulated, there will then be a natural abundance of industrial labour. This reduces the bargaining capacity of workers in the labour market. Contrary is the case in an underpopulated region. In view of scarcity of labour in an underpopulated region, the capitalists are ready to pay workers a bit more, so that they may utilize their idle capital and profit by it. In an overpopulated region there is competition in the labour market. Workers are ready to sell their labour even at a very low price, at a price equal to subsistence level. Labour has no value unless it gets combined with capital, and capital lies unproductive if labour is not put into it to multiply it. In a society with little population, labour can dominate capital. It is just the opposite in a country with an abundance of labour. As the wages are just
at the subsistence level in an overpopulated society, the productivity of workers also is low, and this constitutes a vicious circle. The eminent economist J.R. Hicks holds that overpopulation is only the first of the economic problems connected with labour as a factor of production. 8

The above argument can be verified and supported by facts and figures about population growth and rise in the wages of the workers of Kanpur from 1853 to the 1970s.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Rate of Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>1,18,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>2,03,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1,79,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>2,16,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2,44,000</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>8,47,000</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>7,01,000</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>9,71,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>13,80,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The period 1853 to 1901 was not every significant because industrialization had not commenced on a large scale. During those nearly fifty years, population increased by only a lakh and fifteen thousand. In 1896 the average wage of an industrial worker in Kanpur was ₹ 5.37. By 1901 it increased to ₹ 6.33. In 1911 it further increased to ₹ 7.44. By 1917 it was ₹ 7.28; and within a year it rose again to ₹ 8.28.

Wages increased between 1901 and 1919 on account of the decrease in the work force of Kanpur brought about by epidemics like cholera. In 1931-41 there was no increase in wages. This was due to an abundance of labour during those years. The British held the population explosion of the 1920s exclusively responsible for the growth of dissatisfaction among the industrial workers of Kanpur. If the rate of population growth is not in proportion to the rate of growth of the economic factor, and if the industrial labour class is well educated, workers can still bend the situation to their own advantage.

Education is yet another undoubted instrument of social mobilization and economic change because it develops the capacity of workers to understand and analyse social realities.

and to act in accordance with their requirements by bringing about and maintaining a proper balance between the right to enjoy privileges and the obligation to discharge duties. Auguste Comte outlines three clear tasks for a new social order. One of these is to evolve a new and appropriate system of education for a clear orienting of thought, feeling, and action of men. Moore argues to show how the ignorance of workers can be regarded as a strong barrier to the process of industrialization in the developing countries. The Report of the Whitley Commission also stresses the need to give special attention to the education of workers. The education system introduced by the British during their rule in India continues to flourish even today, with only marginal changes in technique and content. The character of the colonial system corresponded with the interests of both the colonial Power and the upper strata of the indigenous society. That is why there has been no significant change in the educational structure since Independence. The tragedy of the Indian social structure is that quality education is a monopoly of those belonging to the upper strata of society. Moreover,

---

educational facilities are just not available to a considerable part of India's industrial population.

If we look at the educational background of the population of Kanpur, we find that the highest rate of literacy is to be found in the age group of 15-19. Twenty-six per cent of the people are nearly literate; and 22.2 per cent of the people have undergone some formal education. Those having high school and intermediate education were 32 per cent of the total population. Those with a university degree constituted about 9 per cent; people having technical education (degree and diploma) made up about 1 per cent. The table below shows the level of literacy in Kanpur during 1901-71.

**TABLE 2**

**LITERACY IN KANPUR FROM 1901 TO 1971**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Males (In terms of percentage)</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a majority of the workers in Kanpur are illiterate, and they are unable to analyze social problems and to devise the means needed to achieve their goals. They are generally without the kind of education required for the development of an integrated personality and for an adequate discharge of their responsibilities as members of their trade unions and as members of a democratic society. Richard T. Lambert says in his book *Workers, Factories, and Social Change in India* that education, not caste, is the most important determinant of the progress of workers. The spread of education will, according to him, have a dynamic and critical effect on Indian society. The education of industrial workers on proper lines is, therefore, a paramount need and necessity if we seriously intend to make a success of our experiment in democratic Socialism in our country. Some people fear that to extend education to industrial workers would cause serious political problems, that political participation by educated workers would generate more demands by them from the present system, that educated workers can create a strong lobby for themselves to get the Government to concede their demands, that the working class is becoming a big force in our country, and that the education of workers is sure to affect the political stability of the present system. These people obviously do not want to establish democratic
Socialism in our country. Otherwise it should occur to them that education can only enhance the rationality of workers as voters and as participants in the democratic process in our country.

After Independence the Government of India introduced an education programme for workers, ostensibly with the aim of making them good citizens. The present writer during her field work in Kanpur met a number of labour leaders who had taken advantage of this programme, but found that the programme had made no impression on them. This was because the programme teaches workers only how to perform their duties but does not enlighten them on their rights in the present system. It does not address itself to important things like enlightened membership and leadership of trade unions with a view to bringing about the rule of the proletariat. The Government is content if it can limit industrial disputes. It does not seem to be bothered about improving the living conditions of the industrial labour class. The need of the day is intensive and extensive spread of education. The Government should evolve a well-co-ordinated national education policy to enable at least the future industrial class to understand and realize the role it has to play in the governance of the country and in the task of raising its standards of living. Education will help in creating political consciousness among industrial
workers and in making them understand how they can effectively influence policies, play a satisfying role in the governance of the country, and hold their own as the equals of their educated and resourceful opponents. Education will also diminish the social inequalities inherent in the present social structure.

These inherent inequalities are obstacles in the way of development. Let us take the caste system, for example. Caste makes two types of impact on industrial workers. It prevents industrial workers from evolving as a homogeneous class; and it renders united action by workers impossible by activating their parochial loyalties. The caste factor may be said to be "dominant" when any particular caste preponderates numerically over other castes and when it also wields economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can easily dominate if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low.\textsuperscript{12} Elections provide an opportunity for political participation by all castes. Paul Brass confirms the role of caste especially at the time of elections. Indeed caste is the most discussed aspect of contemporary Indian political behaviour. It is the most complex factor

\textsuperscript{12} M.N. Srinivas, \textit{Social Change in Modern India} (New Delhi, 1972), pp. 132-3.
inasmuch as it affects the very basis of Indian society and politics. The relationship between caste and politics is a two-way relationship; for, while caste affects politics, politics also affects caste. Rajni Kothari says that by growing the caste system into a web of organizations, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into a shape of its own designing. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste groups get a chance to assert their identity and to strike for positions. Politicians mobilize caste groups and identities in order to organize their power. If one looks at the caste background of the industrial workers of Kanpur, one finds that they are not a homogeneous group, through the scheduled castes preponderate numerically. Politicians in Kanpur mobilize not only the working class as a whole but also the various caste groups and identities in order to organize their power.¹³ They find in caste an extremely well articulated and flexible basis for organization, something that also lends itself to political manipulation.

¹³ V.B. Singh, Climate for Industrial Relations in Textile Industry (Bombay, 1966), ch. 3.
Anadinath Banerjee says that even in 1939 there was no ill feeling among people of the highest castes among mill workers as such. This is not to deny that certain castes predominate in certain departments of the textile mills. For example, the Muslims dominate the weaving department. This is natural because the Muslims constitute the traditional class of weavers. (Here it is very important to mention that people usually consider the caste system as something obtaining exclusively among the Hindus. The caste system obtains among the Muslims also.) In Kanpur most of the high castes are spread over the city and do not dominate (numerically) any particular geographical area, although there are sizable concentrations of Khatris, Baniyas, Brahmins, and Kayasthas in certain sections of the city. The same is more or less true of the scheduled castes in a number of industrial areas of the city.

One caste which has grown conspicuously into a powerful group in Kanpur is the Chamar caste. Studies of its discontent with its social and economic position in Kanpur underline its potential as a significant political group. Another influential caste is the Pasi caste. Both castes are traditionally landless labourers, field labourers, or manual

Most Congress workers feel that the scheduled castes, particularly the Chamar, are not with the Congress. In general, it can be claimed that caste is an important factor in the voting behaviour of people even in an industrial city like Kanpur. The industrial workers of Kanpur are factory workers only when they pass the gates of their mills. When they return to their homes, they become subject to the influences which operate in their muballas.

In their study of voting behaviour in Kanpur, Myron Weiner and Rajni Kothari state that the traditional rivalry between the Brahmins and the Kayasthas was a major factor in the elections held in Kanpur in 1962 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh. They also state that the influence of caste was certainly much less in the Parliamentary contests and was by no means an absolutely determining factor. It would, therefore, be safe for us to say that the caste factor plays an important role in the lives of the industrial workers of Kanpur. It acts as a binding factor though it does not make the industrial workers a homogeneous class.

Another social factor which has an adverse effect on workers is regionalism. About 8.1 per cent of the people in

---

Kanpur in 1961 were born outside Uttar Pradesh. Those born outside India constituted 3 per cent. Kanpur has a highly localized population of Sindhis and Punjabi refugees in two or three areas of the city (Govind Nagar). In his survey of the socio-economic background of 900 families of industrial workers of Kanpur, V. Agnihotri found that only 2.8 per cent of them were from Bihar; and 0.9 per cent of them hailed from the merged States; 0.2 per cent came from Madhya Pradesh; and 0.1 per cent were refugees from West Punjab (Pakistan). The Chapra District of Bihar was ahead in supplying labour to Kanpur. Some families came from Nepal. Some Christian families belonged originally to Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. The inability of the immigrants to identify their interests with those of the local labourers can be identified as one of the causes for the segregation among the labour population of Kanpur. Otherwise regionalism cannot be called a factor of great importance from the point of view of our study of the industrial workers of Kanpur. The number of those who have migrated from outside Uttar Pradesh is quite insignificant. Moreover, the Sindhis and the Punjabis have constituted themselves into the trading class. They are not part of the industrial working class of Kanpur.

---

ECONOMIC FACTORS AND LABOUR ACTIVITY IN KANPUR

It is not possible for any individual to live in isolation from other people in society. A modern society is so structured that members are obliged to participate in the complex process of production in different capacities to secure fulfilment of their several needs and requirements. Such a united economic effort by the people constituting a society is called the economic system, and all factors which are linked to this process and which affect the economic system -- factors such as economic policies, wages of industrial workers etc. -- can be grouped under economic factors which influence not only the economic system but the whole process of development.

As the industrial labour class is a by-product of industrialization, it is affected most by the conditions in society. With industrial development, not only does labour become better organized, but its strength also grows. In the early stages of industrialization, the industrial working class, being small and weak, is often torn by parochial loyalties. As industrialization grows, and more and more rural areas undergo urbanization, the working class expands. With this, not only does the orientation of labourers change, but their outlook also changes. They become more and more
receptive to new ideas: "The quality of labour is both a cause and a consequence of economic development."\(^{17}\)

In the early stages in a predominantly agricultural country like India, labour has to be converted into capital in order to facilitate capital accumulation for industrialization. Being fewer than the rest of the population, industrial workers are a minority yet and are not influential. In a fully industrialized society, industrial workers are numerically strong and are in a better bargaining position. C. Wright Mill calls them "men of power". At the first stage of industrialization industrial workers are concerned only with small wage rises. They cannot visualize how their demands, even if fulfilled, can change their position appreciably. As industrialization expands, the awareness grows within the class to secure fulfilment of economic demands through political influence. Frantz Fanon also says in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*: "At early stage, his consciousness is so precarious and dim that it is affected by the slightest spark of kindliness."\(^{18}\)

---


Karl Marx declares that industrialization is a must if there is to be an end to exploitation of man by man. Says he: "A proletarian revolution cannot take place unless and until a bourgeois revolution takes place." The rapid growth of production forces during the Industrial Revolution in Europe created a real basis for the fulfilment of the great historical task of abolishing the exploitation of man by man and of emancipating labour. Hence, according to the ideas of Marx, industrial labour can perform a crucial role in the further industrialization of Kanpur and, after achieving a certain degree of consciousness, work for the establishment of a social order in which their demands would be met democratically.

While accepting industrialization as a historical necessity for the development of society, we must recognize that industrialization is always hindered by those who are affected by it. Not only the British but even the propertied classes of Kanpur did not show any interest in industrialization lest it should lead to expansion of the industrial proletariat. Till the First World War the merchants of Kanpur found greater scope for profits in their traditional occupations and hence did not care to set up the factory system. The landlords and the money-lenders, who were the main source of capital, did not advance money for the setting up of industries as they
could get higher profits by lending money to needy peasants. That is how, till the First World War, Kanpur was not much industrialized. The process of industrialization gained momentum only after the First World War. The impact that large-scale industrialization makes on the life of the worker can be guessed by the instances of mass protest by workers which intensified after the First World War. With industrialization, the industrial working class expanded, and its ever rising numerical strength gave it the strength needed to fight against exploitation. If the working class does not form a big majority, it cannot fight for its just demands.

The process of industrialization in Kanpur and the shift from one stage of industrialization to the next can be seen from the table below:

| TABLE 3 |

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY INDUSTRIAL CATEGORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivation</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labour</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying forestry</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing other than household goods</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade and commerce</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and communication</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The occupational structure of Kanpur has also undergone change in course of time. In 1921 the tertiary sector was the most predominant and accounted for 72 per cent of the total number of workers. The secondary sector then was comparatively insignificant. However, the pattern changed in 1961, with the tertiary sector accounting for 56 per cent of the workers and the secondary sector accounting for as much as 41 per cent. (In contrast only 23 per cent of the workers were employed in 1921.) During 1921-61 the workers in the primary sector increased by 107 per cent. There has been a fivefold increase in the secondary sector (43.4 per cent) and about two-and-a-half times increase in the tertiary sector (131 per cent). The increase in employment in the secondary sector shows that industrialization was in progress.\(^\text{19}\) However, if one looks at the figures of the last three decades, one finds that the percentage of workers employed in the secondary sector has come down considerably. In 1951 the percentage workers employed in the secondary sector were 45.1; in 1961 the figure decreased to 34.7; and in 1971 it came down further to 30.2. This shows that though there was an overall increase in the population of industrial workers during the

\(^{19}\) Misra, n. 11, p. 295.
last twenty years, industrial expansion did not correspond to the rate of growth in the tertiary sector. Of course, there was an increase in employment in the secondary sector, but it still lagged behind many other industrial cities of India. Most Western thinkers believe that workers' grievances would start decreasing as employment in the secondary sector increases. The economic base of the industrial City of Kanpur in the present century can be understood better from Table 4.

TABLE 4

ECONOMIC BASE MULTIPLIER IN KANPUR,
1901-1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total employment</th>
<th>Basic employment</th>
<th>Non-basic employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>93,334</td>
<td>37,271</td>
<td>56,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>81,139</td>
<td>19,805</td>
<td>61,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>101,609</td>
<td>24,463</td>
<td>77,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>99,998</td>
<td>33,662</td>
<td>65,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>259,631</td>
<td>119,590</td>
<td>138,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>316,581</td>
<td>119,572</td>
<td>184,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>372,280</td>
<td>144,319</td>
<td>232,691</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 1961 (New Delhi, 1961).
With the intensification of the industrialization of the City of Kanpur, the living conditions of workers have worsened. Even then there has been slight improvement in the wage structure. Industrialization leads to a betterment of the conditions of workers in a way. Not only does it provide more job opportunities to the dependants of workers, but the competition among industrialists makes them use options like reducing prices to promote better sales in the market. Another advantage which the workers in Kanpur gained with increasing industrialization is that their numerical strength increased. This gave them confidence. They felt that in the event of a confrontation with the employers over their grievances there would be many people behind them. The growth of an industrial proletariat took much time in Kanpur because the economic conditions did not let the industrial proletariat develop in the real sense of the term. As economic conditions are determined by wages, low wages only created dissatisfaction among them. This in its turn made them think of ways of improving their own conditions.

Wages are an important factor influencing the activities of industrial workers. They can be divided into three categories: (i) The minimum wage, which enables workers to live just at the subsistence level but which provides not only for the preservation of the efficiency of the workers but also
for the education of their children, medical treatment, and other amenities; (ii) a living wage, which allows workers to live with some degree of comfort and to provide not merely the bare essentials of food, clothing, and shelter to themselves and their families but a measure of frugal comfort, including education for children, protection against ill health, requirements of social needs, and insurance against the more important misfortunes; and (iii) a fair wage, which is a compromise between the two. The attainment of a living wage is the objective of every civilized society. Ensuring the minimum wage for all is the direct and immediate responsibility of every Government.

The wage structure today consists of two major components (i) the basic wage and (ii) dearness allowance. The basic wage in a majority of cases corresponds to the statutorily fixed minimum wage. The Report of the Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee, 1931, recommended for ₹ 15.00 per month as the minimum wage for workers. The monthly wages of a weaver and a spinner at that time in Kanpur, the biggest industrial centre of the United Provinces, were ₹ 33.00 and ₹ 25.00 respectively.20 These wages included some allowances also.

In 1947 the basic wage for workers was fixed at Rs 30.00 per month on the recommendation of the U.P. Labour Enquiry Committee. In 1960 it was raised to Rs 36.00 per month and in 1962 to Rs 38.00 per month (in accordance with the recommendations of the first Central Wage Board on the cotton textile industry).

Dearness allowance was introduced in Kanpur in 1940, but it was not linked to the cost of living index number. This was done only in 1947, when the U.P. Labour Enquiry Committee fixed dearness allowance as a percentage of the wages of workers, neutralizing the cost of living index number to the extent of 63 per cent. The rate of dearness allowance to be paid for each rupee of the basic wage varied with the change in the cost of living index number. No dearness allowance was granted to compensate the workers against the first 25 points rise in the cost of living index number beyond 100. Since 1947, when the minimum wages were fixed and dearness allowance was linked to the cost of living index number, a new feature called "personal wage" has emerged in the Kanpur wage situation. The number of workers entitled to receive a personal wage, however, is steadily declining with the retirement of the older workers.21 Now the most important

21 For details, see the report of the Kanpur Cotton Mills Rationalization Enquiry Committee (Lucknow, 1956), p. 46.
component of the wage structure is dearness allowance, which is about two-thirds of the workers' total monthly income.

Till 1967 the annual income of an average worker in Kanpur was about ₹ 1,631.00. In Uttar Pradesh as a whole it was only ₹ 690.00. The figure for all India was ₹ 1,049.00. Now the average monthly income of a worker in Kanpur is about ₹ 375.00. Though the workers in Kanpur are slightly better off in respect of wages than their counterparts in the rest of India generally, they are far behind the workers of Delhi, Bombay, and Ahmedabad.

As wages in Kanpur are just at the subsistence level, workers cannot start agitating for more wages lest they lose even the one meal that they get everyday under the present system. If the wages had been higher, they would have been in a better position to agitate. The workers of Kanpur went on a long strike in 1937 to secure recognition for the Mazdoor Sabha; they again launched upon a major agitation in 1955 to force their employers to implement the scheme of rationalization. The Kanpur workers never showed such solidarity in the matter of bonus as they did during the agitations of 1937 and 1955.

Wages indeed constitute an important element in a struggle. If the Kanpur workers had fought for better wages, they would have been economically strong enough to press their
demands with vigour. Industrial labour cannot afford to go on a strike even if it is motivated by genuinely just demands. The increase in wages won during 1919-20 was greater than the rise achieved during the last thirty years. The reason was that workers agitated unitedly to fight for a hike in wages. Secondly the industrialists had made unprecedented profits during the war, and they did not, therefore, mind sharing with workers a small portion of their profits. Thirdly, as political agitations intensified after the war, and the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha emerged as the sole representative of the workers of Kanpur, the British employers thought it expedient to yield to the demand of workers for a rise in wages.

Workers in Kanpur live in abject poverty even today on account of the exploitation they suffered during colonial rule. There was a combination of exploiters -- the British and the native bourgeoisie.

For putting forward their demands effectively, the workers of Kanpur have now formed trade unions. Trade unionism is the result of the growth of modern industrial establishments involving the employment of large numbers of workers in conditions which make them helpless as individuals bargaining for their terms of contract. According to Webbs,
a trade union is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives. Section 2 (w) of the Trade Union Act of 1926 defines a trade union as

... any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workmen and employers, or between workmen and workmen, or between employers and employees or for imposing restrictive conditions of the conduct of any trade or business that includes any federation of two or more trade unions.

First, there should be a combination of workmen and employers. The purpose is to organize them and to give their organization a status vis-a-vis the employers. The organization should work to protect and promote the interests of workers and the conditions of their employment. In general a trade union performs three types of functions. First, it maintains and improves the conditions of workers through regulation of their relations with their employers and through provision of benefits and services. This function can be called the economic function. Second, a trade union regulates its own relations and the relations of the capitalists with the State and other matters of natural concern. It enables workers to act as an organized group in the life of the nation and the world. This can broadly be called the social function. Third, a trade union enables workers to manifest their numerical
strength and to make a bid for political power through political propaganda and effort and to influence State action. This function can be called the political function. The way a trade union performs these functions makes a great impact on the lives of workers.

The position of trade unions is strategic in societies which are witnessing accelerated economic activity and in which, owing to a conditioning of the attitudes of workers, the rate of economic growth changes significantly. In a developing economy or country aspiring for economic development like ours, a systematic study of trade unionism is particularly important; for it is highly essential here to examine scientifically the various forms of human institutions, both existing and potential, and to discover the impact made, or likely to be made, by them upon the economic growth of the community. This, in its turn, requires a thorough understanding of the institutions themselves, starting from their origin and extending to their functions, possibilities, and laws of growth. Though the history of trade unionism in Kanpur goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, there is a world of difference between the trade unionism of those far-off days and the trade unionism of today.

A trade union influences the activities of industrial workers to the extent that it seeks to develop among them a
spirit of camaraderie, class consciousness, and solidarity of interests. It constitutes an organization for their protection, for the safeguard of their common interests, and for the betterment of their social and economic position. It is, however, important to make sure that workers know the path they need to take to attain their goals.22

There is evidence that trade unions existed in Kanpur even before 1919. However, the beginning of the trade union movement in Kanpur took place in an organized manner immediately after the First World War with the formation of the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha in November 1919.23 One of the early trade unions to affiliate themselves to a central or trade union organization like the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was the Postal and R.M.S. Union, Cawnpore. Kanpur's trade unions owe much to political parties both for their birth and for their growth and development; so much so that an insight into their political dimensions is essential to understand the dynamics of their strategy and policy.

22 In Kanpur, the initiative to organize the workers came from the politically minded intellectuals of the traditional upper castes who knew only too well that political power in a modern society would depend on the consent of the so-far inchoate masses.

23 Chamanlal Ravri, The Indian Trade Union Movement, (New Delhi, 1972), p. 79.
The first union to be formed by the Communists outside Bombay was the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha. A great struggle ensued in the initial years between the Communists and the Congress for the control of the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha. From 1928 to 1931 the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha remained in the hands of Congressmen. At one time the trade union movement in Kanpur used to be considered to be the strongest in the country. In 1937-38 the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha led a series of long, bitter, and successful strikes which attracted the attention of the whole country. These strikes were meant to force the employers to recognize the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha as the representative of workers. Following the strikes, the membership of the Sabha grew from 4,000 to 12,000. It is important to note that whereas 40,000 workers joined hands to make the strikes successful, only 4,000 workers were actually members of the Mazdoor Sabha. This shows that although the Mazdoor Sabha was successful in harnessing the power behind workers, it could not convince workers about the

25 G.K. Sharma, Labour Movement in India (Delhi, 1963), p. 98.
advantages of accepting its membership. However, there is no doubt about the impact that the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha was making on workers and their employers and on the British Government. The Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha reached its peak of strength when it forged a united front of Congressmen and Communists. The struggle for personal prestige in the Kanpur trade union movement resulted eventually in the decline of Congress influence. Communist influence among industrial labour continued to be strong till 1946. The story of the splits and mergers that occurred within the Cawnpore Mazdoor Sabha from 1946 to 1960 is shown below:

SPLITS AND MERGERS AMONG TRADE UNIONS IN THE KANPUR TEXTILE INDUSTRY 1920-60

Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha

1950 Sati Mill Mazdoor Sabha (a) 1949 Kanpur Mazdoor Congress (b) 1946 Industrial Employees Union (c)

1953 Rashtryia Panchayat

1954 Suti Mill Mazdoor Sabha 1960 Textile Labour Association

Key:

(a) Congress INTUC Union (b) Union of the Non Committee (c) Communist Union (d) United Front Union (e) Unaffiliated Union

The trade unions of Kanpur joined hands again regardless of their party affiliations at the time of the struggle over rationalization. Most unions knew that any move to oppose the struggle would be discredited by workers. The tradition of political unionism of the pre-Independence days continued to operate in the post-Independence period too. The increase in the number of national political parties in India had a corresponding increase in the number of trade unions on the Kanpur labour scene too. To gain the favour of organized labour force, every party tries to sympathize with labour or act as a mouthpiece of labour. If one looks at the number of trade unions and their membership in Kanpur, one finds that there are about fifty-one unions affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) with a total membership of 49,501 workers; nine unions are affiliated to the Central Indian Trade Unions Council (CITUC), with a total membership of 3,623 workers; six unions are affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), with a total membership of 9,549 workers; thirteen unions are allied to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), with a total membership of 22,040 workers; and about sixty-six unions are affiliated to the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), with a total membership of 10,373 workers. There are another twenty-four unions with
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Jute No. of workers</th>
<th>Leather No. of workers</th>
<th>Cotton No. of workers</th>
<th>Woollen No. of workers</th>
<th>Engineering No. of workers</th>
<th>Elector No. of workers</th>
<th>Rayon No. of workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTUC</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>5,595</td>
<td>23,562</td>
<td>1,853</td>
<td>2,433</td>
<td>3,020</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITUC</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,721</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITUC</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,957</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>8,393</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,010</td>
<td>10,493</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,754</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindustan Mazdoor Parishad (HMP)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>5,640</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Trade Union Congress (UTUC)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3,317</td>
<td>2,013</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Registrar of Labour Unions, Kanpur.
a total membership of 10,043 workers. These are not affiliated to any central labour organization.

In all, just about 148,085 workers of Kanpur, i.e. about 50 per cent of the total labour population of Kanpur, are members of some union or other. This leads us to a very important question: How representative are the trade unions of Kanpur workers? The representative character of a union is determined by a number of factors, such as: How democratic is the union? How far do members participate in its activities? It is absolutely necessary for a union to function democratically if it is to develop a mass democratic movement and arouse the class consciousness of workers. Trade union democracy does not consist in holding meetings of the executive committee from time to time, but in involving every worker in the running of his union, in the shaping of policies, in decision-making, etc. Active participation by workers is crucial because it increases the self-esteem of members in various ways--as, for example, through power and status and terms of sense of moral duty and purpose. The democratic character of a union is determined by whether or not it gives its members the satisfaction and the stimulation necessary for active participation. In Kanpur, although organizational apathy does exist among workers, they could add greater meaning to their lives by active participation in the running of their trade unions.
If workers participate in the functioning of a trade union, it means that they also participate in an extra-parliamentary forum to influence Government policy. The more active participation and the more representative their union, the better able the union to secure redress of the grievances of its members. Trade unions, being large organized groups, play a significant role in the interplay of political forces in modern societies. For one thing, they act as an important pressure group in the formation and implementation of public labour relations policy. Trade unions are among the extra-parliamentary means utilized by legislators to influence Government policy. They are ideal political institutions through which a legislator may organize a political campaign. They can be used by politicians as a guaranteed source of voter support. They can also be used to advance one's candidacy as most political parties allot a number of seats to labour leaders. They provide readily available organizations for the exercise of political leverage and influence. In a study on the behaviour of the legislators of the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Richard Brown states that about 10.5 per cent of his sample of legislators used labour unions to influence Government policy; 17.3 per cent of these used their influence sometimes; 8 per cent used it rarely; and 6.3 per cent never used their influence. This means that legislators mobilize

unions around specific political issues only rarely. They solicit their assistance especially at the time of elections for getting votes.

The condition of the workers in Kanpur can be guessed from the fact that their minds are never very much away from bread and butter issues. They have generally shown themselves to be indifferent to the democratization of the functioning of their unions. They rarely, if ever, prefer political methods of action to get their demands fulfilled. Political leaders have often tried, however, to involve them politically in elections through their unions. Significantly enough, political involvement has not necessarily meant the politicization of workers; for, generally speaking, the workers in Kanpur are still politically apathetic. Because of this weakness they have not been able to play the role that they might otherwise have played in the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country for the welfare of the majority. Though Mazdur, a newspaper run by the Mazdoor Sabha of Kanpur, and Nehru appealed to the workers of Kanpur

26 For details, please see Native U.P. Press Report (Allahabad), 15 July 1933.

27 For details, please see S. Gopal, ed., Nehru's Selected Works (New Delhi, 1976), vol. 10.
to establish trade unions in the 1930s, nothing really happened because of the changing governmental policies and poor implementation.

Now the question arises: Why has the Government of Uttar Pradesh failed to formulate policies tilted in favour of the industrial workers of Kanpur? The answer clearly is that for making policies or influencing governmental machinery, labour should be represented in governmental machinery. Such representation can be secured only if trade unions perform their political function in Kanpur. Unfortunately the trade unions of Kanpur are not participating satisfactorily in the political system. Of course, the political system can also do much to activate trade unions. G.D.H. Cole says: "In every country, trade unionism is shaped not only by the stage of economic development, but also by the political conditions and the general infrastructure of the society in which it has to act." To appreciate the truth of this statement we should examine the economic and political roles that trade unions can play and see whether, and how far, these roles are independent.

---

The roles which trade unions play depend very much on the economic policies of the Government and their implementation. The Government's economic policies and their implementation are also in the hands of the Government. The economic policies pursued by the British had two implications. First, the tariff policy of the British made every effort to discourage industrialization. Secondly it did not allow industrial workers to grow as a class. Though the Industrial Commission of 1916 urged in its report the need for a well-co-ordinated policy for India, the British Government really did not take any step to implement the suggestions of the Commission. And then the Trade Union Act of 1926 made it difficult for trade unions to develop on healthy lines in India; for, according to it, even seven members had the right to organize a union in a factory. This type of policy could hardly be expected to permit the growth of a proletariat class in Kanpur and the development of healthy trade unionism. It was aimed deliberately at preventing workers from uniting.

Since India attained independence, the national Government has pursued policies that are supposed to ensure the interest of the bourgeoisie, the landed aristocracy, and the peasantry, as well as industrial labour. It has refused to champion the interests of labour exclusively. A planned policy
for labour should aim at both distributive justice and augmented national income. Nevertheless there is reason to believe that by failing to favour labour above all others, the Government of India has followed policies that are somewhat unrealistic. Any attempt to raise the underdeveloped countries economically vis-à-vis the economically advanced ones would require a policy comparatively favourable to labour. 29

In the end we can only say that although the Government is responsible to a considerable extent for the poor conditions of industrial workers, workers too must accept part of the blame. Apart from fighting for economic benefits, industrial labour should learn how to act consciously as the focal point for organizing the working class a whole in the supreme interest of achieving its complete emancipation. It must support every political movement launched to that end. Trade unions in all countries arise as a protest against existing inequalities, exploitation of man by man, and attempts to deprive men and workers of their inalienable right to enjoy status and dignity as human beings. Thus, essentially, trade

unions are instruments of social change. If industrial labour has to be effective, it has to form an interest group and take active part in politics. Only then can it ensure that Government policies are tilted in its favour.