CHAPTER-I

WORKING CLASS UNRESTS AND THE BIRTH OF MADRAS LABOUR UNION

The working and social groupings and discontent develop largely due to social inequalities, economic imbalances and religious disputes. They have paved the way, in the past, for internal conflicts and also external aggressions. The consequence of native powers and rise of alien rule stand out to warn us of the dangerous consequences of neglecting any longer the interests of the people at the gross-root level. If the above mentioned undesirable process which endangers freedom, peace and progress is to be arrested, then social scientists should come forward to play a different role in highlighting the problems and prospects of the social underdogs instead of championing the cause of any political demagogues, social higher-ups and elitist groups. The time has now come for historians to take up the cause of the silent and the suffering masses, the tillers of the soil and the workers in the factories and fields who constitute the sediments of history.

Working Class in Madras Presidency

Peoples' history aims at promoting the cause of those seeking the means of livelihood, development and social justice. Even national integration could be better achieved if writers and thinkers champion the cause of the much neglected marginalised sections, Falling in line with the mission of writing a Peoples History which is the emerging trend the world
over, this chapter attempts to study the working and living conditions of the industrial workers in Madras in the 1910s and the factors which contributed to the awakening of labour, the sleeping giant. Because of the sensational developments from within and outside India, the workers gradually became conscious of their importance in terms of organised strength and united action.

**Problems of Workers**

At the early stages almost all the factories, whether they were managed by the Europeans or the Indians, accorded little attention to the problems of security and welfare of the workers. Long hours of work, low wages, indebtedness, bad sanitary conditions, poor housing, and denial of leave were some of the common problems of the workers. Other than these, there were grievances like inadequate rest interval, absence of compensation for accidents, lack of facilities like drinking water, medical aid, refreshment sheds, creches and canteens. These grievances created in the long run much discontent among the workers.

**The reasons for the recommendation of Royal commission for working hours**

The labour had no say either in the regulation of condition of employment in general and fixation of hours of work in particular. The Indian Factory Labour Commission observed in 1908 that in ginning
factories, the workers were employed for seventeen or eighteen hours a day. However, this situation underwent a change in 1911. The Factory Act of 1911 made provision for twelve hours of work per day. This fixation was not enforced strictly. According to a Government report, the working hours were from 6.30 a.m. to 12 noon and again from 12-30 to 6-00 p.m. But it was different in many mills. For instance, in October 1918 the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills declared a lock-out as the workers were not present for work at 6.00 a.m. Added to long hours of work, there was forfeiture of a day’s wage for a delay of even two minutes in reporting for work. For want of housing facilities in the city, many workers who were living several miles away from the factories had to leave home at 4-00 a.m. to reach the mill gate by 5-45 a.m. on foot. After finishing their work at 6-00 p.m., the tired workers could get time only to reach home and go to bed, which deprived them of adequate rest and time to look after the welfare of their family. Long hours of work led to ill-health and absenteeism. Hence, the Royal Commission recommended the reduction of hours of work to fifty four per week whereas a few members advocated forty eight hours.

Working hours of wages comparison to Langashire with Madras

In spite of excessive hours of work, the workers were paid poor wages. It tended to generate economic difficulty and discredit in society. The employers attributed the cause of low wages to inefficiency of work. The
dissent note of T. M. Nair submitted to the Factory labour Commission suggested that low wages caused incompetence. The workers refuted the allegation that the Indian workers were not as hard working as their counterparts in England. They argued that it was due to bad machinery and bad raw materials. While a cotton mill in Madras with 35,000 ring spindles and 800 looms, working 67.5 hours a week, would employ 2,622 operatives, a similar mill in Lancashire, working 54.5 hours a week, would require a total number of 982 workers It was 2.62 Indians equivalent to one English worker. While this was the situation in respect of working power, the rate of wage presented an entirely different picture. The average monthly wage of a Lancashire operative was about Rs. 601 while it was about Rs. 15/- for a Madras worker. It is thus proved that for the same expense the Indian mill owner got nearly double the work.

**Discrimination in wages between Madras and Bengal Bihar Orissa**

Wages were fixed differently not only in different industries but also in the same kind of industry situated in the same and different places. The Royal Commission on Labour as the result of its enquiry found that "wages are lowest in Madras, the Central Provinces and the United Provinces". Between 1925 and 1929 in Madras, 22 per cent of the workers got a monthly wage of less than Rs. 13/-, 25 percent not less than Rs. 13/- but less than Rs. 17.50/, 19 per cent not less than Rs. 17 50/- but less than Rs. 22.50/, 15 per cent not less than Rs. 22.50/-, but less than Rs 27.50/-, 4 per cent not less
than Rs. 27.50/-, but less than Rs. 32.50/-, and 15 per cent not less than Rs. 32.50/-. In the Madras Presidency, in the seasonal cotton ginning factories, it was eight annas and five annas and one paise per day for a male and a female respectively. In the cotton pressing factories, it was nine annas and six paise and five annas and ten paise for a man and a woman respectively. In the non-seasonal cotton mills for a male spinner, the wage was about ten annas per day. For weavers it was one rupee. In Madras the wages of unskilled workers were as low as five annas a day for a man but it was eight, six and four annas for a man, a woman and a child respectively in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Thus, discrimination was maintained in the wage rates between a man and a woman. Hence, the principle of equal wage for equal work gained no acceptance. The wages in industrial centres like Coimbatore and Madurai were still lower. They were not paid at the end of each month but on the 15th of the following month and sometimes, later. These discrepancies added to the misery of the factory workers.

**Interest on debts comparison between Madras and Solapur Ahmedabad**

The average monthly expense incurred on items like cereals, pulses, sugar and sweet meats, meat, milk and ghee, vegetables and fruits, oils salt, condiments, tea and other food items, fuel, lighting, clothing, bedding and household necessities, house-rent, hair-cutting, washing, travelling and soap, tobacco, liquor and interest on debts was Rs. 37.13.11, and Rs. 39-5-8 in Solapur and Ahmedabad respectively. Of them, the interest paid on debt
per month on an average was Rs. 2-8-6. This was the monthly expenditure of a working class family having 4.68 and 4.00 persons in Sholapur and Ahmedabad respectively, in 1925-1926. It was inclusive of dependants who were 0.11 in the former and 0.13 in the latter case. But the situation was worse in Madras, where the average number of persons in a working class family in 1935-1936 excluding dependants was 6.03 and whose earnings were lower than what were in Sholapur and Ahmedabad. These figures show the extent to which the wages were inadequate to meet the minimum requirements of an ordinary life.

**Various cause responsible for indebtedness of the workers**

Poor wages made the workers borrow money from money lenders at high rates of interest. From an enquiry made into the budgets of 641 Working Class families in Madras city, it was found that the average indebtedness per family was Rs.236-1-0, which was 6.32 times the average monthly income of the families. Taking only the indebted families, the average indebtedness of a poor family was Rs. 262- 3-11, which was 702 times the average monthly income. The causes of indebtedness were ordinary wants, house building or repairs, marriage expenditure, old outstanding debts, sickness, funerals, purchase of lands and jewels. For each item the percentage of debt was 33.53, 20.61, 15.19, 12.89, 7.02, 6.80, 0.43 and 0.53 respectively. The other causes were unemployment, dismissal, trade stoppages and maternity.
The common rate of interest charged was 75 percent per annum, but 150 per cent or more per annum was not uncommon, and in one case the rate of interest was as high as 225 per cent. Nearly 90 per cent of the families were in debt and the average amount spent towards repayment of debts each month was about 13.2 per cent of the average monthly income. In the unorganised industries like beedi factories, many of the children's parents were indebted to middlemen employers. As a result, the health and safety of their children were neglected. Normally more than 50 per cent of the workers employed were children below the age of ten and seven and in some cases the same might be as high as 65 percent to 70 percent. However, the percentage of debts of workers in the unorganised sector was lower than that of the workers in organised sector. This was mainly due to the low borrowing capacity caused by slender resources and insecurity of job. The figures on the percentage of families in debt were 58.06 for beedi, 75.26 for tailoring and 49.12 for harbour coolies and hand cartmen. The average debt was Rs. 41-4-8 for beedi makers, Rs. 115-7.1 for tailors and Rs. 34-9 1 for harbour and cartmen coolies as against Rs. 236-1-0 for workers in organised industries. In some cases the excessive drinking habit was also responsible for indebtedness. For workers in organised industries, the average income per family including the income of wife, children and other members of the family was Rs. 37-5-11 and it ranged from Rs. 20-5-10 for beedi workers to 26-15-10 for tailors. However, 57.1 per cent of families showed a surplus
budget which ranged from 0.58 per cent to 5.38 per cent of the average income. At the same time 41.7 per cent of families which were under the income groups of Rs 20/- and between Rs 20/- and 30/- showed a deficit budget. Naturally the standard of living of the workers was miserable.

**Standard of living of the workers**

The sanitary condition in most of the factories was neglected. The workers suffered from a lack of provision for latrine. One worker stated to the Indian Factory Commission that "any man would feel exhausted even if he merely sat in a chair in some of the work rooms for eight or nine hours, the atmosphere was so foul". Excessive heat rendered physical toil difficult and unpleasant. A physician found that physical deterioration among the mill hands was due to bad ventilation in mills. Because of the neglect of sanitary provisions, "the mill operatives suffer to a very large extent from phthisis and dyspepsia". Because of severe working conditions the worker, after a few years of work, retired broken down in health. It is proved that the two Factory labour Commissions found no labourers in factories above the age of forty. In 1923 T. Maloney in his official report on humidification in Indian cotton mills stressed the need for white washing of roofs, the spraying of roofs with water, and the provisions of electric fans to reduce temperature. T. Maloney and the Royal Commission suggested that making such provisions in industries would be profitable to industries by
way of increased production and advantageous to operatives by way of improved health.\textsuperscript{35}

Except in a very handful of factories, nothing was done for housing. Many hundreds of workers were homeless.\textsuperscript{36} Bulk of the huts were made of mud containing one room without ventilation. The dimension of one room tenements generally varied from five feet to eight feet square.\textsuperscript{37} The average number of members living in the huts of this size excluding dependants in Madras was 6.03.\textsuperscript{38} The housing problem of workers, working under contractors in the unorganised industries was more miserable. Coolies including the married had “no houses of their own to live in and spent their days and nights in streets or verandas of buildings.”\textsuperscript{39} A very large number, more especially the Adi-Dravida workers, lived in small huts concentrated in extremely insanitary and un-healthy places.\textsuperscript{40} The Madras Family Budget Enquiry Commission observed that "bad housing conditions in Madras are responsible not only for the rise in the incidence of respiratory diseases which rose from 5.1 per mile in 1913 in the city to 11.7 per mile in 1936 but also for the high death rate in general and infantile mortality in particular".\textsuperscript{41} It is assessed that more than a quarter of deaths in Madras city were of infants under one year. While the infantile mortality rate for Bombay city in 1929 was 298 per 1000 births, in certain parts of Madras city it was 300 to 350 per 1000.\textsuperscript{42}
Discrimination treatment of the workers

At the same time the workers were subjected to discriminatory treatment. In the employment and dismissal of workers, there was absolutely neither a regularised nor a recognised system. As a result, petty officials dismissed the workers at their will. At times when any machinery went out of order, wages were either reduced or cut. Usually request for leave was not conceded. In certain factories for one day's absence two day's wages were cut. In the event of eight day's absence they lost all wages including their other claims over the company. C. Simpson stated that workers "absent themselves more as the rate of pay Increases". Normally, however, workers absented themselves due to sickness, ill-health, unexpected problems and death at home and strain of work. In the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills where arrangements were better than those in other mills, the workers did not get more than twelve or thirteen minutes for their actual meal. Realising that lack of rest interval affected efficiency and caused industrial fatigue, the Royal Commission recommended a rest interval of one hour per day.

Factories Accidents

In factories accidents occurred due to lack of safety provisions, breakdown of machinery parts, speedy production, faulty handling and carelessness. Adequate attention was not paid to fencing the dangerous parts
of the machinery. Many lost either their limbs or lives. The physically disabled were not paid any compensation. In the Madras Presidency the total number of accidents was 392 in 1914 and 420 in 1916. Of them, fatal accidents were seven in 1914 and fifteen in 1916. Many families lost their earning capacity when accidents crippled the workers.

**Early Reforms**

The overall grievances created discontent among the workers. As a result, there came sporadic agitations between 1877 and 1908. Among them the strikes in the Buckingham Mills in 1878 and Carnatic Mills in 1889 for weekly holidays were notable. In September 1902 the weavers in the Buckingham Mill complained that flaws in the yarn and weaving looms caused decline in production which led to pay cuts. The excited workers came into clash with the officers. The attempt at eviction led to a riot. With the assistance of police, the strike was suppressed. The workers in the Madras Government Press struck work in 1903 demanding extra wages for overtime work. The demand was rejected and convicts were employed in the place of the striking workers. A new situation emerged as the nationalists found labour as a weapon in their struggle against British Raj. The workers of the Coral Spinning Mills in Tuticorin struck work on 27th February 1908. This was partly because of the grievance over wages and due to the
work of nationalists. The strike ended in success for the workers. They got increase in wages, holidays on Sundays and reduction in working hours.\textsuperscript{56}

These agitations along with the other factors stressed the need for reforms. The reformers in England too demanded the needed legislation. Accordingly, in 1881 the first Factory Act was enacted.\textsuperscript{57} It disallowed the employment of children below seven years and reduced the working hours of children between the ages of seven and twelve to nine. But evasion was frequent.\textsuperscript{58} The Act was so limited in scope that it was applied only to factories employing 100 or more hands using mechanical power. Also it failed to provide for sanitation, safety, holidays and reduction of working hours. Hence the basic problems of the workers as a whole remained unremedied. Yet with the first Factory Act, the idea of labour welfare gained ground in India.

As England was one of the participating member states, the International Labour Conference which was held in Berlin in March 1890, had its impact upon India. It recommended fourteen years as age limit for the employment of children in factories, to exclude females from working in mines, to prevent accidents, to provide insurance against old age and diseases and voluntary negotiation between workers and employers. Accordingly. The Bombay Mill Owners Association granted the demand for a weekly holiday. Encouraged by this, Lokhande and Bengalee\textsuperscript{59} in 1890 established the Bombay Mill Hands Association\textsuperscript{60} which was India's first
labour organisation\textsuperscript{61} though it is not considered a trade union in the modern sense of the term.\textsuperscript{62}

At this juncture the industrialists of Lancashire and Dundee brought pressure upon the Government complaining about the unfair competition from India due to the lack of factory legislation.\textsuperscript{63} The textile workers of Lancashire also organised a demonstration before the Secretary of State for India and demanded proper factory legislation in India in the interest of workers.\textsuperscript{64} Following it the Government appointed a Factory Commission in September 1890 to consider the improvement of working conditions in factories. As a result the second Factory Act was passed in 1891.

**Promotion of the second factory at 1891**

The scope of the new Act was enlarged and extended to factories employing fifty or more workers and using power.\textsuperscript{65} It also empowered the provincial Governments to apply the provisions even to factories employing twenty and more workers.\textsuperscript{66} They were authorized to regulate overcrowding and ventilation and punish any breach of provisions. It granted a weekly holiday for the first time, prohibited employment of children below nine years and reduced the working hours of children between the age groups of nine and fourteen to seven hours a day with a rest interval of half an hour.\textsuperscript{67} The working hours of women were limited to eleven\textsuperscript{68} and night work was prohibited for them.\textsuperscript{69} Though the Act helped to improve the situation, the exclusion of seasonal factories and plantations from its purview limited the
scope of the Act. Moreover, nothing was done to give relief to the workers in mines, where nomen were extensively employed. The half an hour rest interval provided in the Act was not granted frequently and work on Sundays continued on the plea that it was only for cleaning machinery. In this situation the industrial boom of 1904-1905 created more problems for the workers.

**Agitation Against hours of work**

To meet the rising demand, the workers were not only engaged in overtime work, but also in night work. With the introduction of electricity during this period in factories, workers were forced to work an average of fourteen hours a day and at times from 5-00 a.m. to 9-00 p.m. This change in working condition required the regulation of hours of work for male workers. Hence an agitation was organised seeking an enquiry into the conditions of mill workers. Again pressure came from Lancashire and Dundee to strengthen the existing Factory Act. As a follow up, the Government of India appointed a Factory Commission in 1908 with Sir T. Morison as President to consider the question of further reform. T. M. Nair, one of the members of the Commission, wrote a dissenting note on the opinion of the majority and the Government adopted his proposals on controversial points like the hours of work for adults, women and children.
**Third factory Act 1911**

Based on the recommendations of the Commission, the third Factory Act was passed in 1911. The Act restricted the working hours of men in textile factories to twelve hours a day with a half-hour interval and six hours for children. It prevented the night work of women except in ginning factories. However, the old differences between the textile and non-textile factories were maintained in this Act, for the hours of work of women were maintained at eleven per day. The other important provisions of the Act were certification of age and physical fitness of children before employment, incorporation of sanitary and safety measure, strengthening of inspection staff and bringing the seasonal factories within the scope of the Act.

In 1901 the Indian Mines Act was passed. It empowered the Chief Inspector of Factories to prohibit employment of children below twelve years of age and women in mines, which in its opinion was dangerous for their health and safety. However, in all these Acts, conditions of employment like wages, service security, promotions, compensation for accidents, leave for the sick with wages and regulation of fine and punishment were not stipulated. Nevertheless, these legislations marked the beginning of a positive change.
Awakening of Workers

The piecemeal reforms introduced to improve the working conditions in factories proved Inadequate to deliver the expected benefits. On the one hand the restricted scope and limited application of the Acts and on the other the improper implementation of the provisions of the Acts generated dissatisfaction among the workers. In a background so susceptible for agitation, the spread of revolutionary ideas created a resisting tendency among the workers. Also the political and economic climate of the first two decades of the twentieth century appeared favourable to the workers to seek remedial measures. In such a state of affairs, the external and internal factors worked for the awakening of workers.

'External factors served as a source of inspiration. Between the years 1905 and 1908, the extremists made a determined effort to combine the labour force with the national movement. Tilak, who involved himself in labour issues, was deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1905. He exhorted his countrymen, through platform as well as press, to follow the examples of Russia in their fight against the British. 79 To a limited extent Lenin was correct when he wrote:

"The 1905 movement in Russia finally aroused Asia. Hundreds of millions of the down-trodden and benighted have awakened from medieval stagnation to a new life and are rising to fight for elementary human rights and democracy." 80
It is true that in the labour circle too, two important developments came to be noticed. First of all, a wave of labour strike disseminated all over the country, Secondly, strikes ceased to refrain purely economic in character. The Swadeshi movement provided an opportunity to the Indian extremists to follow the Russian revolutionary tactics. V. Chakkarai Chetti, a staunch follower of Tilak, attended the Surat session of the Indian National Congress held in 1907 and turned into a labour leader in Tamil Nadu. The Coral Mill and the Bombay Mill strikes of 1908 showed clearly the extent to which the extremist leaders gained influence over the Indian workers.

The arrival of Keir Hardie, Chairman of the Labour Party in England had a salutary effect in the history of Working Class movement in Tamil Nadu. His short stay in Madras and his life history published in the newspapers influenced Thiru V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar. A prominent nationalist and journalist, he later became one of the founders of the Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu. To quote him the history of Keir Hardie and his party first sowed the seeds of labour movement in his mind. These developments helped some nationalists to associate themselves with the workers. In turn it contributed to the awakening of the workers.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 had its contribution to the awakening of the workers. Inspite of the strict censorship enforced upon the infiltration of news to India, it did infiltrate through anti Russian writings in
the English Press, emigrants from Russia and Russian scholars, Engineers, trade representatives and military officers who were visiting India. Among the Indians who were inspired by the revolution, Thiru V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar was one. In the same year, he relinquished his Tamil pandit post in the Vesly College and became the editor of the newspaper, *Desabhaktan* in which he wrote pro-nationalist articles. The journal, *Ghadar* (Rebellion) carried the news of Russian Revolution and asserted on 28th March 1917 that the formation of a Soviet Republic would be advantageous to the workers. B. P, Wadia, the founder of the Madras Labour Union, observed in 1919: "The forces let loose by the war and the Russian Revolution have to a certain extent widened and coloured the political outlook of the Indian labourers". He further acknowledged that he explained to the workers the significance of the Russian Revolution. M. Singaravelu Chetti who professed communist Ideas, organised the leftist trade union movement in Tamil Nadu. In this way the external factors influenced the workers through their leaders.

The internal developments too had their impact upon labour. The economic crisis that emerged out of the First World War increased the problems of the workers. Prices of essential commodities soared up and this put the workers to acute difficulty. In the meantime the Home Rule League evinced interest in labour problems. Annie Besant preached among other things the welfare of the workers from 1918. Gandhi found that
strike was an effective instrument to demonstrate the protest of the workers against the attitude of their masters. On 22nd February 1918, the Ahmedabad Mill workers went on a strike for increase in wages. It was during this strike that Gandhi introduced the system of fasting. When some workers who were on strike returned to work, he went on fast. It came to an end on the fourth day of the fasting when the mill owners agreed to accept arbitration. As a result, the workers were given 35 per cent increase in their wages. The successful intervention of Gandhi came as a source of encouragement to the workers in general. These developments contributed to an awakening among the workers.

**Origin of Madras Labour Union**

A religious association popularly called "Venkatesa Gunamrutha Varshani Sabha" situated at Perambur served as the nucleus of labour movement. The Sabha evinced interest in the affairs of the workers of the Buckingham end Carnatic Mills, who participated in large numbers in the monthly religious meetings held under its auspices. It provided them with an opportunity to assemble and share their views regarding their grievances to the members of the Sabha. G. Chelvapathi Chetti and Ramanjulu Naidu were the active members of the association, took the initiative to organise the workers. The grievances were brought to the notice of the mill authorities through anonymous letters and problems were listed in
newspapers for the information of the public. They found that the anonymous letters had some effect, for the mill authorities enquired about the complaints and removed some of the irritants.

Following it, the Sabha organised a labour meeting in 1917, when N C Kannapiran Mudaliar, a Vaishnavite speaker, advised the workers to form a union for themselves. The organisers of the meeting collected and compiled the complaints of workers and despatched them to P. Kesava Pillai, a follower of Annie Besant. His article in the *Indian Patriot* highlighted the grievances of the workers in the mill. Following this, on 2nd March 1918 under the auspices of the Sabha, a big labour meeting was held in the garden of Ramabayammal on Strahans Road. Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, editor of *Desabhaktan*, Gulam Muhammad, a Co-operative Inspector, and A Subramania Naicker, editor of the *Venikula Mitran*, spoke at the meeting. Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar highlighted the success of labour movement abroad and explained the reason for poverty, premature death and spread of epidemics in India. Gulam Muhammad explained the advantages of establishing a Co-operative Society and called upon the workers to form one. The immediate result of this meeting was the drafting of a petition, containing demands for increase in wages and reduction in working hours. Signatures were obtained from the workers, but it was not submitted to the mill authorities, for fear of the police. A proposal to organise an association to safeguard the interest of
the workers too was made, but did not materialise as a result of police intervention. However, the Commissioner of Police gave a different picture when he reported that since the Sabha came to know that labour movement was a political one, the members stopped getting signatures from the workers for the organisation of labour union. On knowing that the Sabha was going to form a labour union, the mill authorities in fact issued an order to the effect that no employee of their mill should become member. Gulam Muhammad was dismissed from his service from 23rd April 1918 under the orders of the Government for having spoken on co-operative society in a labour meeting. Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar was warned against writing articles against the Government in Desabhaktan. As a result the effort to organise a union of workers came to an abrupt end.

The leaders who came forward to organise labour came from different interests. G. Chelvapathi Chetti and Ramanjulu Naidu were cloth and rice merchants respectively. Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, P. Kesava Pillai and B.P.Wadia as politicians were anti-British. Hence, the reaction of the Government against the organisation of labour was not in favour. Yet G. Chelvapathi Chetti and Ramanjulu Naidu who failed in their attempt to organise the proposed union adopted a new method to fulfil their aim. They met B. P. Wadia, a close associate of Annie Besant, and sought his help for the formation of an association. With the intention of knowing the problem of workers directly. B P. Wadia went to Perambur along with them
and had a look at the workers of the mill at their meal time. To quote him, "they came, they gobbled, they turned".\textsuperscript{116} Moved by this sight, he agreed to preside over the labour meeting.\textsuperscript{117} At a public meeting held in the compound of Janga Ramayammal, Perambur, on 13th April 1918, a large number of workers attended.\textsuperscript{118} B P Wadia, who presided over the meeting, listed the hardships experienced by the workers, criticised the indifference of the nationalists and the elite as well as the apathy of the Working Class and called upon the labour to inculcate a sense of mutual help.\textsuperscript{119} He also stressed upon the need to develop self-confidence among the workers and to promote co-operation with mill owners.\textsuperscript{120} On 7th April 1918 at a meeting held at Perambur the workers accepted the proposal to form a union. Accordingly, an association called the Madras Labour Union was formed under the Presidentship of B. P. Wadia.\textsuperscript{121} Kesava Pillai and Thiru V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar were elected as Vice-Presidents and G. Chelvapalhi Chetti and Ramanjulu Naidu as Secretaries.\textsuperscript{122} Though the importance of Swaraj was stressed at the meetings, the primary aim was to improve the economic, moral and social conditions of the workers\textsuperscript{123} through peaceful means.\textsuperscript{124}

The organisation of the union evoked a mixed reaction. Most of the newspapers especially, \textit{The Hindu, Swadesamitran, New India, Common Weal, Andhra Patrika, Indian Patriot} welcomed the newly formed labour union. But the newspaper, \textit{Madras Mail}, the Government and the employers
blamed the Home Rule League as responsible for kindling labour unrest and described B. P. Wadia as a dangerous politician.\textsuperscript{125}

A careful study on the working and living conditions of the mill workers in the context of the adverse economic effects of the First World War and the political developments at home and abroad suggests that economic and political factors were at work in labour unrest, awareness and organisation. The nonpolitical factors included appalling working conditions and miserable living. While the economic factors formed the basic causes of labour unrest, the interests of the political activists played a signal role in labour awareness and organisation. The internal and external political developments which came in the form of the Home Rule Movement and the Russian Revolution respectively served as instruments to motivate and organise the workers. Therefore, the political motive of the nationalists who organised the workers to fight out their issues cannot be negatived. At the same time the view of the colonial Government that labour unrest was engineered only for political consideration is untenable, for economic grievances and enervating working condition constituted the basic causes of labour unrest. Unfortunately, the negative and reactionary approach of the Government and the industrialists failed to realise that organised labour on healthy lines could be of a contributing factor for industrial peace and progress.
The view that the nationalists were interested in the welfare of the workers only for humanitarian reasons does not have any foundation either. It appears true that the labour leaders who hailed from the national movement had an inner motive to use the workers as tools against the British industrialists and the alien Government in India. Perhaps, it was due to this intention that they showed much interest in organising the workers in the European owned industries, where the working condition appeared better than in the Indian-owned factories. In the initial stage the workers in the factories of the Indians were left unorganised. This selective approach manifested itself in the anti-British stance of the labour leaders. These factors brought into the labour organisations certain degree of political colour and character. As a result of the selective approach, and the anti-union stand of the employers, there appeared a transformation in industrial relations marked by a militant attitude rather than a submissive spirit.

Angered at the politically motivated labour leaders, the industrialists turned against the workers and their organizations. Inspite of the consequent difficulties and losses suffered by the workers, the class consciousness that emerged among the workers with its limitations not only brought the workers together for a common cause, but their common endeavour also bore fruits in the long run. This offered a noteworthy lesson that any exploiting force could no longer stand against the legitimate interests and aspirations of an awakened, organised and disciplined people. A development of this kind in 1918 marked the opening of a new chapter in the
history of industrial relations as well as in the much needed People's History. In fact the labour movement represented a break with the past gaining organised power to struggle and bargain for progress.
END NOTES


8. Ibid., pp. 185-186.


10. Ibid., p. 200.


13. Ibid. p. 203.


16. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1930, p.206,


30. **Addenda to Part I** of the memorandum submitted by the Government of Madras to the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 11. A pass was given to every twenty seven men to use a latrine in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. When one was inside the latrine, no other man was permitted to enter it as a rule. (**Andhra Patrika**, 8 January 1918; **G.O, No. 164, P.D.**, 19 February 1918, p. 9).
32. Ibid., p. 183.
33. Ibid., p. 233.
35. Ibid., p. 117.
36. Ibid., p. 274.
38. Ibid., p. 146.
39. Ibid., p. 50.
40. Ibid., pp. 50-51. (The European and Eurasian workers were provided with good houses and other facilities), G. O. No:164, P.D., 19 op.cit., pp.9-10.
41. Ibid. p. 38.
43. G.O. No. 164, P.D., op.cit., p.28.
44. The Indian Patriot, Madras, 5 January 1918, p. 5, G.O. No. 164, P.D., 19 February 1918, p. 9.
45. Ibid., pp. 9-10.
47. Ibid.
48. Wadia, B.P., op. cit, p.179.

51. Ibid, pp. 9-10.


53. Ibid., pp. 302 303.


56. The Hindu, Madras, 7 and 8 March 1980.


58. Before the Factory Act of 1881, the working hours of children was equal to that of adult male workers (Dr. Gadgil, The Industrial. Evolution of India in Recent Times), 1860-1937, Delhi, 1972, pp.83-85.


63. Dr. Gadgil, The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, New Delhi, 1924, p. 84.
64. Ramanujam, G., *op. cit.*, p. 5.


69. Dr. Gadgil, *op.cit.*, p. 84.


73. Dr. Gadgil, *op. cit.*, p. 305.


75. Lokanathan, P.S., *op. cit.*, p. 11.


84. Ibid., p.455.
85. Ibid., pp. 455-456.
88. Sukhbir Choudhary, Peasants and Workers Movement in India, 1905-1929, New Delhi, 1971, p 63.
94. The religious body was founded by G. Varathayya Chetti, father of G. Chelvapathi Chetti who was the General Secretary of the Sabha later became one of the founders of the Madras Labour Union.

98. **Chennai Thozhilalar Sangam Arupathavathu Aandumalar (Tamil)**. 1978, p. 10. (Yet harassment of workers too followed the anonymous letters).


103. Desabhaktan was the Tamil organ of the Madras Presidency Association *Fortnightly Reports*, strictly confidential, 20 March 1918, p. 5.


111. Letter from the Registrar of Co-operative Societies to the Chief Secretary to Government of Madras, 13 March 1918, **G.O. No.342 Confidential, P.D.,** 18 April 1918, pp. 11-15.


113. **Ibid.**

114. **Chennai Thozhilalar Sangam Arupathavathu Aandumalar,** pp. 10-12.

115. **Ibid.,** p. 11.

116. Wadia, B.P., **op.cit.,** p. xiv.

117. **Chennai Thozhilalar Sangam Arupathavathu Aandumalar, op. cit.,** p.11.


119. Wadia, B.P., **Labour in Madras,** p. 3. The Indian National Congress in its sessions held from 1908 to 1911 had not passed even a resolution for labour when the question of factory legislation was before the country (Wadia, B.P., **Aims of the Labour Movement in India,** Madras, 1920, p. 3).

120. **Report of an officer of P.D.,** Madras, 14 April 1918, in **G.O. No.312, Confidential. P.D. 18 April 1918, pp. 21-22.**

122. Murugesan, K., and Subramanyan, C.S., op. cit., p. 34.

123. Wadia, B.P., Aims of the Labour Movement in India, op. cit., p. 5.
