CHAPTER IV

LABOUR AND THE WAR (1939-1945)

The outbreak of the War in Europe in September 1939 and its impact on India in general and the labour movement in particular is an extremely important aspect to be studied in detail. It will not be an overstatement to say that the world of labour the world over during the period between September 1939 and August 1945 was exercised about the War. The effects of the war in terms of the rise in prices, deteriorating conditions of work and heavy handed repression, etc., exceeded every other previous experience hitherto. In India, the war exposed as false the claims of the imperialist rulers that power would gradually be handed over to Indians. The declaration by the Viceroy on 3rd September 1939, proclaiming India as a belligerent nation in the European War and the annulling of the working of the Government of India Act, 1935 even at the Provincial level, was followed by the resignation of the Congress Ministries at one go. The Defence of India Ordinance of September 3, 1939 spelt a death knell to even a minimum right to free expression of any shade of opinion contrary to that of the Central Government. In response to this the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress on 14th September, 1939 said:

... the Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any co-operation in a War which is conducted on
imperialist lines and which is meant to consolidate imperialism and elsewhere.¹

This rejection of the war was however qualified by the Congress in its resolution over the same issue when it demanded from the Government to:

"(a) declare war aims
(b) arrange a Constituent Assembly without external influence
(c) declare India an independent nation and give present application to this status..."²

The British response to this was negative leading to a deadlock in the political situations which continued up to the arrival of the Cripps Mission followed by the 'Quit India' Resolution on 8th August 1942 by the Congress.

This brief introduction of the overall political situation is essential before entering into a detailed discussion on the response of labour to the war, keeping in view the scope of this thesis, i.e. in a colonial country the working class movement in essence is essentially intertwined with the struggle against colonialism. This idea was exemplified when the General Council of the All India Trade

Union Congress (AITUC) in its meeting on 28th March, 1940 held at Bombay expressed its attitude to the War as follows:

As the present war between Great Britain and France on one side and Germany on the other is claimed by Britain and France to be waged for the vindication of the principle of freedom and democracy, and not for any Imperialist purposes, it is only natural that India, without having any sympathy for Germany would claim for herself, freedom and democratic Government before she can be expected to take part in the war. Participation in the war, which is not likely to result in the freedom of the people of India, will not benefit India; much less will it benefit the working classes of India. 3

Thus, we can begin by saying that both the Nationalist as well as organised labour in India, responded to the situation created by the War in more or less similar terms. This however need not mean that these two opinions, went on together throughout the war. In fact, the effects of the war fell differently on the different classes and thus the responses differed in their form and content. The working class responded to the effects of the war by means of

massive strike actions demanding 'dearness allowance' and wage hikes all over the country. The historic Mahaghai Strikes that were conducted in Bombay, Cawnpore, Bengal during March/April 1940 needs to be mentioned in this context. While these strikes were led by the Communists from within the AITUC, the Indian National Congress was busy with negotiating with the British imperialist rulers for a transfer of power to Indian hands. It is to be noted here that never did the Congress launch upon a concerted movement involving the working class throughout the period of the War.

Yet another aspect of utmost importance in this context is the change in the attitude of the Communists to the War. The volte-face of the Communists by 1942, i.e. with the entry of the Soviet Union in the war against fascism, the Communists analysed the War as a "Peoples' War" and hence adopted a policy of 'No strikes as far as possible' came into clash with their 'anti-war' movements. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI of this thesis. Suffice it to state here that this aspect effected the rising strike wave of the working class in as much that there was a fall in the number of strikes and mandays lost in 1943 as seen in the Introduction to this thesis.

The scope of this Chapter will be to analyse the strikes that took place in the Madras Presidency in terms of the demands placed by the workers, followed by a section on
the ideological streams at work vis-a-vis labour in the context of the overall political situation in the country. The last section will deal with the response of the British Indian State in terms of the executive and legislative intervention in the world of labour.

SECTION-1

STRIKES DURING THE WAR - AN OVERVIEW

The immediate effect of the war on labour was in the prices front, and as it has been seen from the figures in Chapter I, in the disproportionate rise in prices compared to the wages of the workers. The Home Department, Government of India, in its appreciation of the political situation in February 1940, said as follows:

In the world of labour the rise in prices of necessities and signs of increasing industrial prosperity, both due to the war have prompted a demand for higher wages; and here and there where forces are at work which desire upheaval for their own political ends, threats have been made of organised strikes.  

Let us now take a look into the nature of the strikes that

4. Home Department appreciation of the Political Situation in India for 1940, E.C.O. proceedings, F.No.:I (24)-P(Sec.), 40 of 1940 (NAI).
took place in Madras Presidency, during the war years. The attempt will be to analyse the strike wave in terms of their spread, industrywise and also to attempt a look into the demands that caused the strikes to arrive at a contextual understanding of the same.

TABLE 4.1

STATEMENT SHOWING INCIDENCE OF STRIKES AND MANDAYS LOST -

MADRAS PRESIDENCY - NOVEMBER 1939 - AUGUST 1945. 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Strikes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays</td>
<td>12,110</td>
<td>151,588</td>
<td>450,205</td>
<td>817,073</td>
<td>40,281</td>
<td>127,821</td>
<td>46,636</td>
<td>1,645,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the figures in Table 4.1 that the strike wave in the Presidency reached a peak in 1944 with 72 strikes. Notwithstanding this fact, in terms of the mandays lost, the highest ever was reached in 1942, with about 8 lakhs or about 50 per cent of the total number of mandays lost during the period of War. The strike wave, however, was fairly widespread during the entire phase, but for a relatively low level it had reached in 1943. The reasons for

this drop, may be explained in terms of the increase in dearness allowance sanctioned by the textile industry, as well as the consequences of the Quit India Movement, which had led to the imprisonment of many trade unionists and the 'No strikes as far as possible' attitude of the Communists. With this, let us now look at the industries where the strike wave took place in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4.2.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATEMENT SHOWING INCIDENCE OF STRIKES - INDUSTRYWISE - MADRAS PRESIDENCY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- NOVEMBER 1939 - AUGUST 1945</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textile (Cotton &amp; Jute)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Strikes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays Lost</td>
<td>12,110</td>
<td>140,205</td>
<td>326,375</td>
<td>736,646</td>
<td>18,103</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>3,798</td>
<td>12,40,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engg. (incl. Rly. Workshops)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Strikes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays Lost</td>
<td>8,058</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>9,465</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>19,841</td>
<td>4,480</td>
<td>43,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food, Drinks &amp; Tobacco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Strikes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays Lost</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,012</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9,836</td>
<td>41,618</td>
<td>3,733</td>
<td>59,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Strikes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays Lost</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>118,318</td>
<td>70,962</td>
<td>12,186</td>
<td>63,425</td>
<td>34,625</td>
<td>3,02,841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Ibid.
It is evident from the data available in the above table (Table 4.2) that the strike wave was most marked in the Textile industry accounting for 68 or about 29 per cent of the total number of strikes. Similarly, the textile industry in the Province accounted for about 75 per cent of the mandays lost during the war. This trend however registered a change from 1943 onwards and from then on, the hitherto unorganised section of labour, those employed in the Food, Drinks and Tobacco as well as the other peripheral industries dominated the strike wave. It is to be noted that these sections put together, accounted for 134 of the 162 strikes between 1943 and 1945 and about 77 per cent of the mandays lost during this period. An important aspect to be noted was the entry of the scavenging staff working under the local bodies who came out on strike for the first time in their history.

Thus we may safely conclude that the working class of Madras, like their counterparts all over India fought the effects of the war with massive strike actions: the strike wave that broke out ever since 1935, continued to intensify, and during the period of the war, it spread into the peripheral industries with great vigour. In this context, let us look at the nature of the strike wave in terms of the demands placed by the workers or in other words, let us look into the causes of the strikes in the following table (Table
4.3) before entering into a detailed analysis of some of the
more important strikes.

| Table 4.3 |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **STATEMENT SHOWING DETAILS OF STRIKES AND MAN DAYS LOST IN TERMS OF THEIR CAUSES:** 7 |
| 1939 | 1940 | 1941 | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | Total |
| Wages, Dearness Allowance, Bonus |
| No. of Strikes | 2 | 7 | 19 | 15 | 26 | 50 | 25 | 144 |
| Mandays Lost | 11,560 | 28,960 | 3,58,880 | 7,51,923 | 19,327 | 86,912 | 15,044 | 12,72,906 |
| Suspension Dismissals |
| No. of Strikes | - | 7 | 8 | - | 6 | 6 | 6 | 33 |
| Mandays Lost | - | 22,791 | 78,179 | - | 1,839 | 27,228 | 21,985 | 1,52,022 |
| Leave, Holidays |
| No. of Strikes | - | 2 | - | - | 2 | 3 | 1 | 8 |
| Mandays Lost | - | 2,625 | - | - | 5,246 | 1,392 | 41 | 9,304 |
| Discharge, Retrenchments |
| No. of Strikes | - | - | 1 | - | 4 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| Mandays Lost | - | - | 2,999 | - | 441 | 644 | 4,260 | 8,344 |
| Others (Working conditions, Ill-treatment etc.) |
| No. of Strikes | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 12 | 9 | 42 |
| Mandays Lost | 550 | 97,212 | 10,147 | 65,150 | 13,128 | 11,645 | 5,306 | 2,03,138 |

From the details in the table given above, the following conclusions can be drawn on the character of the strike wave;

that the strike wave was predominantly caused by the economic effects of the war manifested in the rising prices disproportionate to the wages, while in the initial stages, it was caused more by suspensions and dismissals of workers. It can be seen that 59 per cent of the total strikes during the period was caused by demands for wages, Dearness Allowance, etc. (accounting for 71 per cent of the mandays lost) while Suspensions/Dismissals accounted for 15 per cent of the strikes (14 per cent of the mandays lost).

SECTION -2

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE STRIKES

The overall context in which the Trade Union movement in India was placed was spelt out by the AITUC in the Report of the General Secretary to the 19th Session of the Congress at Kanpur in September 1942 as follows:

Continuous unrest has been evident among industrial labour all over the country mainly due to the fall in the standard of living because of steadily rising prices...Though industrial concerns are making heavy profits because of war, even small increments of wages as dearness allowance are very grudgingly given. The long drawn out and bitter struggle put forth by thousands of workers at the Kolar Gold Fields,.... and the Bus Workers of Madras are only an
Organised resistance to the rise in prices in the wake of the war was not very late in coming as far as the working class in the Presidency was concerned. The Chief Intelligence Officer, Madras reported on 10.8.41 that,

There has been some slight deterioration in the Labour situation... Strikes are in progress amongst the textile labourers in Coimbatore and Tiruppur and the Motor Bus Drivers in Madras city. 9

The Madras Bus Workers strike which began on 4th July 1941 had its origins in the non-implementation of the award of the Commissioner of Labour, Madras, reached after a settlement on 29th April, 1941, which provided for 3 days rest in a month and reinstatement of discharged employees (numbering about 100) without loss of seniority. 10 The attitude of the Bus Owners in refusing to implement the agreement reached, was alone responsible for the strike that


went on for quite some time before it died out, not before accounting for a loss of about 1,13,000 mandays.

The same period, witnessed a series of organised strikes by the workers of the Cotton Textile industry in Coimbatore District which accounted for a loss of about 2,38,000 mandays demanding Dearness Allowance, in July-August 1941. The intensity of this strike can be gauged by the fact that they accounted for 53% of the mandays lost in the year. This strike wave began on the 12th July 1941 when "All the mill workers numbering more than 8,000 employed in the three spinning mills of Tiruppur (went) on strike..." The demands placed by them were grant of 25 per cent dearness allowance and acceptance of the recommendations of the Court of Enquiry." This was followed by a strike notice served by the Coimbatore District Textile Worker's Union on 5.7.41 stating as follows;

The Central Committee of this Union after deep study of the Co-operative stores in the mills, is of considered opinion that no worker is benefited by the stores... So this committee requests the Mill-owners to declare 30% of the wages of a worker as Dearness Allowance. If the Millowners do not declare so

12. The Hindu, (Madras), 23rd July, 1941.
within 31st July, '41 the Committee resolves to observe a general strike after issuing notice of 24 hours.

The response of the millowners to the demands of the workers however was not positive, though they were prepared to give certain concessions in the course of discussions with the Commissioner of Labour, Madras, viz. -

1. A Dearness Allowance of 10 per cent subject to a minimum of one rupee per mensem per worker for the full number of working days in a month with effect from 1st July 1941 and continued as long as the need exists and/or the company can afford the expenditure.

2. Prosperity bonus for 1941 only, of a month's wages or 8 1/3 per cent of total wages, to be paid before Diwali day to those workers in service on that day.

3. The recommendations of the Government in respect of the findings of the Court of Enquiry as modified by the SIMA including the grant of 13 days casual and

sick leave with pay will be adopted with effect from 1st July 1947.  

The reaction of the Executive Committee of the District Textile Worker's Union to the millowner's offer was "A flat rejection...and the Union decided to launch upon a general strike after the 31st of July if their demand for 30 percent increase in pay with effect from 1st July 1941 or alternatively 25 per cent increase from 1st April 1941, or 20 per cent increase from 1st January 1941, was not conceded by that date."  
The union dispatched the resolution, expressing the futility of any further negotiations and its commitment to go on strike demanding its reasonable and just right for a 30 per cent dearness allowance "at a time when the millowners are having sweeping profits because of the international situation." It is to be noted here that the sale price of 40's yarn of 42 bundles, each of 10 lbs. increased from Rs.230/- in July 1939 to Rs.493/- in July 1941 (the increase was by 114 per cent) while the cost of production during the same period increased from Rs.240/- to


15. The Hindu, (Madras), 30th July, 1941.

Rs.325/- (by only 35 per cent). Thus, we can safely agree with the contention of the workers' union that by 1941, the Coimbatore Textile Industry was making enough profits and hence the demand of the workers for an increased allowance was perfectly justified. The strike began on the morning of 5th August 1941 in the mills and the strike was total. The strike went on till the end of the month and by 30th August 1941, the mills in Coimbatore and Tiruppur resumed work. This however was only after the employers agreeing "to pay a dearness allowance at 12 1/2 per cent as from the 1st July 1941 and to give a bonus of one month's wages in 1941 and 1942 to be paid on the 1st of September, each year." 17

Notwithstanding the fact that the workers registered a gain in the strikes discussed above, it needs to be noted that as a sequel to the strike, "...upto 3.9.41, 1,346 workers had not been re-employed... after the strike." 18 This number however was reduced to 752 on 25.9.41 and 261 on 13.10.41. Apart from this, prohibitory orders were passed in both the centres during the strike. This will be discussed in detail in the following section of this Chapter. It became clear during this strike that the mill-owners were...


18. Letter from D.M. Coimbatore to the Secretary, Govt. of Madras, dt. 4th September, 1941. G.No.2502. P.W.D. dated 17.10.41. (T.N.A.).
most unwilling to part with the huge profits they had been earning with the advent of the War.

The same attitude was visible in the case of the Bus-owners in Madras City when at every stage they not only went back on their commitments, but had even "withdrawn from the arbitration proceedings as they did not agree with the preliminary ruling of the arbitrator" 19 on December 19th, 1941.

Agitation for higher wages and dearness allowance continued and the next major strike action took place in Madras where the workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills struck work thrice in succession in February, March and August 1942, accounting for about 5,60,000 mandays lost or 72 per cent of the mandays lost in the year 1942. The first strike took place when the Union's demand communicated to the management on the 6th January, 1942 "to pay immediately to the workers employed in the mills the bonus for the half year ending with 31st December 1941" 20 was turned down by the management on the ground that the accounts of the period were yet to be settled. As a consequence to this "on the 19th of February, the workers in the spinning and carding sections of


20. Letter from the Commissioner of Labour, Madras to the Secretary, Govt. of Madras, dated 27th February, 1942. G.O.No.720, P.W.D., (Ms) (Confdi) dated 9.3.42. (T.N.A.).
the Carnatic Mill stopped work." The mills declared a lockout and after persuasion by the leadership of the Madras Labour Union, the men resumed work on the 21st February 1942. The calm that was restored, however, did not last long and "The workers of the Carnatic Mills resorted to a stay-in-strike on the afternoon of 9th March because the management cut their pay for the period of the strike during February. In the night the workers of the Buckingham Mills also joined the strike... The mill was closed on the 10th..."22

The management however decided to re-open the mills on the following day and stuck to its position that wages for the strike period will not be paid. The workers entered the mills but those in the spinning department refused to work. "The management requisitioned police assistance in order to clear them from the place... The police opened fire... 8 persons were killed, 20 seriously injured..."23 The mills remained closed until the 6th of April, 1942 when the workers "agreed to resume work unconditionally and represent their grievances to the management."24

21. Ibid.


23. Ibid.

Despite this set-back, the demand for wages for the strike periods was kept alive and it came to the fore again when in August 1942, payment of the half-yearly bonus was made the workers were paid "for 5 months only, i.e. the closure period was excluded and at the rate of 10% instead of 12 1/2 at which payment was made in February." The workers resorted to stay-in strike the following day and when they went out for lunch, the management declared a lockout and affixed a notice in the following terms:

The management regret that their employers have illegally struck work and accordingly will not open the mills until the work people desire to return to work and the management are satisfied that normal working would be resumed.26

The mills remained closed until the 20th of September 1942. The workers resumed work on 21st September 1942 on the following conditions:

1. No wages for the period of the stoppage.
2. All workers who had struck work had to forfeit their right to the special gift of one week's pay.

25. Letter from the Commissioner of Labour, Madras to the secretary, Govt. of Madras, dated 25th August, 1942. G.O. No. 3646, P.W.D. (L), (Ms) (Confid), dated 7.10.42 (T.N.A.).

26. Ibid.
3. Dismissal of 52 workers, predominantly in the spinning and carding sections, who were identified as the ring leaders of the strike. 27

The general trend indicated with regard to the two major strikes earlier (Textile strike in Coimbatore and the Motor Bus strike in Madras) as well as in the strike in the B & C Mills remained similar in broad terms, where the working class was driven into defensive strike actions by the managements of the industry. Notwithstanding this fact, the working class all over the presidency, resisted the onslaughts of price-rise, victimisation, etc., by waging unremitting struggles throughout the period of the war.

The analysis however will not be complete without a brief discussion on the attitude of the major shades of political opinions in the country, viz. the Communists and the Congress vis-a-vis industrial labour in the context of the legislative and administrative interventions of the State machinery. Let us look into this aspect in the following section.

SECTION-3

STATE INTERVENTION IN LABOUR MOVEMENTS

The declaration of India as a belligerent nation on

3rd September, 1939 was accompanied by the promulgation of the Defence of India Ordinance which empowered the Central Government "to prohibit meetings and other forms of propaganda, and to arrest without warrant, and to impose penalties for breaches of regulations, to include death or transportation for life." In the world of labour, Section 81-A of the Defence of India Rules, provided for the following:

1. (a) prohibiting, subject to the provisions of the order a strike or lockout in connection with any trade dispute;
   (b) referring any trade dispute for conciliation or adjudication in the manner provided in the order; and
   (c) enforcing for such period as may be specified in the order or any of the decisions of the authority to whom a trade dispute has been referred for adjudication.

2. If any person contravenes any order made under the rule, he shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine or with both.


The period that followed witnessed large scale repression in the form of arrests and prosecution under the DIR which "took many active trade unionists from all over the country to jail to the extent that many of the affiliated unions were obliged to curtail even their routine activities..."\(^{30}\) It is to be noted here that in Madras, "The old Provincial Committee of the AITUC had ceased to function."\(^{31}\) This was caused primarily by the arrest of the Communists and the Congress socialists under the D.I.R. who led the labour in the struggle against rising prices in furtherance of their policy of opposing the war. The Government "... in order to prevent extension of their activities... found it necessary to round up and detain the most important of these leaders."\(^{32}\)

It is to be noted however that the provisions of the DIR was essentially used against the workers alone and in the case of the employers we hardly find any evidence of the application of the rules. The Government's approach to the strikes that took place during this period was spelt out in the various communiques that were issued during the strikes.

\(^{30}\) Report of the General Secretary, 19th Sessions of AITUC, Kanpur, September 1942, AITUC Papers, Reel No.3382 (NMML).

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Home Dept. appreciation of the Political situation in India for 1940. F.No. 11(24)-P(Sec)/40 of 1940. E.C.O. Proceedings. (N.A.I.).
by the Motor Transport workers in Madras, the Textile Mills in Coimbatore and the B & C Mills, Madras. Let us look at them briefly before proceeding further.

The Government of Madras issued a Press communique on 19th July, 1941 on the Transport workers strike in Madras where it was stated as follows:

The Government......have reached the conclusion that both parties are at fault, the workers of the transport services by embarking on a lightning strike without notice and.... the employers by their failure to implement the terms of the award.... The Government......therefore advise the workers to resume work unconditionally..... 33

While the workers responded to this by passing a resolution "accepting the advise of the Government and expressing their preparedness to offer their services"34 the Bus owners showed no such intention and in fact even withdrew from the arbitration proceedings as seen earlier and the Government on its side failed to enforce its advise on the management and the strike dragged on to ultimately fizzle out.

While the Government had at least made a cursory


34. The Hindu, (Madras), 21st July, 1941.
mention on the role of the management in the case of the Motor Transport workers, with regard to the strike in the B&C Mills in August 1942, the Governments Communique read as follows:

"...The Government desire to make it quite clear to the workers that whatever their grievances may be, no notice will be taken of them until they have been notified in a constitutional manner to the management and the Commissioner of Labour after normal work has been resumed." 35

Apart from these statements which definitely showed the pro-employer attitude of the Government, the use of the repressive organ of the State was witnessed in a good number of cases. For instance, during the strike at the Soundaraja Spinning and Weaving Mills, Dindigul in Madura District in May and June 1941, "Mani Bharathi and Sri Ramakone, the organisers of the strike...were convicted and sentenced under the D.I.R. to undergo Rigorous Imprisonment for one year each." 36 Similar repressive measures continued throughout the period along with promulgation of Prohibition Orders


under Sec.144 of the Cr. P.C. during almost every intense strike action by the workers.

The inadequacy of the D.I.R. and the other machineries to deal with industrial disputes which were breaking out in large numbers resulted in the enactment of the Madras Industrial Disputes Bills, 1942. The Bill provided for, among other things to the Government "the power to refer any industrial dispute to the Court of Arbitration in certain circumstances... The decision of the Court of Arbitration on a reference made to it will be final and binding on all the parties concerned and cannot be called in question in any court of law."37

This part of the Bill providing for compulsory arbitration, came in for severe criticism from the labour organisations and in a statement issued by the Madras Provincial Trade Union Congress, while suggesting certain amendments to the Bill such as fixing up of a time limit of 15 days for the conciliation proceedings, it demanded "that the whole section of the Bill relating to compulsory arbitration must be deleted..."38 These amendments were however not even considered and the Bill was enacted by the Governor of Madras in exercise of the powers assumed to

38. The Hindu, (Madras), 23rd December, 1942.
himself by a proclamation under Sec. 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935.

Conclusion

To conclude, in essence, the outbreak of the war in September 1939 and the price rise it brought about (Section-1) was resisted by the working class in Madras Presidency by launching massive strikes demanding higher wages to compensate the rise in prices (Section 2). The employers however resisted, as much as they could, to part with the massive profits they accrued and in this, they were aided by the British Indian State machinery (Section 3). The strikes that took place between September 1939 and August 1942 were greater in intensity in relation to those between September 1942 and August 1945 as is evident from the figures given in Table 3.1 i.e. the initial phase accounted for about 80 per cent of the mandays lost during the war, whereas the number of strikes during this phase were only about 30 per cent of the total number of strikes during the war. A detailed discussion of the causal explanation of this will be attempted in Chapter-VI, but we can safely conclude at this stage that the change in the stance of the Communists after the entry of the Soviet Union in the war as well as some wage hikes by 1942 and the fixing up of the dearness allowance in proportion to the Consumer Price Index served to pacify the hitherto militant and organised section of Labour in the
Presidency, namely the textile workers. Their place however was taken over by the relatively unorganised sections like the scavenging staff, the bidi workers, etc. in the period following 1942 up to the end of the War. The trend that was witnessed during the War—a trend of rising strike wave continued after the War in far more higher scale. Let us discuss this in the next Chapter.