CHAPTER-V

BAURIA AND CHANGAIL : THE CASE OF TWO JUTE MILL TOWNS

In the previous two Chapters III and IV, an attempt was made to analyse the policies of mobilisation of jute workers in the entire industry by the CPI(M) in West Bengal. In Chapter III we have seen that the CPI(M) mobilises the workers through its trade union organisation, the BCMU affiliated to the CITU, around the grievances of the jute workers. Strikes are used as the ultimate weapon of action for the redressal of the grievances of the workers. But we have also seen that the BCMU had shown weaknesses in mobilisation, since it had failed if not wholly but partially to mobilise the jute workers around political issues. Mobilisation was mostly around economic grievances and even industrywide actions have failed to educate a considerable section of the jute workers politically. Thus, jute workers to a large extent lack political consciousness and this is more particularly true of Hindi speaking workers in the industry. In Chapter IV, an attempt was made to analyse and examine the mobilisation efforts of the party after it came into power in 1977. This mobilisation effort could be referred to as the mobilisation from the top or above. Mobilisation from the top would mean the use of the institutions available to it at the State level for the purpose of providing relief to the jute workers and thus by this trying to bring it closer to the party. To some extent the party has been able to provide relief to the workers in the industry by using its good offices under the labour department. By this, it had brought a good section of the jute workers closer to the party either directly or by facilitating mobilisation from below. In this Chapter, the last one in the thesis, an attempt will be made to analyse the mobilisation efforts of the party at a micro level, in two jute mill towns - Bauria and Chengail in the district of Howrah, which together is a location centre for five jute mills which altogether employs less than 20,000 workers. Attempt will be made to analyse the mobilisation effort from the top as well as below, with more emphasis on the second that is trade union mobilisation. The whole Chapter will be divided in three sections. In the first section, an attempt will be made to analyse the living conditions of the workers in Bauria and Chengail. In the section, we shall discuss the politics of trade union mobilisation by the BCMU in the region and in the final section, an attempt will be made to analyse the problems which the BCMU confronts in mobilisation.
JUTE WORKERS IN BAURIA AND CHENGAIL

Bauria and Chengail are two jute mill towns in the district of Howrah. It is located like all the jute mills in the banks of the river Hooghly. Connected by rail and road network, it is around half an hour distance from Calcutta by rail. The towns are surrounded by villages in three of its sides and are basically small urban conglomerates, and are only towns because of the jute mills. Since both the towns are identical in their class composition and nature, hence we shall discuss the politics of mobilisation of the jute workers by the CPI(M) together after discussing the nature of the towns and the workers in this towns separately.

Bauria

Bauria is a small town with a predominantly working class population. It is predominantly an industrial town surrounded by villages which came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century and grew as a jute mill town in the twentieth century. There are four mills in the town; two jute mills, one cotton mill and a cable factory which was earlier a jute mill. The whole of Bauria area belonged to the Fort Gloster Company in the pre-independence era and the jute mills were under the management of this company. One of the jute mills is called the Fort Gloster Company commonly known as the new mill and the other is known as the north mill. The town falls under the Uluberia north legislative assembly constituency and the Uluberia parliamentary constituency. The town is basically a working class town. The growth of the middle class in this town is significantly low because of several reasons. Before coming to the BCMU and trade union politics in this area along with the mills in Chengail, let us have a look at the workforce in these two mills in Bauria.

Fort Gloster (New Mill)

The total working complement in the Fort Gloster Company as on 5.5.1971 was 7371. According to the 1984 industrywide agreement, the number of workmen to be made permanent was 6634 and the number of workmen to be made special budlies was 1474. The total complement in 1997 was 55 hundred out of which less than 35 hundred were permanent and less than 17 hundred were special budlies. The number of casual labour was around 7 hundred in

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1 See, BCMU, Memorandum of Settlement in Industry of 9.4.1984, pp. 18-20.
1996. The figures mentioned above indicates two facts. Firstly, it indicates that the total complement in the mill had declined over the years particularly after 1984. Secondly, it indicates that the mill management had not implemented the agreement of 1984 on the ratio of permanent workers and budlie workers. The decline in the total complement of workers can be attributed to the process of retrenchment which was carried on in the industry in general under various pleas even after the Left Front Government assumed office in 1977. The gross violation of the agreement of 1984, particularly regarding the working complement has taken place in the industry due to which the percentage of permanent and budlie workers is not 90 to 20 per cent. The mill management had also violated the contract regarding abolition of casual and contract labour. According to a trade union leader of this mill, 4 to 5 thousand workers are recruited every year. This had been the trend since the last four to five years.

Enquiries and interviews in the jute mill area revealed that though the workforce from Delta and Phuleswar in Howrah district were from Bengal but in this mill, the majority of the workers were migrant workers from upcountry (Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. Bengali workers in the second half of the nineties constituted 45 per cent of the total workforce and out of this, most of the workers were local Bengali labour and only a small proportion came from a relatively far away places like Dum Dum, Kolaghat, Tamluk, Midnapore, etc. Most of the workers in the mill were uneducated and illiterate, though enquiries revealed that from the late 1980s, many educated youths, even graduates have entered the mill as unskilled workers.

So far as wages are concerned, workers do not face any problem. The mill management had accepted all the decisions of the wage board in the industry and also honoured the various tripartite settlements, particularly concerning wages and other emoluments. Salary is paid regularly every fortnight. Union leaders interviewed reported that the daily rated workmen under the non-productive category receives Rs.110/- per month and production related workmen (piece rated) receives Rs.112/- per day for 26 days. The total minimum wage comes approximately to Rs.3065/- including basic wages and D.A. for 26 days. This was the minimum wage when the interview was taken in October 1996. The wages of the workers in the period 1977 to 1992 was the same as discussed earlier in Chapter II since the mill had accepted the wage agreements which

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2 This was informed by Mr. Chandrama, NUJW leader and a worker in the mill (Interview dated 28.10.1996).
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
were signed by the IJMA with unions in the presence of the representatives of the Government.

According to an INTUC leader Chandrama who is working in this mill since the last 26 years:

Recommendations of the wage board etc. are obeyed by the mill management including Provident Fund, Gratuity, E.S.I. and other emoluments. This is not the case of other mills.¹

This claim of the union leader was confirmed by some workers during formal and informal interviews. Three workers interviewed together in the area surrounding the mill reported:

The working condition in this mill is perfectly all right. As far as payment etc. is concerned, there is no problem at all. Payment is made every fortnight and there is no deduction from payment at all. There is no irregularity in Provident Fund payments etc. This mill, therefore, is running perfectly though there are problems in this regard in other mills.⁶

The same view was expressed by other workers who were interviewed during this period. It is, therefore, a mill which like many other mills in the industry do not have incidence of cut in payment, irregularities in Provident Fund and ESI payments etc. The mill is owned by the Bangur Company and according to Chandrama, the Union leader, it is running under profit.

The workload of the workers to some extent had increased since the period of emergency. We have seen earlier that some workers were retrenched even after the Left Front Government came into existence. Though Chandrama reported that around 4 to 5 hundred workers are recruited every year but recruitment of workers may decrease in years to come. He accepted that though there is a persistent demand from the INTUC against retrenchment, some workers had got retrenched because of remodelling and modernisation. He accepted that “some workers who were affected by modernisation were shifted” and asserted that “we have demanded throughout that the workload must not be increased”. This author found that the workload in the mill for a worker is more or less the same as in the case of the industry. The machine in the mills operate for 24 hours without break and therefore, there are three shifts for the workers. The morning shift (A shift) begins from 6 A.M. and continue till 5 P.M. with a long intermission of 3 hours between 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. when the workers of the B shift take over and come for rest from 2 P.M. to 5 P.M. The B shift continues till 10 o’clock in the night. Thus, the actual working hour of an individual worker (including the interval of three hours) in the A and B shifts runs for 11 hours in total. The workload of the worker is also more than this and can be calculated from the fact that the workers had to operate two looms at the same time, which is a source of resentment among the workers

¹ Ibid.
⁶ Interview with two workers in the mill gate (Interview dated 16.11.1996).
throughout the industry. The workload is heavy. This is what is also claimed by the Central trade
unions operating in the industry.

North Mill

The other mill in Bauria is commonly known as the North mill. The mill along with the
new mill was owned by the Fort Glister Company, then it was transferred to the Bangur brothers.
One of the Bangur brothers sold the mill to the Bajorias, namely Arun Lal Bajoria, who is a late
entrant to the ownership in the jute industry. The Bajorias were known to be traders in raw jute
and jute goods for a long time; it was only later that the Bajorias owned some mills in the industry,
one of them being the north mill. This phenomenon of jute traders entering into the manufacturing
business is not something uncommon in the industry. Almost all the present Indian owners of the
jute mills were traders in the beginning. This process has continued even today. Many of the
promoters of the jute mills are and were pure traders in raw jute and jute products.

The composition of the workers in the jute mill is almost similar to the composition of the
new mill. This author was told by some workers when interviewed informally that there were
around 8,000 workers working in the jute mills. The exact number of workers in the mills would
be something lesser than that. They work in three shifts. It appeared that more local labour
(Bengali labour) is employed in this mill than that of the new mill. The workers mostly come from
Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The wage paid to the worker is
similar to the new mill. The workers are paid fortnightly.

Regarding the question of workload, two of the workers interviewed in the mill
complained:

The policy of the management is to make us work more and more and exploit us
more and more. This is what they do but still claims that the mill is running
under loss. The management had increased the workload manifold. They have
decreased the number of workers manifold in the mill affecting adversely the
man and machine ratio. One worker is operating two machines/looms at a time.
This is too difficult a job for a worker but we have nothing to do since we are
poor people and our family depend on the running of the mill.

Another worker of the mill interviewed said:

Generally it is said that during the emergency there was strong repression from
the millowners on the workers; today we find that the millowners are putting

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7 This information was given by workers interviewed informally in the mill gate. (Interview
8 This information was given by workers interviewed informally on 16.11.1996.
9 Interviewed with workers dated 16.11.1996.
more repression on the workers and have increased the workload to unprecedented level.\(^{10}\)

This statement of the worker on the repression in the mill may be an exaggeration but it suggests that the workload of the worker remains quite high. Other workers interviewed suggested the existence of same level of workload inside the mill. The existence of a heavy workload in the mill can be explained by the existence of the type of owners and management in the mill, though it is a common phenomenon in the industry. The Bajorias are purely traders and have the mentality of the trading community to earn as much as profit possible at a short period of time. This unprofessional attitude of the mill owners and the mill management is responsible for the growth of workload of the worker in this mill.

Chengail

Chengail is a small town in the district of Howrah with a predominant working class population. The town is located very near to Bauria and in its social composition, it is very similar to Bauria. It is basically a jute mill town dominated by the workforce of this mill. For various reasons, the growth of middle class in this entire town has been very limited. The town falls under the Uluberia parliamentary constituency. The town came into prominence in the early decades of this century when three jute mills grew in this area. The most important feature of this jute mill was that one of the jute mills, the Ludlow mill, which was established in 1922, was under American capital. It is a predominantly jute mill town and there are three jute mills - the Premchand Jute Mill also locally known as the Rajar Mill, the Ludlow mill and the Kanoria jute mill. Out of the three, Ludlow mill is the biggest in the area. Let us have a glance at the workforce in this area, working in the mills.

Kanoria Jute Mill

According to a trade union leader who was interviewed in October 1996, the daily requirement of Kanoria jute mill is 3041 workers. The mill runs for 6 days in three shifts in a week. According to available data the total working complement as on 5.5.1971 was 2,539 and as per the settlement of 1984, the number of workmen is to be made permanent were 2,285 and number of workmen to be made special budlies were 508.\(^{11}\) Most of the workers are from the villages surrounding the mills and some were reported to be outsiders. According to a few workers interviewed near the mill compound that only around 10-15 per cent of the workers come from

\(^{10}\) Interview with a worker (Interview dated 17.11.1996).
outside the State, Bihar and upcountry. Most of the workers from outside the State live in quarters. Most of the local labourers employed are landless labourers and poor peasants. The number of women workers are only few and they are concentrated in one or two departments of the mill. According to the workers interviewed, around 40 per cent of the mill workers are permanent workers and rest constitute budlie workers and contract labour. The budlie workers come regularly to the mill counter to enquire about work. This ratio of permanent and budlie workers reported does not tally with the figures mentioned above. This is simply because the successive mill owners of the Kanoria Jute Mill have violated the various agreements reached with union leaders and the Government.

The mill in recent years have come into the hands of promoters, those who do not manage it professionally, but are traders, those who want to earn as much profit as possible in the short run and then run away. In the recent years the mill had faced a series of long closures causing hardship to the workers. It was owned originally by Mafatlal. After Mafatlal left in 1980-81, the Kanoria’s came in. In 1987, the mill faced lockout. After Kanoria’s it was in the year 1991 that Pasani came in.

The minimum wage in the jute mill in 1991 was Rs. 1,275.50 (consolidated) monthly. In 1996, the daily wage varied between Rs. 108/- and Rs. 110/-. The workload in the mill was reported to be heavy as in the case of other jute mills in the State. But what the workers has suffered most in the recent past is the hardship arising from lockout or closure of the mill. Enquiries revealed that during closure of mills, some workers who were old and have not found work in other places committed suicide. Apart from the heavy workload in the mill, the mill workers had suffered most due to lockouts since the 1980s. The mill was under closure due to lockout in the year 1983 which affected 5,500 workers. It had faced lockouts since then more frequently which had caused immense hardship to the workers.

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12 Interview with Sheikh Najibur Rehman, Leader Shramik Sangram Union and a mill worker. The interview was taken on 29.10.1996. This information was also received from workers interviewed near the mill gate on 29.10.1996.
13 Ibid.
14 This was found by R. Sen. See, R. Sen, “Jute Industry”, in S. Davala (ed.), Employment and Unionisation in Indian Industry, p.55.
15 Interview with Sheikh Najibur Rehman, n.l2.
16 Government of West Bengal, Department of Labour, Labour in West Bengal 1983, pp. 4-5.
Ludlow Jute Mill

The Ludlow mill is the biggest of all the three jute mills in Chengail, in terms of the number of labour it employed. The mill came into being in 1922 under American capital and in the later years after independence it was owned by the Kanoria's. Gopal Biswas, a CITU leader and a worker in this mill informed us that in 1996 there were around 6,500 workers in the mill and the daily working complement was around 4,300. Available Government and Union documents reveal that the working complement as on 5.5.1971 was 5,023 out of which the number of workmen to be made special budlies was 1,005.\(^\text{17}\) Apart from this, the mill employed contract and voucher labour. The composition of the labour force was more or less the same as in Kanoria though it was informed that workers from outside constitute a good section of the total working complement. There are quarters which board workers from outside the State. The Ludlow mill is regarded as the best mill in the entire area and the workers of this mill had suffered less from lockouts and closures than the two other mills in this region. The mill had to a greater extent honoured the industrywise tripartite agreements.

The Premchand Jute Mill

The Premchand Jute Mill, though one of the oldest in West Bengal, it had suffered most from closures and lockouts in the entire region. The mill was under closure from 6.4.1977 for a long time till the late eighties. It is commonly known as the Rajar Mill in the area.\(^\text{18}\) According to one worker interviewed, the mill was owned for some time by the Bajoria's and during the time of the interview it was under lease. The mill was once a large one, though in 1977 it employed only around 2,000 workers, now only a part of it is functioning. The number of permanent workers in the mill is much lesser, than in other mills, and the mill workers are one of the lowest paid in the industry. In 1991 the monthly wage of a jute mill worker was Rs.910/ consolidated.\(^\text{19}\) It was learnt in 1996 that the daily wage of a jute mill worker was only Rs.40/-.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\) Government of West Bengal, n.16.  
\(^{19}\) This was found by R. Seen. See R. Sen, n.14.  
\(^{20}\) This was told to the author by a worker interviewed in the mill gate (Interview dated 29.10.1996).
Before coming to a discussion of the decline in support of the CITU and its causes in details, let us have a look at the influence of the CPI(M) in this area and the BCMU among the jute mill workers of this area. Trade union movement in this area began around 1928-29 and from then the workers had gallantly struggled against oppression. The first strike in this area was reported in 1898 when the first strike in the Bauria Cotton Mill took place. There was a movement in 1905 against the retrenchment of some workers. But movement of a significant scale began in 1928-29. Hartals were staged which continued for six months.24

It is argued that there is no parallel to this movement in history. This was a period when Comrade Muzaffer Ahmed, Philips Spratt and Bradley, the later two were members of the British Communist Party, came to India to organise the working class in this area. Bankim Mukherjee came later. The Communists were active in the jute mill areas in the early 1950s. The Chairman of the IJMA while presenting the annual report of the IJMA for the year 1949 reported in 1950:

> A constitutional approach to settle labour problems did not however seem to be appreciated by certain unions, particularly by the followers and supporters of the Communist Party. The later with the object of dislocating the industry, took advantage of certain sectional grievances in mills and by systematic propaganda succeeded in bringing about considerable dislocation in the normal working of several mills. Throughout the year there has been a spate of pamphlets castigating employers, governments and non-communist unions, and workers were being incited to resort to violence and lawlessness.

It further added:

> Mostly at the instigation of the Communist Party, organised violence continued to be practised. There were during the year, a number of instances of noisy demonstrations, assaults on members of the supervisory staff and the surrounding of managers.

Commenting on labour propaganda, the Chairman said:

> The year 1949 was characterised by the activities of the followers and supporters of the Communist Party. The latter with the object of dislocating the jute industry carried on systematic propaganda through leaflets and posters against the government and employers, often succeeding in bringing about serious industrial disturbances. Realising the deteriorating labour situation, the Government drive against the Party was intensified.25

This report of the IJMA Chairman is for the whole of the jute mill area, but from other accounts one can come to the point that the Communists were active in the area of Bauria and Chengail, which fall under the Uluberia parliamentary constituency and the AITUC was active in the jute

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24 This was learnt from P. Basu, leader of the Uluberia Chatkal Mazdoor Union (Interview dated 28.01.1997).
25 IJMA, Annual report presented by the Chairman for the year 1949, p.
mill areas and was trying to organise the workers, who it seems were mainly under the influence of
the INTUC. The INTUC was the dominant union in the area, the Congress was the dominant
political party. It was only in the second general elections the Communists won both the
legislative assembly and the parliamentary seats. This dominance of the leftists both in the trade
union front and the party front had continued till then, though since the second half of the 1980s, it
had suffered a decline in its support base. A former BCMU leader of this area said:

Workers in general are left-minded that is the reason why ultra-leftists
are enjoying popularity now. This is a symbol of political consciousness and not
backwardness. They are left because it is a Bengali-dominated area and also
because it is a left-dominated area in general. The workers are in the forefront of
all social works. Since 1952 the left forces had won the elections. The Congress
had never won in one legislative assembly seat. The winning of the Congress
candidate is an accident not the rule.26

The dominance of the left forces and particularly the CPI(M) continued in the 1970s and also in the
1980s. During the parliamentary elections of 1989, the CPI(M) candidate Mr. Hanan Mollah was
able to secure 3,93,735 votes around 52 thousand more votes than the Congress (I) candidate.27 In
almost all the jute mill areas of the State; Barrackpore, Dum Dum, Howrah, Uluberia, Serampore,
Hooghly, the CPI(M) candidates were able to win. This tells amply about the dominance of the
CPI(M) in the predominantly working class areas of the state including Bauria and Chengail. In this
elections the Party was successful in pushing back the Congress (I) to its 1980 position. “The seats
lost to the Congress (I) in 1984 in the industrial belts have been restored...”. This is what was
reported by the Party organ People’s Democracy. The CPI(M) State Committee which reviewed
the election results felt:

It can be generally said that the Left Front got the vote of vast sections
of agricultural workers and poor peasants. The vote of the working class and of
unorganised workers went to the Left Front to a greater extent than before.

On the Hindi-speaking voters, it said:

Though there is a small increase in the vote of the Hindi-speaking
people in favour of the Left Front, this section of the population generally voted
against the Left Front.28

What was surprising was in the elections of 1989 in the Uluberia constituency, a party representing
the Muslims contested and was able to secure 5,427 votes.29 This is because Bauria and Chengail

26 Interview with the former BCMU leader, who now is a leader of the UCMU (Interview
dated 28.01.1997).
27 “State Committee Reviews Election Results”, People’s Democracy, February 11, 1990.
28 Ibid.
areas are surrounded by villages, which comprises sizeable Muslim population and some villages are purely Muslim dominated. A section of this Muslims had gone in favour of organisations of that kind. And it was also found that a section of the Muslim workers from the villages in the jute mills vote for this organisation.

Earlier it has been suggested that the workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh that is Hindi-speaking people vote for the Congress and not for the CPI(M) and the Left Front. It was found that there are two categories of workers among the Hindi speaking workers. A group of workers those who side with the CITU/BCMU for economic demands but do not closely align themselves with the CPI(M). During elections they vote for the Congress candidates. The second group was found to be active members or under the influence of the NUJW/INTUC, and also vote for the Congress. It must be remembered that these workers are semi-proletariat in the sense that they continue to have link with their villages, some of them even possess pieces of land in the villages and they continue to get a influenced by the politics of their State in which the Congress dominates and hence vote for the Congress during elections. The second category of the workers are more in number than the first.

According to Sultan Singh, an important BCMU leader of this area:

We try to involve workers in various movements around their grievances on issues like wages, bonus, provident fund, gratuity, ESI, against retrenchment, workload, against Julum (repression). Those who are militant workers they are drawn into the union and they form the main cadre. Some of them are also drawn into the Party first as A.G., then through involvement as C.M. and then as Primary member, overall through democratic movements particularly economic struggles we prepare our workers and party members.30

Department Committees are grassroots level committees for mobilisation. It was informed that department committees are formed regularly and the meetings are held frequently, this helps in enhancing consciousness of the workers. For a movement the practice is that departmental committee meetings are held and views are taken. Apart from this Basti Committee meetings, para meetings, street cornering, mass meetings and gate meetings are held to inform workers about day-to-day affairs of the unions and other issues. Local Committee Conferences are held annually to form “the executive committee”31

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid. Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview dated 27.01.1997).
31 Ibid.
Referring to mobilisation of workers a former BCMU leader of this area stressed the importance of the department committees and shift committees. To him.

Conferences are held regularly, gate meetings are held regularly. The committees are functioning regularly whether it is local committees or committees of the lowest level. This is the process, though everything is not perfect.

On the style of functioning he commented:

The functioning is more or less democratic if not totally. There is trade union bureaucracy, though there is democracy to a considerable extent. There are many works in which leaders do not function democratically, though a single person do not take decision but it is taken by most of the members of the executive.32

Membership drive is always done annually, not monthly. Though special membership drives are also taken. Membership fees are mostly collected annually and not monthly. There are also instances when funds are collected during movements, particularly bonus movement and membership is also given during movements.33

Now coming to the question what are the problems which are involved in mobilising the workers at the local and plant level at Bauria. The problems to be discussed would involve both trade union mobilisation and mobilisation for the party particularly electoral mobilisation. A large section of the workers are from the Hindi belt Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, it becomes difficult to mobilise them because their semi-proletariat nature affects and partially determines their consciousness. The BCMU leader, Sultan Singh admitted:

Bihari and workers from outside the State mostly get consciousness from outside from their home State. They have their own traditions, political consciousness etc. determined earlier. They are with us in economic demands but when they go back, they develop the same consciousness. The work of developing their consciousness through day to day work had not been taken up or are not being done properly by our leaders.34

How does the BCMU mobilises support for the Party during elections? It was stated that:

During elections Party units in the mills mobilise the workers. These units through basti committees, through their militant cadres mobilise the workers. Issues which are used mostly are national and state level issues. These issues are propagated through leaflets, posters, booklets, etc.35

Thus, it is the party units in the mills which mobilises support for the CPI(M) and Left Front during elections and issues around which it mobilises are national and state level issues. Let us examine the issues which were used for the purpose of mobilisation during the elections between

32 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 17.11.1996).
33 Ibid.
34 Interview with Sultan Singh, n.30.
1977 and 1992. In 1977 the BCMU party unit in the area mobilised on the issues of victory to democratic forces and defeat of authoritarian forces since for it “democratic rights and liberties are necessary to carry on struggles for better living conditions, for socialism and ending of capitalism”.

Apart from this, the terror in West Bengal’s industrial areas which was unprecedented and the crushing burdens during the emergency - mass slaughter of jobs, closures, denial of bonus, impounding of DA became issues and the result was that in the area the Left Front candidates were able to secure comfortable victories. Throughout the industrial areas in West Bengal, the Left Front won almost all seats. More than 50 leaders of the CITU were elected to the legislative assembly, some of them were members of the working committee and General Council of the CITU. In subsequent elections, particularly in the State legislative assembly elections, the records of the Left Front Government, particularly its record in the labour front were highlighted in street corner meetings and gate meetings which were routinely held in the evenings before the factories. One of the major campaigns had been the “anti-people and anti-democratic nature of the Congress(I) party and the Central Government”. The latter has been referred to in the press as anti-Congressism”.

The March 1987 assembly elections were being held at a time when the Left Front has completed 10 years of office and hence apart from “anti-Congressism”, in street corner and gate meetings, the CPI(M) effectively tried to propagate the pro-people development work carried under the Left Front in rural development, small scale and cottage industries, education, etc. and contrasted this with the conditions prevailing in the Congress(I)-ruled States. This election saw one new issue. The CPI(M) took a firm stand against communal and secessionist forces. This was because communalism had emerged as a significant phenomenon by this time and the forces such as the BJP was mobilising masses on communal lines. Taking of an anti-communal stand was necessary because a large section of the workers, particularly local work force are Muslims in Bauria and communal parties both Hindu as well as Muslim were organising workers and masses along communal lines in this area. In some of the jute mill towns in the industry, CPI(M) was threatened to a less degree by the BJP. An organisation of the Muslims was quite active in the area in this period. This is revealed from the fact that the organisation contested the Uluberia

35 Ibid.
36 See, the issues of the working class immediately before and after the elections.
37 People's Democracy, n.d.
38 See the issues of People's Democracy, during and after the elections.
parliamentary constituency and was able to secure 5,427 votes. The main slogan in that elections of the CPI(M) were four: "Defeat the Congress(I)", "Isolate the communal forces", "Ensure victory to Left and secular forces" and "Strengthen the CPI(M) and the Left in Parliament. The help of year long "oust Rajiv campaign" was taken which created a favourable election atmosphere and the Congress(I) was even blamed for the spurt of communal violence in the country. The communal danger and the anti-communal issues dominated the CPI(M)’s election campaign in this area in the subsequent elections of 1991 and 1992.\textsuperscript{39} This campaign was made by the CPI(M) because the CPI(M) felt that its social base actual or potential in this area among the mill workers was declining. Sultan Singh, the BCMU leader admitted:

Some workers are members of the BJP and BSP. Earlier, chatkal (jute) workers were mostly \textit{Lal Jhanda} and \textit{Tiranga Jhanda}. Religious and caste consciousness had spread among the workers. The main danger now comes from the organisations like BJP and BSP in this area. This is because of our failure, we have failed to convince the workers. They, the BJP, BSP and others have consolidated themselves.\textsuperscript{40}

**Decline in support base of the BCMU and CPI(M)**

Now coming to the question why there has been a decline in the support base of the BCMU, in particular and CPI(M) in general among the workers in these jute mills. Let us first try to answer the question, why decline in support for the BCMU? Does the answer lie in the decline in militancy on the part of BCMU, in general? The BCMU is an organisation which mostly tries to organise the working class in the industry throughout the State along the grievances of the workers and for that purpose the BCMU had not launched separate movements but had mainly tried to redress the grievances through industrywise general strikes which are launched by the unions in the industry jointly. The BCMU being the leading organisation in the industry in its strength and influence, it has taken the lead in organising the movements. Whether the BCMU had become less militant particularly from the second half of the 1980s because of which the support base of the organisation had declined? The leaders of the BCMU and CPI(M) are viewed in the contrary.

Hanan Mollah, the Member of Parliament from this region pointed out:

The workers in this region all along with the jute workers throughout have launched movements first for ordinances and then for implementation of this ordinances. Till 1977 in the movement against millowners the workers had to take the barbaric attacks from the government, they were lathi charges against the workers. The millowners used to hire goondas who hurled bombs on the workers. During the movement, the Labour Commissioner also sided with the

\textsuperscript{39.} \textit{People’s Democracy}, n.d.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview dated 27.01.1997).
millowners. NUJW also sided with the millowners. For this reason, the movement was more militant. There was mobilisation and more mobilisation followed.\textsuperscript{41}

He further argued:

The attitude of the Government after 1977 had changed. The Government had said that in the case of legitimate demands the police will not intervene. This had changed the nature of the movement altogether. As a result, inside attacks have stopped altogether from goons, the INTUC had also become militant and hence the necessity of gherao etc. had declined. Thus, the objective reality has changed which have changed the course of the movement.\textsuperscript{42}

This was a more general observation by a party leader of this area though he asserted that it was also the case in the mill areas of this region. A former BCMU leader argued:

There has been no agreement in the mills without militant struggles, without a prolonged general strike except in 1972 and 1988. Movements are launched together with other unions almost everywhere. All the trade unions, even today use strikes as a method to protest against the millowners. There were police repressions earlier, now it is not the case ... \textsuperscript{43}

Gopal Biswas, another leader of the BCMU and a prominent party member reported:

During the Congress regime if there was any movement, there was repression by the police. Struggles are being launched at least ten times more but repression today is less. The Police interferes only if there is a law and order problem. Most of the workers those who have participated in the movement during the Congress period they are now retired. These young generation of workers they have not seen the repression of that times.... \textsuperscript{44}

Sultan Singh also expressed the same feeling:

Government used to use all weapons to repress trade union and democratic movements. Now the government does not use them and helps the workers. New generation of workers feels that trade union militancy had declined. The path of struggle to a lot of extent has changed.\textsuperscript{45}

Thus, in essence the BCMU leadership denies the absence of movement and militant struggle in the industry in general and the mills in this region in particular. Instead there is an admission by the leadership that it had become difficult to coerce the owners of the mill, hence a much cautious attitude is adopted by the BCMU. Even they had realised the limitations of trade union action. A former BCMU leader of this region admitted:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Interview with Hanan Mollah, Parliamentarian and prominent CPI(M) leader of Howrah region (Interview dated 18.11.1996).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Interview with former BCMU leader who is now a leader of the UCMU (Interview dated 17.11.1996)
\item \textsuperscript{44} Interview with Gopal Biswas, prominent BCMU and CPI(M) leader of Howrah region (Interview dated 18.11.1996)
\item \textsuperscript{45} Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview dated 27.01.1997).
\end{itemize}
Our forerunners were much better. We are finding it difficult to run trade unions. Now we are not in the same position as our predecessors were earlier. Earlier we were in a position to enhance wages by declaring strike in one department of the mill now we are finding it difficult to pressurise through industrywide strikes.\textsuperscript{46}

The same view was also echoed by Sultan Singh:

Earlier workers used to place their charter of demands. Now since there is a crisis, the capitalists are also submitting their charter of demands before the Unions and the workers. This is something very new. This was not the case earlier. Trade Unions to some extent are therefore accepting the demands of the mills and that is why the feeling among a section of the workers that union leaders had become agents.\textsuperscript{47}

This confession of a veteran trade union leader indicates to one particular phenomenon. That is the difficulty which the Union finds in pressurising the millowners to accept their demands. As we have seen elsewhere that this difficulty arises out of the fact that the millowners at present had used a counter pressure of lockout and closure to threaten the workers. This, the millowners had done in West Bengal very successfully. In this region, Bauria and Chengail, a number of mills are being closed. The Bauria Cotton Mill, one of the oldest in the country is lying closed since long, the Prem Chand Jute Mill Company had suffered most due to closure and now it operates only with a labour force of about 400. The Kanoria Jute Mill Company had faced a series of long closures in the past two decades. Hence, the problems which unions particularly the BCMU had faced is the problem of security of employment of its workers. A threat of strikes and other forms of protests by the Unions have invited the threat of closure and lockout by the employers.

Hence, so far as the question of militancy is concerned, the BCMU have led militant movements in the mills of this region in the form of general strikes in the industry during this period. Strikes took place in the mills along with the industry in 1979, which continued for 50 days, then in 1984 which continued for 84 days and then in 1992 which continued again for 50 days. Apart from this general and long battles, one day token strikes had taken place a number of times in this region in the jute mills which were led by the BCMU. The absence of police repression and counter violence from the workers do not suggest that there was no militancy in the jute mills in this region.

What therefore else can be the reason for the decline in support for the BCMU among the jute workers in this region. The answer has to be found in the growth of labour aristocracy, the

\textsuperscript{46} Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 17.11.1996).
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview dated 27.01.1997).
failure of the leadership of the BCMU to raise the political consciousness of the workers which it mobilises, organisational weaknesses, etc. This will be discussed in the next section in brief.

III

PROBLEMS IN MOBILISATION

Labour Aristocracy in Chengail and Bauria

We have seen in our third chapter that “labour aristocracy” prevails in the jute industry. These labour aristocrats are a part of all the unions functioning in the industry and are in the leadership of some of the unions at the plant level including the BCMU. To the question whether labour aristocrats exists in the Bauria-Chengail region where five jute mills are located? Whether labour aristocrats forms a part of the BCMU? The answer to both the questions is ‘Yes’ and it is this phenomenon which is primarily responsible for the decline in the support of the BCMU and the CPI(M) in this region. This author arrived at this conclusion because of two reasons. First, because it was admitted by the CPI(M) and trade union leaders interviewed and secondly because this had been a source of internal conflicts within the BCMU since the second half of the 1980s which resulted in the split of the BCMU and the birth of Uluberia Chatkal Mazdoor Union, affiliated to the Marxist Communist Party of India. Further split in the BCMU took place later and was responsible for the growth of ultra-leftism in this area, particularly in one jute mill, namely Kanoria.

Prominent BCMU leaders of this area those who are also active in the party when interviewed accepted the existence of the labour aristocrats in the BCMU. To quote Gopal Biswas again:

A section of the CITU leaders are corrupt. They try to take advantage. They work less, keep good relations with the management for their own benefits. The maliks also try to keep them in their own hands and thus provide them benefits. 48

This definitely is a general comment on the condition of the labour aristocrats in the entire industry, but this observation of Biswas is based on his observations in the area. He added that “we are fighting against them”. This “fighting against them” indicates to the prevalence of it, however small it may be in number. Another important BCMU leader Sultan Singh also accepted the existence of the same in the region. A former leader of the BCMU had stated:

Some BCMU leaders are also under the influence of labour aristocracy.... 49

48 Interview with Gopal Biswas, prominent BCMU and CPI(M) leader of Howrah region (Interview dated 18.11.1996).
49 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 17.11.1996).
But he pointed to one other fact that the growth of labour aristocracy in this entire region is lesser than in other regions. This may be true because charges of bribe and corruption against the BCMU leaders were less by the workers interviewed.

It was also learnt that the corruption of some of the leaders and the close alignment of some had become a source of conflict inside the BCMU organisations in this region. It all began in the mid-1980s when some leaders raised their voice on the behaviour of some of shop floor level leader of the BCMU. The source of conflict were many; the correct relationship of the party with the BCMU, the strategy to be adopted by the union, etc. Some local level shop floor level leaders of the BCMU in this region were charged by others as Dalal’s those who align closely with the mill management. The differences in the BCMU continued till the late 1980s when many leaders left the BCMU and some were expelled and the Uluberia Chatkal Mazdoor Union was formed by the break-away group. This weakened the BCMU and the Party significantly. This old and mature leadership like Panchu Basu, Satyen Das, R. Bhattacharjee who were old guards either left or were expelled for anti-party activities.

Now comes the question in what form do labour aristocracy exists in the BCMU leadership? It takes the form of procurement of some concessions from the mill management. It takes the form of some passes for the shop floor level leader, less work load, temporary or permanent jobs for friends and relatives of the leader, etc. It does not take the form of economic benefits as in the case of Europe. Hence labour aristocracy prevails in the jute mills of this region and some of those labour aristocrats are shop floor level leaders of the BCMU. And these labour aristocrats are referred to as ‘Dalals’ of the management, etc., by the critiques of the BCMU and the ultra-leftists. A leader of the Shramik Sangram Union, an ultra-left organisation, which came into being in 1991, claimed: “All the unions in the industry just follow the path of the management.”

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50 This information was gathered by the author from interviews with BCMU leaders of this region including those expelled from the BCMU.
51 Interview with Kalyan Ghosh, prominent activists of the National Jute Shramik Union (Interview dated 10.11.1996).
Another leader of the SSU who was expelled from the organisation later and a worker in the Kanoria jute mill charged: "The CITU collaborates with the mill management. The leaders are Dalals."

Apart from the charges of the opponents particularly the ultra-leftists, the author found that a good section of the worker had developed a general impression that the leaders of the various unions are pure Dalals of the mill management. Hence aristocracy of labour exists in the BCMU though at times it is the product of the conditions which prevail in the state, as such and at times it is because of the pressure and threat from the mill owners that labour leaders accept the unjust demands from the mill managements. It is also due to the cautious policy of the CPI(M) that employment of the workers must be protected first and then demands be raised.

**BCMU and alienation of the workers**

The party and the BCMU since have a strong presence in the entire area thus they have developed strong organisational structures. But the question is whether the organisation and the leadership have kept closer contact with the workers of this region or not? A closer examination would reveal that since the second half of the 1980s there has been the growth of alienation of the leaders and organisation from the workers. This alienation has taken place despite the fact that most of the leaders of the BCMU and also of the party are mill workers themselves. A former BCMU leader of this area reported:

> Alienation had started from 1987 onwards, though the alienation is not total, but in some spots.

Almost similar views were expressed by the present level BCMU leadership including Sultan Singh and Gopal Biswas. What has been the cause of this alienation? To this question the former BCMU leader replied:

> Trade union leaders have found it difficult to satisfy the interest of the workers.

This can only be one of the reasons for this alienation. The other reason is to be found in labour aristocracy, the problem which was discussed earlier. Corrupt leaders and labour aristocrats will have very little reason to closely align themselves with the general workers. On the earlier point trade union leaders have found it difficult to satisfy the interests of the workers. Sultan Singh admitted:

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52 Interview with Sheikh Najibur Rehman, leader Shramik Sangram Union and a mill worker (Interview dated 29.10.1996).

53 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 17.11.1996).
We are finding it difficult to fulfil all the demands of the workers. We are finding it difficult to stop retrenchments. Units which are lying closed, we are finding it difficult to open despite all our efforts. We are finding it difficult to convince the workers that in a capitalist society retrenchment will take place ... the millowners are submitting their charter of demands and in many cases we accept their demands ... All this are responsible for the running away of workers from our fold. 

It had definitely become difficult for the BCMU and other unions to satisfy all the demands of the workers. Given the condition that the millowners are using weapons like lockouts and closures very frequently in order to threaten the workers and their unions, bargaining with the millowners even on day to day problems have become difficult. Hence, unions find much more difficulty in meeting the interests of the workers, leading to a gulf between workers and BCMU leaders. The satisfaction of the demands of the budlie workers had become a much more difficult problem for the BCMU leaders. The budlie workers exist in order to take the place of permanent workers during certain seasons. Budlies press for job even during normal times, thus they demand permanency or security in employment. It had become difficult for the BCMU leadership to satisfy this demand firstly because regular jobs cannot be provided to them by the millowners because of the nature of employment of budlies and secondly, because the millowners and management have grossly violated the industrywide agreements on the question of providing work to budlies. The BCMU and other unions have failed to pressurise the millowners on this point. Hence, apart from the difficulty which the BCMU leadership had found to satisfy the day to day problems of the workers it had failed to solve the demands of the budlie workers who are the constant source of trouble.

One reason for the decline in support for the BCMU had been very little political work. It had been argued earlier that most of the issues on which the BCMU and the party mobilises are economic in nature. Very little political work is done by the union or the party in the area for raising the political consciousness of the workers. Sultan Singh accepted:

We have failed to convince the workers politically. It is only through economic struggles we try to teach them political struggles, about their conditions etc. This is a great failure on our part. 

On another point, he stated:

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54 Ibid.
55 Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview dated 27.01.1997).
56 Ibid.
Involvement of workers are less in political movements. They are more interested in their economic grievances ... We have failed to convince workers politically.  

Convincing the workers and raising the political consciousness of the workers had become difficult for the BCMU leadership since the mid 1980s also because of a number of reasons. The party has to take a stand of mobilising the working class and engaging in struggles at a time when the industrial climate in the State had deteriorated significantly and the owners of the capital, particularly the jute millowners had started using the offensive of closure and lockouts, throughout the State. The incidence of lockouts, closures and suspension of work had increased significantly in the entire State, the jute industry and the workers being most affected, it is in this situation the BCMU had found it difficult to protect employment of its workers. In this area of Chengail and Bauria, the Kanoria Jute Mill and the Prem Chand Jute Mill had been affected most by these developments. It is in this situation the BCMU and the party units had to accept some of the conditions imposed by the millowners. Sultan Singh admitted:

Capitalists are also submitting their charter of demands before the workers. This was not the case earlier. This is something new. Trade unions, including the BCMU had started accepting some of the demands of the millowners... We are finding it difficult to fulfil all the demands of the workers ... We are finding it difficult to stop retrenchment. We are finding it difficult to open the closed mills.

In this condition, it becomes difficult for the BCMU leadership to convince the workers who are mostly conscious about their economic demands. It becomes difficult to convince the workers about the industrial climate and compulsions. This to a considerable extent has eroded the credibility of the BCMU leadership among the workers. What about the political work of the BCMU and its leaders among Hindi speaking and other non-Bengal workers. The condition of the Hindi speaking workers looked more precarious. The former BCMU leader noted:

The movement here is mostly based on economic demands. Political developments are weak. No political training has been imported to the worker. There is no cultural mixing with Hindi-speaking workers. Hence Hindi-speaking workers do not come with us (the Left). Politically, there is an effort, but socially and culturally there is no effort. No attempt has been made to change feudal and cultural consciousness. Some Hindi-speaking workers those who come closer to us, culturally and socially, they return to their own places (State) and talk about our politics (Left politics). But these category of workers are only a few.

This fact was also accepted by Sultan Singh:

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 28.01.1997).
Bihari and workers from outside the State gets consciousness from outside; that
is their home State. Old traditions, political consciousness, etc. are determined
from earlier. For economic demands they are with us, but when they go back to
their home State they develop the same consciousness. The work of developing
their consciousness through day-to-day political work is not properly done by
our leaders.\textsuperscript{60}

Hanan Mollah, the CPI(M) Member of Parliament from the region pointed out to some definite
changes in this regard. He said:

Jute workers from outside; particularly Bihari workers for them \textit{Mang ke liya lal
zhanda and vote ke liya Tiranga zhanda}. Now the situation, however, has
changed, though not significantly, but to a lot of extent.\textsuperscript{61}

To the former BCMU leader:

Among Oriya workers 80 per cent are our supporters. Workers from Andhra are
mostly our supporters. But we have failed to penetrate among the Bihari and
workers from Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{62}

One of the reason why Hindi-speaking workers are out of the fold of the BCMU is definitely the
unsatisfactory nature of political work done by BCMU leaders but one thing must not be ignored
altogether, that the semi-proletariat nature of these workers have affected this political work to a
large extent. The workers come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where feudal obligations are very
strong. They come from the areas in which the Congress and other rightist parties are dominant.
Hence after coming they follow the ‘Sardars’ and because of this the Congress have got a foothold
here in this area.

Now coming to one another reason, organisational functioning and democracy. This
question has assumed importance because of the splits which the BCMU and the Party had faced in
this region. Despite the fact that BCMU leaders expressed views almost describing the
relationship of the Party and BCMU as perfect, and described organisational functioning as perfect
in the region, the author had come to the conclusion that relation between the Party and the BCMU
and inner functioning of the BCMU is only, far from perfect. The correct relationship between the
Party and BCMU had been a source of tension among the important leaders of the BCMU in this
region. Differences grew from the mid-1980s on the question of trade union democracy. Trade
Unions were considered by some leaders as “more or less autonomous body”. The Party members
within the BCMU claimed that the Party is above trade unions and the Party would formulate

\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Sultan Singh, prominent BCMU leader of the Howrah region (Interview
dated 27.01.1997).

\textsuperscript{61} Interview with Hanan Mollah, parliamentarian and prominent CPI(M) leader of this
region (Interview dated 18.11.1996).
decisions. It was argued by the former that the decision of the Party will be put forward in the executive committee of the BCMU and if the executive committee rejects it then the Party must accept the decision of the executive committee of the BCMU. This group argued that this attitude of the Party was to a large extent responsible for the functional defects on the party of BCMU. This difference resulted in internal conflicts was one of the reason among many others, which we have referred earlier for the split in the BCMU and the formation of a local organisation in Uluberia, namely Uluberia Chatkal Mazdoor Union. One of the important member of this breakaway group said: “We wanted trade union democracy and labour militancy.”

The BCMU leadership have accepted that this breaking away of the BCMU was one of the reasons for the decline in support of the BCMU. Sultan Singh argued:

Erosion in the support of the Party has started taking place. The left had started declining here.

To him the reasons are enormous. One of the reason is:

Many CITU leaders (old comrades) left the CITU. Many were expelled. Breakaway unions were formed and many of the leaders went for them. The Uluberia Chatkal Mazdoor Union was formed. This weakened the Party and the BCMU significantly.

Sultan Singh’s arguments are correct if looked at from one angle. But to analyse the main reason for the decline in support, one must look behind the split, the cause of the split and the cause seems to be much more important and deeper than the effects of the split in the BCMU. The impact of the split on the BCMU and the Party is very clear. It had led to an erosion of the support base of the BCMU and the Party in this area. The organisation had faced a decline in its membership and influence among the workers in this region. The greatest danger had come from the ultra-left in the recent years. The Sangrami Shramik Union came into existence in this region in the year 1991 surrounding the problems of the workers of Kanoria. The Kanoria Jute Mill, had seen sporadic lockouts, closures and suspension of work throughout the 1980s. A section of the leadership which came out of the BCMU in the second half of the 1980s organised militant and ultra-left movements in the jute mill of Kanoria. One of the main slogan of this ultraleftists was that all the trade unions operating in the jute mills, mainly the CITU had become Dalals of the management.

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62 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 28.01.1997).
63 Ibid.
64 Interview with Sultan Singh. Interview was taken on 27.01.1997.
and stressed the need for independent or autonomous movement. The ultraleft movement in this region had been an outcome of the problems and weaknesses of the BCMU in this region. And it is also due to the weakness of the BCMU and the Party, organisations had appeared which attempt to mobilise workers on caste and communal lines. This is even admitted by the leadership of the BCMU and party functionaries. Let us end our discussion by quoting from the interview of Sultan Singh:

It is because of our failure that caste and religious consciousness had increased in this area. Casteist and communal organisations are mobilising workers on caste and communal lines.  

CPI(M), Left Front Government and Workers in Bauria and Chengail

Before we end our discussion let us come to the question, how have the CPI(M) used the state level institutions which is available to it since 1977 for the purpose of mobilisation of the jute workers in this area? To put the question in another way, to what extent the state government headed by the CPI(M) have provided relief to labour in this area? Now one thing must be pointed out that the attitude of the government towards labour in this region is a part of the general approach to labour in West Bengal and jute labour. Hence in order to understand this one may look at the union leaders and workers perception of the government's approach. The former BCMU leader of this region answered when asked:

The Government in general is sympathetic but there are limitations. The limitation is that the Left Front Government cannot ask the millowners to do this or that it is a question of bargaining. The jute industry is a big industry and is controlled mostly by the Central Government and not by the State Government. In the acts of the Central Government there are several loopholes hence they take the advantage. Though the Left Front Government is there but still we take recourse to strikes, industrywide strikes for addressing the grievances of the workers.  

Another prominent leader Gopal Biswas pointed to one another aspect:

The West Bengal Government had given some concessions to the millowners for the survival of the industry. Several taxes had been relieved, the Government had decreased the sales tax on jute goods.  

All this the Left Front Government according to him had done keeping in view the crisis in the industry, the problems which the industry has been facing in recent times. This it had done for the workers in the farthest sense since the survival of the industry is must for generation of

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 28.01.1997).
employment for the workers. We have argued earlier in Chapter IV that the Left Front Government's approach to the problem of industrial revival and development stems out from the fact that the resurgence of the industry in the state have a direct relation to the problem of the workers. The former BCMU leader also pointed out to one another aspect of the government's policy.

There were police repressions earlier, now the police maintains neutrality. Police had lathi charged at certain cases, also fired but only when law and order problems arouse. It had done but not intentionally. 69

Gopal Biswas contended:

During Congress regime there was police repression, struggles are being launched now but there is no repression. Only when there is problem of law and order the Police intervenes. 70

The BCMU and CPI(M) leaders of this region felt that “the attitude of the Government towards workers movement has changed considerably”, the Government had said that, “in case of legitimate demands the police will not interfere” and this is what “had changed the nature of the movement”, this had taken place for the first time in India. The government, supports the workers during problems.” To Gopal Biswas “there is enough governmental pressure (on the management and millowners) and because of this pressure the strike of 1995 was settled in only 4 days.” 71

The INTUC leader Mr. Chandrama did not accept this claims by the BCMU and CPI(M) leaders. He felt that the CITU leaders do not have much say for the mills, obviously before the Government. He was critical about the Left Front Government’s policy on labour in general and jute mill labour in particular:

The Left Front had failed to pass any law on jute labour. The Central Government had done the most. The Centre had passed the laws relating to P.F., E.S.I., Bonus, Pension, etc. It (the State Government) had imposed professional tax instead. No other State had imposed this tax. The CDS scheme which was introduced by Indira Gandhi was abolished by the West Bengal Government. 72

This was asserted by the NUJW leader Chandrama. He felt “that the workers had a lot of expectation from the Left Front Government but the CPI(M)-led Government had dashed all the hopes of the workers.” The NUJW, some other unions and more recently the Shramik Sangram

68 Interview with Gopal Biswas, prominent BCMU and CPI(M) leader of this region (Interview dated 18.11.1996).
69 Interview with the former BCMU leader (Interview dated 28.01.1997).
70 Interview with Gopal Biswas, prominent BCMU and CPI(M) leader of this region (Interview dated 18.11.1996).
71 Ibid.
Union had used this slogan of State Government's apathy as an issue in mobilisation and it from
the late 1980s that they had been successful in cutting down the support base of the BCMU and the
CPI(M). Organisations of this kind had been successful in doing so, this can be made out from the
fact that a section of the workers interviewed agreed to the point that the Government had been
apathetic to the problem of the workers. One worker stated:

There is more workload in the industry now than during the emergency period.
The State Government have not done anything significantly after the mid-1980s
for the jute workers, though it did some good work during the earlier period.\textsuperscript{72}

The views expressed by this worker looks to be similar to that of the NUJW leader
Chandrama. Therefore it appears that the NUJW had been successful in convincing the workers to
some extent, its views on the State Government and jute labour. This also reflects the low level of
political work which the BCMU leadership had done in the jute mill areas, among the mill workers
in Bauria and Chengail. The decline in the strength and influence of the BCMU in the two jute
mill towns after the mid-1980s and the decline in the votes of the CPI(M) in the elections after
1985 reflects the fact that both at the level of the union and at the level of the Party, the CPI(M)'s
base had eroded considerably in the mill towns. This is the reason why ultra-leftism had become
popular among the mill workers at the union level for economic struggles and there has been
growth in political parties both communal and casteist at the level of party politics.

\textsuperscript{72} Interview with Chandrama (Interview dated 28.10.1996).
\textsuperscript{73} Interview with a worker (Interview dated 17.11.1996).