CONCLUSION

We have seen hitherto the emergence of the working class and their role in the politics of the struggle against imperialism in the last ten years before independence. The colonial context in which the industrial development had taken place in Madras Presidency has been outlined in Chapter I. In this attempt, we have in the first place tried to analyse the spread of industries in terms of the numerical distribution of industrial workers in the Presidency. We have seen that the major industries in the Presidency can be identified as Textile, Food, Drinks and Tobacco, Gins and Presses and Engineering. The Textile industry (including Cotton Spinning and Weaving and Jute) employed on an average, 38 percent of the total workforce in the Presidency followed by Food, Drink and Tobacco (including sugar mills, but predominantly paddy boiling, rice milling and tobacco curing) accounting for 24 per cent of the total workers employed; Gins and Presses, predominantly a seasonal industry, employed 12 per cent and the Engineering industry (primarily the Railway Workshops) employed 10 per cent of the workforce.

In terms of the geographical spread of the industrial working classes, we have identified certain districts, namely, Madras, Madurai, Tinnevely, Coimbatore, Vizagapatam
and East Godavari, where there was a considerable concentration of industrial enterprise. It has been seen in this chapter that these were predominantly centres of Textile industry - Cotton and Jute, except for Madras, which had a fair amount of workers employed in Engineering industry too. Another aspect of significance, that has been noted in this context was that, the Coimbatore district was primarily a centre for yarn manufacture, while the others were in cotton spinning and weaving.

With this, we arrive at a conclusion that the industrial development in the Presidency was taking place in a scattered fashion with some districts (especially Coimbatore and Madras) witnessing a high concentration of industrial employment and on the other side of the spectrum, some districts showing absolutely negligible industrial employment. With this broad picture in mind, we analyse the factors such as wages (money and real), housing, hours of work, etc. and thus identify the areas or spheres of conflict in labour-Capital relationship.

The rise in the money wages of those employed in the major industries was disproportionate to the rising prices, caused by the outbreak of World War II. It is evident from the details in Chapter 1 (sections 2 & 3) that the real wages of workers in the four major industries dropped quite
drastically throughout the period of the war, except for a marginal rise in 1944. The real wages had in fact dropped below the 1939 figures for most part of the war period as seen in Chapter 1 (Graph 1.6 and Table 1.8). The textile industry was, however, an exception to this trend, as is evident from Table 1.9. This we have explained as the result of granting of 'Dearness Allowance', a demand that was constantly and consistently raised by the working class in the Presidency as well as throughout the country after the outbreak of the war.

The overall fall in real wages and consequently the falling standards of living with the outbreak of the war, compounded with the appalling conditions of housing as well as the unregulated system of recruitment in the textile industries in particular and in the other industries in general, acted together in the generation of industrial conflicts in general. Apart from this, we have also seen in the case of the Coimbatore textile industry (yarn manufacture) that by its very nature, it was heavily regulated by trends in the world market; in particular the crisis in 1939, necessitating a large scale retrenchment, was caused by dumping by foreign manufacturers and a saturated home market, both of which were an outcome of the Indo-Britain and the Indo-Japanese Trade Agreements.

Thus in Chapter 1, we have tried to show the
significance of the colonial context in determining the objective conditions in which the working class of India was made and the areas of conflict with capital. Hence the workers struggles were intertwined with the anti-colonial struggle. However, it is important to note that the linkage between the strikes by the workers for their demands (in most cases economic demands) and the anti-colonial struggle is not a simple or mechanical one. It has been attempted in the rest of the thesis to locate this linkage from the experience of the working class in Madras Presidency.

In Chapter II of this thesis, we have seen the revival of the labour movement from its temporary setback after the World Economic Crash that had shown itself from 1929. In analysing the nature of the strikes in the Madras Presidency from July 1937 onwards, we have seen that this period witnessed the emergence of an offensive phase in the history of labour strikes. The strike wave reached a high watermark in 1938, accounting for an unprecedented loss of mandays, i.e. more than 23 lakhs as compared to around 2 and 3 lakhs in 1937 and 1939 respectively. In this phase, it has been seen that the textile industry alone accounted for nearly 94 per cent of the mandays lost. An important aspect to note was the causes that led to the strikes. We have seen, (from Table 2.3) that about 50 per cent of the mandays lost were due to strikes caused by suspensions and
dismissals; demands relating to increased wages provided for the loss of about 30 per cent of the mandays lost.

From 1937 two major factors that aided the revival of labour movement in general were, the revival of industry from the effects of depression and the coming to office of the Popular Ministry in the Presidency. The election manifesto of the Congress had stated that,

In regard to industrial workers, the policy of the Congress is to secure to them a decent standard of living, ... suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, ... and the right to workers to form unions and to strike for the protection of their interests.

This assurance created an element of confidence among the industrial working class that their strikes will receive a sympathetic treatment from the Congress Ministry. The experience of the labour movement in Madras during the period between July 1937 and September 1939 however witnessed a distinct departure from the spirit of the manifesto. The proposed legislation regarding labour by the Government of Madras, as we have seen in chapter II, was effectively aiming

at restricting the right to strike by imposing many restrictions on the worker's unions.

It is to be noted that the Congress Government in Madras essentially aimed at restricting strikes, as stated in its communique in October 1937:

....The Government therefore make it quite clear that they strongly disapprove of a strike, when all other available methods of representations had not been exhausted...

It has been seen that the Congress Ministry strained all its nerves to impose the spirit of this communique in its more than two years in office. This was a distinct departure from the agenda of action spelt out in the Congress election manifesto, as we have seen in chapter III.

The Rajaji Government, looked at every major strike as a 'law and order' problem, alone. This attitude, ironically, was evident, even in cases, where the Government felt that the demands raised by the workers were genuine and justified. It has been discussed in detail, that in cases such as the General Strike of the textile workers in Coimbatore, the men employed in the printing presses in Madras, etc., while the Minister for labour expressed in

clear terms that the demands placed by the workers were justified, nevertheless, the use of Government machinery and the police was justified by ministers in order that 'protection' to the employer might be provided. It is to be noted that, in all instances, except the Madura Mills Dispute in 1938, the repressive machinery of the state was used against the working class and its leadership.

Yet another aspect of significance in this context was the distinct hostility that was evident in the Congress Ministry in its attitude towards the Communists. The use of repressive machinery in the case of strikes guided by the ideology of class war was justified by Rajaji as early as in October 1937, when the Congress Ministry sanctioned the prosecution of S.S. Batliwala for sedition. The Prime Minister stated,

"...Because this province is made the target of left wingers, ... I have necessarily to be first in the field in drawing the line of demarcation between liberty and licence and between freedom of opinion and incitement to violence and disorder." 3

In essence, the record of the Congress Ministry in Madras, as was the case elsewhere was open to criticism as far as the

working class was concerned. To speak in general terms, the working class, its movement and struggles received practically the same step motherly treatment that was acceded to them under the former regimes. The strikes were crushed by arrests and processions were lathicharged and meetings were banned. The period witnessed the death of a few workers in police firings as has been seen in detail. In all such cases of 'administrative interventions' by means of the repressive machinery, the Congress Ministry never lagged behind to justify the same.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that the experience of the working class under the Congress Ministry, laid bare the antagonism between the two perspectives on the role of the working class in the anti-imperialist movement. The programme in this context, as put forward both by the Communists as well as the AITUC in 1935 appealed to the Congress to,

...reorganise its structure and to adopt a clear-cut programme of national independence....to perform successfully its historic function as the instrument of the masses in their struggle against imperialism.

4. Resolution passed by the E.C. of AITUC. File No.1, AITUC papers. (NMML)
This met with no response from the Congress. In fact, the communique issued by the Government of Madras in August 1938, cited earlier, stated that,

...anyone tempted by such propaganda will give thought to the rule of anarchy and violence. 5

This conscious effort by the Congress in Madras, as in other parts of the country to keep the anti-imperialist struggle outside the purview of labour politics was evident in clear terms during the world war II. The Congress programmes of individual satyagraha launched by the end of 1940 and the 'Quit India' movement of August 1942, failed to incorporate the working class as a whole.

Notwithstanding this aspect, we have seen in chapter IV that the working class in Madras Presidency fought relentless battles against the effect of the war. It is of interest to note here that in this phase too, the workers in the textile industry stood in the forefront of the strike wave, accounting for the loss of more than 12 lakhs or 75 per cent of the mandays lost during this phase. Another important aspect in this phase was the unionisation and strike actions of the workers in the peripheral industries such as the Food, Drinks and Tobacco, especially during the

5. Communique issued by the Govt. of Madras on 10 August, 1938. File No.6/1/38, Home Political (NAI)
later stages of the war. It has been seen that the strikes in this group of industries, accounted for about 77 per cent of the mandays lost during the later stages of the war, i.e., between 1943 and 1945. The period also witnessed the entry of the scavenging staff working under the local bodies who came out on strike for the first time in their history.

In terms of the causes leading to the strike actions during war, those relating to higher wages and 'Dearness Allowance' accounted for the loss of more than 12 lakhs mandays or 71 per cent of the mandays lost during the period. The period in the Presidency witnessed the working class demanding a legitimate share in the wartime profits made by the industrialists. The effects of the war, manifesting itself in the unprecedented rise in prices, acted as the most important factor in the major strike actions during the phase and all these strikes were met with brutal repression by the British-Indian state, by means of the provisions of the Defence of India Act. We have seen, in detail, that invariably, the provisions of the DIR were used against the workers in the Madras Presidency, as in the case of the other parts of the country; the repression in Madras was so heavy that, "The old provincial committee of the AITUC had ceased to function." 6

6. Report of the General Secretary, AITUC, September 1942, AITUC papers, Reel No.3382 (NMML)
Another important aspect of relevance to the scope of our discussion during this phase was the change in the attitude of the Communists to the war by 1942. Their anti-war activities among the workers from the beginning of the war leading to the historic Mahaghai strikes in 1940 and 1941 was given up by 1942-43 and the Communists began to adopt a slogan of 'No strikes as far as possible'. This change in stance, we have seen in chapter IV had led to a recession in the intensity of the strike wave by 1943. This however was only a temporary feature and by the end of the war, we have seen that the Communists at many places in the Presidency had been in the forefront in organising the workers demanding wage hikes and resisting suspensions and dismissals.

The termination of the War, the elections to the Provincial Ministries, the formation of the Interim Government at the central level were all accompanied by massive and militant actions by the workers and peasants, predominantly led by the Communists, throughout the country. The Madras Presidency too witnessed a massive strike wave, in all major industries in an unprecedented manner. As has been the case in the previous phases, a majority of the strikes in the post-war phase too were caused by demands for increased wages.

The salient feature of this phase however was the repression of these strikes by the Congress Ministries in the
provincial as well as the central level. It is to be noted that the Prakasam Ministry in Madras during this phase, had surpassed the Rajaji Ministry (1937-39) in terms of its intensity of adverse reaction to strike actions, as has been seen in detail in Chapter V. The Ministry did not resist the passage of the Public Safety Ordinance in January 1947 leading to the banning of the MPTUC and the arrest of almost all trade unionists in the province. It is of importance that the Ordinance was passed on 23 January 1947, in the wake of a call given by the MPTUC on 19.1.47, "...to the working class in the province to observe January 24th as Anti-Repression-Day..." 7 The popular ministry rather than asserting against this executive action of the Governor, by their passivity to this action, expressed their implicit consent to the emergency ordinance.

This attitude of the Ministry in 1946-47 as well as the earlier period (1937-39) in the province, however has to be seen in the specific context of the inherent contradictions between the two alternative perspectives on the role of the working class in the national liberation struggle. As has been seen in detail in chapter VI of the thesis, the contradicting perspectives of the Congress and the Communists acted as a major factor that guided the

dynamics of the working class movement in India. In a nutshell, the combination of labour radicalism and popular revolt painted on the wall the imminent danger of a social revolution. The awareness of this threat effectively determined the political and social action.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Communist influence in the national liberation struggle was only marginal, the period between 1937 and 1947 witnessed the decisive phase in the struggle between the Communists and the Congress to hegemonise the anti-imperialist struggle. This struggle in its course established the antagonism of the Congress to the perspective of the Communists towards the national liberation movement.

To sum up, the last ten years of the anti-imperialist movement in India witnessed the maturing of contradictions between the two opposite perspectives on labour and its role in the struggle against imperialism. The Indian National Congress and its approach to the role of the working class was in definite opposition to the perspective of the Communists in this regard. The unity that was achieved between the AITUC and the NTUF, we have seen, was only apparent and with the maturing of contradictions, the Congress split the AITUC to form the INTUC - an organisation launched on the principles of the "Employers' Trusteeship" as opposed to the ideology of 'class struggle' as envisaged by the Communists.