CHAPTER - II

STRIKES AND POLICY APPROACH OF CONGRESS:
THE PROVINCIAL MINISTRY - 1937-1939

It has been discussed in the Introduction that the Strike wave in India that had broken out in the twenties of the 20th century had subsided progressively from 1930 onwards, after reaching its peak in 1928: the record number of mandays lost (of more than 310 lakhs) had begun receding and in 1935 it reached an all time low of about 98 lakhs. The causes for this, will be discussed in Chapter VI in detail, but, to put it very briefly, the arrest of the Communists and their detainment in the Meerut Conspiracy trials as well as the split in the AITUC beginning in 1929, had contributed to the recession in the frequency and intensity of labour disputes during this period.

Notwithstanding the fact that labour was relatively quiet during this phase, the conditions that contributed to the rising strike wave such as the impact of the Wall Street Crash remained to affect the working class in India. The silence that was recorded, hence has to be seen as an apparent one. Temporary recovery of industry began by 1934 and this laid the grounds for the intensification of the strike wave as seen from the fact that by 1937, we find a sharp increase in both the number of strikes as well as the mandays lost. It is to be noted here that this revival of the strike wave in India was to retain its intensity, except
for a relative fall between 1943 and 1945. The experience in
the Madras Presidency was more or less in the same lines as
will be seen in the course of this chapter. Before we enter
into this discussion, let us look at, in brief, the major
factors that worked in this direction of what we may call
'the revival of the strike wave'. In other words, let us
look into the conditions that led to the recovery of the
labour movement in India after its set back in the years of
the world depression.

It is to be noted here that the period of revival,
which began around 1936, witnessed not only an increase in
the number of strikes, but also some very major and
intensified strike actions by the workers in the Bengal-
Nagpur Railway, the Cawnpore Textile Industry and the
Calcutta Jute industry, to name a few. The general offensive
of the workers to win back the losses sustained during the
long period of depression ranging from 1930 to 1936, was
aided, primarily by two factors. They were the improved
conditions of trade and industry as well as the growing urge
among the workers to combat the worsened condition of life.

The overall conditions that worked in this direction
can be explained in the words of Manibhen Khera, the General
Secretary ofAITUC, in the following terms:

A new wave of awakening is sweeping through the
country and the workers at every place are girding up
their loins ... They have regained enough confidence to resist every offensive of the capitalists even to go forward for winning back what they have lost during the last few years... ¹

Apart from this, yet another important factor that effected this revival of working class militancy was the unity that was emerging between the hitherto rival trade union organisations. The Red Trade Union Congress, which broke away in 1932 from the AITUC merged with the parent organisation in 1935. Similarly, steps towards uniting the NTUF with the AITUC were also in progress. Notwithstanding the fact that the merger of the NTUF with AITUC could materialise only by 1940, the period between 1936 and the merger, witnessed the constitution of the Joint Labour Board consisting of members from both the organisations as well as concrete steps in the direction of unity. A discussion on the content of this unity will be found in chapter VI in detail. Nevertheless, at this stage, suffice it to state that this measure contributed towards the revival of labour movement in India.

The changing political context, especially, after the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement, witnessed a fair amount of radicalisation of the Congress; the Government

1. Report of the General Secretary, 16th Session of AITUC, Delhi, 1938, AITUC Papers, Reel No.R.3382 (NMML).
of India Act, 1935, with its provision for elections to the Provincial Ministries, put forth a changed situation for the National Liberation struggle to face. The Congress put forward a manifesto, which reflected the ongoing radicalisation process (from the Karachi Session, 1931) in which, for the first time in its history, it had spelt out a programme towards labour. It read as follows:

In regard to industrial workers the policy of the Congress is to secure to them a decent standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labour in conformity, as far as economic conditions in the country permit, with international standards; suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment and the right of workers to form unions and to strike for the protection of their interests.

This radical stance was however momentary and the period during which the Congress Ministries were controlling the Provincial Governments witnessed a distinct deviation from this declaration. In fact, in Madras and Bombay, as we

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shall see in this chapter, the ministries even went to the extent of introducing bills that effectively curtailed the right to strike and form unions.

However, we may state here that by the middle of the thirties of this century, the labour issues had begun to attract the attention of the Congress, the largest force against imperialism. The period also witnessed the Indian working class, being subjected to the dynamics of the two counteracting forces of anti-imperialism - the Congress and the Communists. This overall background, is essential to study the aspects of trade union movement.

Let us now look at, in detail, the labour movement in Madras Presidency during the period when C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) was the Prime Minister and V.V. Giri (the Trade union leader) was the Minister for Industry and Labour. The chapter will be divided into three sections. Section-I will attempt at an analysis of the strikes in the Presidency in terms of their nature and causes, followed by a discussion on the attitude of the Congress Ministry to the strikes in Section-II. Section-III will discuss the legislative measures undertaken by the Provincial Ministry regarding labour.

SECTION-I STRIKES IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY - 1937-39

The strike actions involving the industrial workers during the period of the Congress Ministry in Madras should
be seen in the overall context of the revival of labour
offensive for restoration of wage cuts after the trade
depression on the one hand and the change in the Congress
programme after the Karachi session on the other hand, as has
been briefly dealt with in the introductory section of this
chapter. The lull in the Congress activities after the near
failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Madras,
1930-33, was followed by a pressing demand from the radical
elements in the country led by the left wing forces over "the
need for collective affiliation to the National Congress of
the Trade Unions, Kisan Sabhas, Nav-Jawan Sabhas and all
similar collective mass organisations (till then outside the
Congress), so as to make the congress the widest mass
organisation with the possible national front of all anti-
imperialist forces in the country". This demand was however
never conceded by the leadership of the Congress (this will
be discussed in detail in Chapter VI of this thesis). Despite
this fact, the radicalisation of the working class through
the strikes preceding and following the declaration of the
Government of India Act, 1935 was taking place in
an unprecedented manner. In fact "Between 1937 and 1939
the trade union movement throughout India made new and
significant advances in organisation, solidarity and
political consciousness of the working class."

4. Ibid. p.212.
Of the 179 strikes reported for the whole of India in 1937, involving about 650,000 workers, Madras Presidency accounted for 61 disputes, involving 60,980 working people. In other words the workers who went on strike in Madras Presidency in 1937 accounted for about one tenth of those in the whole country. It is to be noted here that numerically the number of workers coming under the purview of the Factory Act 1934, in Madras constituted about 12 per cent of the same all over the country. Major industrial centres such as Madras, Coimbatore, Madura and even the peripheral districts of Malabar and South Kanara turned out to be stormy centres of radical political activity involving the working class.

The gravity of the situation in the realm of labour activities was explained by the Government of Madras in its report as follows:

The very large increase in the number of strikes during the year under report has been a cause of considerable anxiety to the Government... Of the several causes for misunderstanding and the consequent conflict between capital and labour, the most outstanding concern were wages and conditions of employment...  

5. Ibid. p.218.

Before going into the details of the Government's response to this situation, let us now look into the details of the strikes that took place from 1937 to the declaration of World War II in November 1939.

Table 2.1

STATEMENT SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF STRIKES IN MADRAS RESIDENCY BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 1937 AND NOVEMBER 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>2,11,985</td>
<td>23,26,594</td>
<td>3,87,538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the figures available that the strike wave during the period when the Provincial Ministry was in power was fairly widespread and in terms of the mandays lost in 1938, we may say that it was intensified from the previous year to quite an extent. Moreover, the strikes in Madras Presidency accounted for 25 per cent of the mandays lost all over India in 1938, as can be seen from an analysis of the figures in Table 2.1 in comparison to the all India figures given in the Introduction. Let us now look at the industry-wise break-up of the strikes for our period in the following table.

Table 2.2.

STATEMENT SHOWING INDUSTRYWISE DISTRIBUTION OF STRIKES AND MANDAYS LOST, 1937-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDUSTRY/YEAR</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textiles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>1,95,367</td>
<td>22,29,649</td>
<td>3,20,622</td>
<td>27,43,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engg. (including Rly. Workshops)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>7,551</td>
<td>3,484</td>
<td>4,061</td>
<td>20,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food, Drinks, Tobacco</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>7,262</td>
<td>50,110</td>
<td>42,161</td>
<td>99,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>40,351</td>
<td>20,694</td>
<td>62,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures in the above-mentioned table (Table 2.2) show that the strikes predominantly took place in the textile industry accounting for 60 out of the total number of 107 strikes during the period. Again, in terms of the mandays lost, the strikes in the textile industry accounted for nearly 94 per cent of the total mandays lost during the period.

8. Ibid.
period. This enables us to conclude that the major centres of textile industry, such as Madras, Coimbatore and Madurai, turned into stormy centres of working class protest. This statement however, does not negate the role of workers, employed in other industries in the strike wave. As for instance, the figures relating to the textile industry include the jute industry too; the strikes in the jute centre of Chittivalasa in the Andhra region of the Presidency accounted for a loss of about 6 lakhs mandays or about 23 per cent of the mandays lost in the textile industry alone. Another important aspect of this period was the emergence of the workers in the Printing Presses in and around Madras city. In all, their strikes during the period accounted for a loss of about thirty two thousand mandays, which is a considerable figure in relation to their negligible numerical strength among the industrial population of the Presidency.

This brings us to another important question in analysing the strikes within the scope of this section viz. the causes that led to the strikes. Before we look at the figures available, it is essential to state that, by using the expression 'cause', we mean the immediate provocation to the strike as stated in Government records and statistics. The general propensity to strike was affected by a variety of events, as seen in the initial parts of this chapter.
## TABLE 2.3

**STATEMENT SHOWING THE CAUSES LEADING TO THE STRIKES - 1937-39**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages, Bonus, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>1,42,830</td>
<td>6,99,556</td>
<td>67,455</td>
<td>9,09,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions/Dismissals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>7,781</td>
<td>12,60,576</td>
<td>1,87,244</td>
<td>14,55,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrenchment/Discharge of labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>3,40,379</td>
<td>64,824</td>
<td>4,06,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave/Holiday with pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,792</td>
<td>9,934</td>
<td>11,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (incl.workg. conditions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of strikes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandays lost</td>
<td>60,374</td>
<td>24,291</td>
<td>58,081</td>
<td>1,42,746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the figures given above that the demand for increased wages and related monetary demands caused 28 out of 105 strikes during the period. In terms of


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the mandays lost, strikes relating to the wage question accounted for about 30 per cent. The year 1937, predominantly witnessed strikes for increased wages and bonus in the Presidency, accounting for about 67 per cent of the mandays lost. However, the largest number of the loss in the mandays during the period was due to strikes against suspensions and dismissal of workers, which accounted for about 50 per cent. It is evident that in the years 1938 and 1939, the workers struck the most to resist suspensions and dismissals as can be seen from the figures in Table 2.3. Let us now look into the attitude shown by the Government in response to those strikes in the following section.

SECTION-II: THE CONGRESS MINISTRY AND LABOUR - A SURVEY OF THE POLICY APPROACH.

The election to the Madras Legislative Assembly in April 1937 under the Government of India Act, 1935, provided for the organised labour, representation in specific terms in the form of seats where the electorate was constituted from the industrial labour only. With a relative radicalisation of the programme of the Indian National Congress and a specific reference to the problems of the Industrial workers in the election manifesto, as seen in the introductory section of this chapter, it is to be noted that the Congress candidates won in all the six labour seats in a most
convincing manner. This should be seen not just in terms of the popularity of the Congress vis-a-vis the politics of reaction and compromise of the Justice Party, whose influence in the labour front was negligible, but as a symbolic expression of the hopes or the expectation of the industrial workers regarding the Congress programme of securing better living and working conditions in the election manifesto. The debate within the Congress with regard to office acceptance and the final decision to form ministries in the Provinces turned out to be a sad story. In fact, the prophecy of Jawaharlal Nehru in his Presidential address to the Faizpur Session of the Indian National Congress in December 1936 with regard to acceptance of office under the new Constitution, that,

It would inevitably mean a kind of partnership with British imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people, an acquiescence, even though under protest and subject to reservations, in the basic ideas underlying the act, an association to some extent with British imperialism in the hateful task of the repression of our advanced elements.11

10. The candidates elected were as follows: N.G. Ramasamy (Coimbatore and Malabar), S.R. Veradarajalu Naidu (Madura), P.R.K. Sarma, (Press Labour Union, Madras) Subba Rao (Chittivalasa Jute Mills), G. Krishnamurthy (Railway Trade Union, Madras).

was to come true in the 26 months when Congress Ministries were in office. The official history of the Indian National Congress, wrote as follows:

.... The increasing strength of the Congress power and Congress influences brought with it a volume of trouble. The accelerated pace of popular expectations in the way of progress of ideas and events - especially in the spheres of labour and machinery was the cause of strikes here, there and elsewhere, which under the very Congress Ministries witnessed instance after instance of firing by the police and the military. That there were three such firings in South India, was considered as enormity...12

Let us look at the pronouncements of the Provincial Ministry in Madras in the two years and three months when the Congress party was in office with regard to labour before going into a detailed analysis of the same.

EARLY DISPUTE SETTLEMENTS

The formation of the Congress Ministry on 14th July, 1937 took place when the men at the P.W.D. workshop at Madras were on strike (from the 12th of July) against the

introduction of the dreaded piece work system. The workshop was locked out in response to the stay-in-strike by the men who had "apparently resorted to this step in view of the repeated assurances held out by the President of their Union, a Congress M.L.A., that the Congress Ministry would do everything for the work-people when they came to power." 13

While this strike was settled with the Government deciding to withdraw the piecework system in favour of the workers, the Congress Ministry began to get exercised by the spate of strikes that greeted its formation. In fact, the Government's attitude to labour agitation was spelt out in general terms by the Premier, C. Rajagopalachari (hereafter Rajaji) when he addressed a gathering of the striking workers of the P.W.D. on 16th July 1937 at the Congress Bhavan. In the course of his speech, the Premier advised the workers to remain united and peaceful and to repose complete faith in the Ministry as a necessary prerequisite to their grievances getting redressed. The Labour Minister on the same occasion called upon the workers to remain united and disciplined and strive for enhancing the profit of whichever industry they belonged to. 14

13. Fortnightly Reports on the political situation in Madras Province (hereafter Fortnightly Reports) for the First Half of July 1937, F. No.18/7/37, Home Political (NAI).

This appeal on the lines of a trusteeship in labour-capital relationship and thus a negation of the class contradiction, was developed further when the Labour Minister and erstwhile Trade Union leader, V.V. Giri, addressed a gathering of workers in the textile centre of Papanasam in Tinnevely District when he stressed that both the employers and employees are partners in an industry and that the formation of trade unions were integral to industrial development. He stressed that employers should help and recognise the growth of trade unions and called upon the workers to remain disciplined and co-operate with the employers and to respect the supervisors. These utterances are to be noted to follow the later developments in this area in more concrete terms.

The futility of an advocacy for compromise between the irreconcilable rift between capital and labour was reflected in the spate of growing unrest as is evident from the details in table 2.2. Strikes broke out in quick succession and by October 1937, we have on record, major strikes some of short duration and others extending for over a week. The strike in the Madura Mills Company, Madura involving 2,800 workers, in Lakshmi Mills Company, Coimbatore where 845 workers were involved, in the B & C Mills, Madras and in Ganeshar Aluminium Factory, Madras: In all these, the

Government intervened and exercised in arriving at a settlement.

It was during the strike in the Buckingham & Carnatic Mills, Madras which began on 2nd October, 1937, demanding higher wages in the carding section that the Government came out with its position regarding strike actions by the workers. In a Press Communique issued on 22nd October, 1937 the Government of Madras stated as follows:

There are instances of labour going on strike without prior representations and negotiations and without giving the employer adequate time for the consideration of alleged grievances. 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 and that their policy was that 'internal settlement' was preferable to 'external settlement' of trade disputes. In cases, however, where internal settlement was found not possible, intervention was considered justifiable both in the interest of the community at large and of the industry in particular.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{16. Report for Week Ending 22.10.1937. G.0.448, dtd. February 1938, Development Dept. (Ms) (TNA).}\)

\(^\text{17. Government of Madras, Madras in 1938, (Madras, 1939) p.68.}\)
This declared policy of the Government, deprecating resort to strikes by workers was a guiding principle to its approach to the strikes that took place since July 1937. In the period between August 1937 and June 1938, the Government utilised the machinery of conciliation provided by the Trade Disputes Act, 1929, on five occasions, (Choolai Mills, Diocesan Press and WIMCO Factory in Madras, Textile Mills in Coimbatore and the Chittivalasa Jute Mills, Vizagapatnam) and in two cases persuaded the parties to have recourse to arbitration to resolve their differences. (Madras Electric Tramway Corporation and the Madura Mills dispute). 18 In the year following this period, i.e. July 1938 to June 1939, Courts of Enquiry were instituted on two occasions, (Diocesan Press, Madras and Minakshi Mills, Madurai) and the parties were persuaded to leave the dispute for arbitration, on a solitary occasion, (Radhakrishna Mills, Coimbatore). The Government's intervention and settling disputes in these cases in an amicable manner is only a part of the story.

In fact, there were a good number of instances where the Government involved its repressive machinery to settle disputes between labour and capital. Again, in all except one such case, the Government machinery sided against the cause of labour in the Presidency. This aspect of the story

will be discussed in the following Chapter. Suffice it to state at this stage that the actions undertaken by the Rajaji ministry were bereft of any sympathy towards the cause of the workers and that there were many instances of deviation from the Congress election manifesto.

Let us discuss the legislative interventions undertaken by the Rajaji Ministry regarding labour in the following section.

SECTION-III LEGISLATIVE MEASURES OF THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT - AN OVERVIEW

Growing rift between capital and labour necessitated the Congress Ministries to initiate certain legislation with regard to labour and the lead in this regard was taken by the Congress Ministry in the Bombay Province, with its professed aim "to promote legislation aiming at the prevention of strikes and lockouts as far as possible"¹⁹, as distinct from the Congress election manifesto recognising "the right to strike for the protection of their interest" as seen earlier in this chapter. A detailed discussion over the Bombay Trade Disputes Act, 1938 will be beyond the scope of this thesis, but suffice it to say that the Government of Madras introduced a similar bill but thanks to the termination of the Congress Ministries in November 1939, this did not reach

Despite the fact that V.V. Giri's draft proposals of April 1938 on legislation on labour could not be made into an Act, it is of interest to discuss them briefly, before we reach certain conclusions on the approach of the Rajaji Ministry to labour. The Government circulated a memorandum in this connection in June 1939. While the full text of the memorandum along with the reactions of the Employer's Association as well as the perspective of the Madras Labour Union as well as the Madras Provincial Trade Union Congress is given as an appendix to this Chapter (Appendix-1), the essential elements of this were as follows:

1. While 'internal settlement' of disputes was desired, in the event of it not taking place, Government intervention in the form of conciliation by the commissioner of labour as Chief conciliator or his appointee-official or non-official-as conciliator was sanctioned.

2. Creation of a permanent conciliation machinery constituting judges of the District courts in the mofussil and of the City Civil court in Madras as Industrial Courts.

3. Government also provide for reference of disputes to a Board of Arbitration. No reference to be
made under ordinary circumstances to such a Board unless both the parties to the dispute agree in writing. But Government consider it desirable to reserve to themselves the right to refer a dispute to arbitration in exceptional cases. The award of the Arbitrator will of course be binding on the parties to the dispute.

4. Provision for the employers to negotiate with non-recognized trade unions.

5. Government recognition to trade unions only subject to certain conditions which they hope will ensure a proper working of the trade unions concerned.

6. Provision to be considered for imposing penalties which should be imposed on parties for taking hasty action in the matter during the progress of investigation, conciliation, etc. 20

It is explicitly evident from the details mentioned above that the proposed bill in letter and spirit negated a fundamental right assured in the congress election manifesto i.e. "...the right of workers to form unions and to strike for the protection of their interests" as seen in the earlier

part of this chapter. But then this should be seen as an essential change in the policy of the Congress itself and not as a stray action of a whimsical Congressman in Madras as is evident from the fact that a comprehensive programme of reform as suggested by the labour sub-committee of the Congress and ratified by A.I.C.C. in October 1937 included among other measures, the "Recognition by the state and employers of Trade Unions which accept the policy of using peaceful and legitimate means,"\(^{21}\) for administrative or legislative actions to be taken by the Provincial Governments. We shall discuss this in greater detail in chapter VI.

The proposals of the Government of Madras was opposed by a large section of the trade unions. In a memorandum submitted to the Government of Madras, the Madras Labour Union stated their views on the proposed legislation as follows;

1. The proposals made therein are inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing. The only policy that emerges from them is the prevention or strikes ... This is purely meant in the interests of the Government and not of workmen... The mentality behind this is distinctly bourgeois...

2. The policy adumbrated with regard to recognition of

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Unions is somewhat curious and is not calculated to strengthen trade unions. It is not the duty of Government to recognise or not to recognise trade unions and invest them with authority. It is for labour and capital to determine it,... In the circumstances of our political life in this province, Government cannot be expected to be impartial as rival trade unions will be and are run by leaders of different political parties...

3. Government desire to reserve power to refer matters to arbitration without consent of parties in exceptional circumstances ... Such compulsory arbitration cannot be conducive to harmony nor will any decision given by such a Board be accepted... 22

In a similar fashion, the Madras Provincial Trade Union Congress while pointing out the deficiencies in the proposals, demanded among other things the following provisions as foremost in any labour legislation. The Union stated that;

1. We... consider that provision should be made for compulsory recognition of non-communal Registered trade unions with a membership of not less than 10 per cent of

22. Trade Disputes and Trade Unions and Unemployment Assurance - The Madras Labour Union's Statement of Objections. G.O. No.1380, dtd. 27.5.1939, Development Dept. (TNA).
the workers of the particular undertaking or establishment.

2. Where a union feels it necessary to resort to strike after exhausting the above avenues, recruitment of black-legs to the detriment of workers should be prevented. Infringement of this provision should be made a cognisable offense on the complaint of the registered trade union.

3. Government should prescribe definite and proper procedure for regulation of the conduct of police in industrial disputes.\(^{23}\)

It is to be noted that the criticism of the trade unions of the proposed legislations were founded from their experience from the advent of the Congress Ministry in the province. The aspect of compulsory arbitration came in for criticism from almost all quarters of public opinion. The Hindu, (Madras) wrote that,

... compulsory arbitration is such a serious method of securing industrial peace that we doubt whether the Government are well advised in accepting it as a suitable method. It is open to grave objections, especially in the present undeveloped state of

\(^{23}\) Measures for the Amelioration of the conditions of workers - Memorandum to the Madras Government by the Madras Trade Union Congress. \textit{Ibid.}

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industrial organisation in this country... 24

To sum up, the proposals of the Government of Madras were in consonance with their communique of October 1937, aiming at promoting only a 'peaceful and legitimate' means for the redressal of grievances of the working class. The legislative measures were aimed against the growth of those trade unions guided by the ideology of class struggles, led by the Communists.

It is important for us to discuss these proposals in its context rather than in letter, as to what was construed to be 'peaceful and legitimate means' for the redressal of the grievances of labour. This was made clear in no uncertain terms by the Premier in his speech in the Legislative Assembly aimed against the critics of the Governments' policy towards labour in general and against the Socialists and Communists in particular. Referring to the stay-in-strikes, resorted to by workers the Premier contended that these were a mockery of the principle of non-violence and so was picketing. He stated in no uncertain terms that,

These so called stay-in strikes had not been heard of till recently. It was only recently that people imagined that they could block the gateway and say that they were picketing peacefully ... I do not want

to refer to other provinces or go by precedents. Whether they have declared it illegal or not, we are declaring it illegal... There is a school of labour leaders who want that state of things so that there may be revolution and through revolution we may arrive at a 'class less' society... 25

This reaction by the Government we may categorically conclude was in response to the increasingly evident spread of Communist influence among the industrial workers in the province of which the Congress Ministry was not very happy. This conclusion can be established with the fact that in August 1938, the Government of Madras in a communique had expressed that the idea of involvement of the working class in the anti-imperialist struggle as a class as suggested by the Communists was inimical to the interests of the Congress in the following terms:

The Government trust that anyone tempted by such propaganda will give thought to the rule of anarchy and violence which is the inevitable consequence of any encouragement to such a movement... There is no possibility of success for such a programme and no one need have any apprehensions of it. But the thoughtless repetitions of such phrases and

ideas... and any unthinking support given to such secret organisations who spread such ideas, must tend to weaken the force of the movement for social and industrial progress and full political freedom to which the Government is pledged. 26

The reaction to this comment from the communists was one of contempt and resolutions were passed in public meetings in certain industrial centres of the province. On the other hand, one of the English dailies commented in its editorial as follows:

It was typical of the firm attitude of the Madras Congress Government on the subject of law and order, that it should have given the lead to other Congress Provinces in pointing out the dangerous character of Communist propaganda... They are, in fact, closely akin to previous effusions of the Communist Organisations which have led the Government of India to put the party under a ban with very good reason.... The Madras Premier rightly argues that a Popular Government has every right to use all the weapons in its power to check unlawful activities. 27

26. Communique issued by the Govt. of Madras on the 10 August 1938, pointing out the dangerous character of Communist Propaganda, File No.6/1/38 Home Political, (NAI).

27. Newspaper clipping appended in File No.6/1/38, Home Political, (NAI).
This step of the Government of Madras was appreciated in no uncertain terms by the Associated Chambers of Commerce too in its Annual General Meeting held at Calcutta in December 1938 when M.H. Horsman, M.C. (Upper India) cited the Madras Governments' communique of 10th August and said:

I desire highly to commend the communique ... exposing the 'Red' plot which had then come to light and warning the public against the movement... That the Government of Madras, a Congress Government, be it noted are really alive to the threats against Congress which are an essential plank in the Communist 'platform'...

Thus, to conclude, we may state with enough evidence that the Congress Ministry in Madras approached the working class movement with hostility as long as it was guided by the ideology of class struggle. The Congress Ministry looked at the revolutionary role of the working class in terms of a law and order problem. Notwithstanding the fact that the Government professed in so many words that it stood for the amelioration of the working conditions in industry, we may conclude that in its actions in the course of its existence and more so towards the end of the period, the apprehension

of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on the controversy of office acceptance that "it would inevitably mean a kind of partnership with British imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people..." proved to come true. This aspect will be discussed in further details in the following chapter.

The declaration of the war and the resignation of the Congress Ministries, with no alternate programme to fight imperialism opened up yet another chapter in the movement of the working class of India and this will be discussed in Chapter-IV of this thesis.