Chapter II

Leaders of the Labour Movement: Their Ideologies and Influence:

The city of Bombay in the 20th century superseded the other two presidencies in the colonial India i.e Calcutta and Madras in terms of industrial development and started yielding more revenue to the British government. It is equally interesting to note that the initial policy of the British government was to only retain India as the mere supplier of raw materials and subsequently promote it as the arena for only selling their manufactured goods. The last five decades of the 19th century was rather a more calculative move on the part of British capitalists in India. Though it appeared that they were promoting the growth of the textile industry, but in reality, it was an allied set up in India to assist the textile firms in Manchester and Lancashire in England. They allowed only those industries to grow in India which they would be able to regulate and had some monitoring experiences. This was also a deliberate move not only to eliminate the remaining small-scale cottage industries, but also to channelize the industrial policy of India on the lines of England.

The conceptual design of these industries penetrated in the Indian market and conveniently encouraged Indian traders and mercantile class in this sector. The survey of the British rule and its impact on Indian economy was rightly mentioned by Annie Besant in her book ‘How India Wrought for Freedom’ where she highlights ‘that the English connection, under the Company, reduced India to poverty, and dislocated her industries, and that, under the Crown, the Government still hamper her industries, make a cruelly severe drain upon the country, and by their fiscal arrangements prevent the return of prosperity’. The change in the economy had a profound impact on the social fabric of India, ‘a hundred families belonging to the same caste may be grouped into a village within the city which will thus be split up into several natural areas dominated by common attitudes and sentiments’. The last chapter dealt in detail explaining the evolution of the rural peasants as the industrial workers in the factories and mills of Bombay.

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The mill operatives in Bombay were primarily agriculturalists and they would work for short intervals in the industrial city and would look forward to going back to their villages with the first given opportunity. The return to their villages was like reconnecting with the umbilical cord which was never detached or cut despite their new surroundings and lifestyle of the city. They would return back only when they would exhaust their savings or if the leave sanctioned to them was getting over. As the Royal Commission of Labour rightly recorded ‘the villages have hitherto provided a measure of insurance against the effects of the various changes which may reduce, interrupt or destroy the earning capacity of the worker. In sickness and in maternity, in strikes and lock-outs, in unemployment and in old age the village home is a refuge for many, and the fact that it exists affords a sense of security, even when it is not required’³. The growing number of textile mills was also leading to acute urbanization. Bombay was now the leading center of migration for those who were looking for the opportunity to earn their livelihood rather than depend on mere good monsoon. The density of Bombay City and Island was ‘78 persons per acre in 1921’⁴ not an exceptional figure for a large industrial center.


Table VII:

The proportion of Total Bombay Population and Mill Hands born in Bombay\(^5\) 1911-1931.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population (Per cent)</th>
<th>Total mill hands (Per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>10.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>26.33</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The Table VII clearly indicates that the city was also becoming a place of permanent settlement for the migrants and they were equally counted as the makers and workers of industrial Bombay. The number increases from 19.6% in 1911 to 24.6% is indicative of the fact that the city was offering more employment opportunities to the migrants and perhaps the First World War was one of the reasons for this growth in demand for more working class.

The total mill hands also increased from 10.92% in 1911 to 26.33% in 1931, corroborates to the fact that the industrial growth in Bombay was substantially good to cater to this kind of flow from across the country. The increase in the mill operatives was also indicative of the lesser employment of children compared to last century. The estimated figures\(^6\) of Bombay Presidency in 1921 was that there were 2,42,000 mill operatives, out of which 1,46,000 workers were employed in the city of Bombay, including 30,000 women workers. The actual inhabitants of the city were merely 10% and the rest migrated from ‘Ratnagiri (41 percent), the United Provinces (11 percent), Satara (8 percent), Poona (7 percent), Kolaba (5 percent)\(^7\).

The divisive nature of the labour class based on their regional affiliation was the main reason that they could not identify that they all suffered equally and their combined efforts would be able to eradicate their woes and unjust treatment. In the editorial column titled ‘Duty Towards Labour’ of a leading newspaper it was stressed ‘the working classes of India have suffered from the additional drawback of lack of organization, the Labour problem in India will only be solved adequately and satisfactorily when Labour is fully and properly organized.


\(^7\) Ibid.
For, the salvation of Labour can come through itself primarily. Meanwhile, it is the duty of the educated classes to see that all possible help and guidance are affordable to Labour to organize itself. The pressure of economic helplessness has considerably overcome the two-fold drawback of poverty and lack of organization and the workers have everywhere begun to demand what is their due\(^8\). The rise of working-class consciousness would only emerge if they identify themselves as one community and understand the role they played in the growing industrial environment. Their class consciousness was suppressed due to the insecurity in the employment and they also looked at their problems and issues from an individualistic point of view. They somehow could never co-relate to the collective sufferings and exploitation by the common hands of the Mill owners and management.

The formation of MillOwners Association in 1875 bears the testimony of more unity amongst the few capitalist of Bombay, but the majority was yet to determine their force and strength even after six decades of their existence. The workers followed the dictates of their ‘good sense’ in struggling to ameliorate their conditions but followed their ‘common sense’ when involved in societal activity\(^9\). The age-old social norm of accepting the master's diktat unquestioningly, the hierarchical order of monarchical or feudal system and lately the dominating influence of the zamindars in the villages had a deep-rooted impact on the migrant peasants of the city. His garb had changed, from farmer to the industrial worker, but his social status was still in the suppressive mode. The initial European or racial superiority and the alienation of English language added to his role of inferiority.

**Factors that prevented the emergence of Labour movement:**

The factors that prevented the labour movement to take shape in a formidable shape is discussed by Gulzari Lal Nanda\(^{10}\), he accounts for eight reasons which affected the late consciousness of the working class.

The first and the most influential reason was the high scale of illiteracy amongst the working class, as they were merely farmers or local artisans, so they did not get any formal training.

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\(^8\) *Times of India*, 13-4-1920, cols, 2,3, p . 10.

\(^9\) *Trade Unions And Labouring In The Third World*, Workshop Papers, Institute of Social Studies, Delhi, 1981, p . 63.

especially in the English educational pattern. Their understanding of skilled workers in the factory was the mere outcome of rigorous training and assistance from the jobbers. This made them always feel that they deserve the wages they are getting. The lack of sheer knowledge of profits and the growing margins in the factories net income kept them in isolation of their equivalent share. To the extent that they felt the meager dividends they would get annually was due to the mercy and benevolence of the mill owners.

The second factor was caste and regional division amongst the workers outside the factory, were so intact that they did not make attempts to see beyond this stratification, even though it was affecting their social standard of living.

Thirdly, the importance of discipline and proper orientation of the role they played was missing to a great extent. The issue of absenteeism was very common amongst them and it was used against them very often by the employers. So even if they would go as a small group to raise some pertinent issues, the jobber or the supervisor of the mills would target the individual participant workers on their irregular record whereby threatening them of dismissal. This affected their morale and they lost their bargaining power.

The fourth, aspect was their incapability to sustain against the arbitrary rules of the employers. The small and short episodes of strikes would eventually get withdrawn by using the divisive policy amongst the workers. They would not be financially strong enough to pull on with the strike or prolong it till their legitimate demands were accepted. The resistance level was always weak and the uncertainty of their employment made them return back within a short time to save their means of survival.

The fifth aspect was their consistent link with their villages, which weakened their loyalty towards their work and the co-workers. The villages offered them respite and assurances, in case of unemployment in the city. Their loyalties were strong and intact, to their rural roots, despite their complete migration to the city.

The sixth factor was the acceptance of new mode of life in the city compared to what they were living in their villages. Since they witnessed that almost all the co-workers were living in the same deplorable conditions, it became a set feature of the city and an approved lifestyle of the working class.

The seventh factor was more part of their grooming and upbringing in the joint family system. They were not volatile in raising their demands or placing their opinions assertively. The
aggressive temperament was acquired by them after being suppressed for ages and being the marginalized section of the society. The small source of earning, away from their caste-based society was a big relief for them. They did not wanted to disturb this new urban fabric, in which their role was defined as a mere worker, irrespective of their origin, birth or region.

The eighth and most important factor was the feeling of subordination and knowing their status on the chart of development. They did their duty loyally and above all the other societal roles. The acceptance of their employers as the new urban feudal lords helped them to retain their traditional attitude of subordination.

These factors were the fetters which the worker had to overcome and realize that their growth is equivalent to the increase in the number of mills in Bombay.

The multiplication of the mills did not change the conditions of the workers in any sphere, except the growth in their physical numbers.

The following table illustrates the growing number of mills and strength of the working class in the Cotton textile mills of Bombay from 1865 to 1922. Average Number of Mill Hands Employed Daily on All Shifts\(^\text{11}\), Bombay Cotton Textile Mills, 1865-1924.

Table: VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Mills</th>
<th>Average Daily employment</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of mills</th>
<th>Average daily employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1895</td>
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<td>75740</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>6733</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78455</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>7715</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>70728</td>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77169</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>8103</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>72914</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8553</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82162</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>8816</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86122</td>
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</table>

The Table VIII, highlights that in 1865 there were only 10 cotton mills in Bombay with 6,557 workers; the figure goes up by 1900 with 82 cotton mills having 72,914 workers. The number further swells to 1, 48,414 by 1924 with 82 mills. The mill operatives increase in the number and so does the production in the mills. We find the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha and Social Service League make their attempt to raise the concerns of the workers. The decline of the Sabha during this time leaves the field of working-class movement open for the new experiment. As both the league and the Sabha were not able to mobilize and strengthen the movement despite their attempts for one decade. ‘The sabha was more easily undermined in this way because it was based on an uneasy mixture of caste and class motives. The League’s constituency was the poor of all communities, but because the League lacked a class ideology,
it was always in danger of being outflanked by less compromising class organizations in periods of industrial strife"\(^{12}\).

The phase close to 1917 was the period of economic turbulence in the economy of the Bombay city. The industrial atmosphere was just recovering from First World War since it had brought high hopes to the native capitalist who were expecting the post-war period to be equally jubilant. They had promised the workers good incentives and increase in the wages post-war, as the production and supply had to be interrupted. The workers responded favorably to the appeal of the Mill owners. The end of the war did not yield the required results and benefits to the working class and so the industrial strikes became the call of the day. They were able to dissolve the minor strikes of 1917 and 1918, but in January 1919, a major strike broke out which witnessed the participation of almost 1,50,000 workers. The working class, nevertheless, came forward to play its own role. Though the British rulers suppressed the workers unleashing a ruthless terror the fighting outburst of the labour movement left an indelible mark on the course of the national movement in India. Referring to the anti-imperialist political struggles Lenin wrote: “The Indian proletariat has already matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious political struggle- and that being the case. Anglo-Russian methods in India are played out”\(^{13}\).

As N.M. Joshi in his editorial wrote that ‘out of the number of disabilities under which they work the three outstanding ones which deserve our attention are those connected with

(1) Housing.
(2) Long hours.
(3) Ignorance and
(4) Want of organization\(^{14}\).

The ground was prepared for a formidable labour movement as the end of the war had exposed the intentions and ulterior motives of the mill owners completely. They were keener to safeguard their profits than to share it with those who they had promised and appealed to, during the period of crisis. The mill owners were not regulated by any Factory Acts or by any


\(^{13}\) Ibid., Gopal Ghosh, pp 58-59.

\(^{14}\) Times of India, 20-1-1919, col, 2-3, p. 10.
Fair wages legislation to be obliged to the demands of the workers. In fact ‘history of factory or Labour Legislation has a very sorry tale to tell being mostly animated by a narrow outlook and self-interest of employees. Legislation as such was enforced not because it was in the best interest of the workers, but because it suited the policy of the government to confine, to a certain extent, to international decisions and in order to reduce conflicts between capital and labour\textsuperscript{15}. The mill owners not only lost the economic grounds of negotiations but morally also they lost the trust and confidence of their workers. The situation became too alarming and insecure for the successful running of the mills.

The end of World War became the base of the beginning of the class war in Bombay. The growing consciousness of the rights of the workers, the aftermath of the Russian revolution, dwindling of England’s position to the second-ranking worldwide and the emergence of the national consciousness in the country was not conducive to the stability of the Mill employers. It was clear that no industrial edifice can be permanent if it is built on such unsound foundation and betrayal. The strike of 1919 was one of the most memorable strikes as for the first time it unified a big force of the working class in Bombay.

**Types of Strikes:**

Before we elaborate on the strike of 1919 lets us examine the definition and features of the strike.

A *strike*, as the word implies, is an action of a group of individuals intended to act against the ones who control them or in power and responsibility for their sufferings or grievances. The method adopted is generally peaceful and begins with cessation of work and appeals to the other employees to join them in a collective cause. The industrial or the work premises is converted into the orientation ground and display of their strength. The purpose is to create the stoppage of work and bring this phenomenon to the notice of the employer or the ones in the authority. It can be a total or a partial cessation of work and to engage in the mode of discussion on their demands or issues. The strike is not used to harm the industrial setup or to engage in any kind of destruction to the property and machinery as the workers know that their existence and survival depends on it.

Another stage of a strike is the lockout, which is like the last resort and is the extreme form of negotiations. The employees compel the employers to close down the industrial premises and shut down the work completely. The lockout can sometimes lead to the stage of protest in front of the workplace and it involves generally all the sections and departments of the industrial set up. The lockout can prolong till no resolution is reached the losses are borne by both the parties. The employers bear the loss of no production hence no selling of goods, whereas the workers have to survive without wages and earnings. The workers find the lockouts more difficult to survive because by the end of the strike they end up exhausting all their savings.

The lesser known way of expressing the discontent is by Ca’Canny in which the workers deliberately limit the output of the work. It slows down the process of work, the production is not stopped, but the net output is limited and the time taken is same. In this the employee is not affected much and his wages are secured, whereas the employer suffers due to less production proportionately to the time invested in by the worker.

The primary objective of the strike is to affect the production and paralyse the production unit. The workers in a way engage in direct no cooperation mode with the employer. The condition of Bombay in 1919 was to a great extent on the verge of experimenting with all these modes aggressively. ‘During the first world war especially towards the end, a large number of trade unions had come into existence due to increasing cost of living. On account of the illiteracy of the workers, whenever they went on strikes, they sought the help of sympathetic persons in public life for negotiation with the employers and for putting the case before the public and the Government’\textsuperscript{16}.

Average daily Employment of Men, Women, and Children Bombay Cotton Textile Mills\textsuperscript{17}, 1884-1937. (All Shifts)

Table IX:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total employment</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


\textsuperscript{17} Morris, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 217. Also see, Labour Office, Government of Bombay (BLO) 1934, Labour Legislative Investigation Committee Report (LIC), 1946.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<td>1884</td>
<td>39716</td>
<td>30383</td>
<td>8816</td>
<td>517</td>
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<td>1892</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>127578</td>
<td>98377</td>
<td>29163</td>
<td>38</td>
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</table>
The growing number of operatives from 39,716 in 1884 to 2,05,491 by 1947 explains the growing importance of the cotton textile mills in Bombay. However, the statistics also gives us the encouraging ratio of decline in the number of children over the period of time from 517 in 1884, rising to the highest number of 5,100 employed during the First World War in 1915, to complete decline by 1937. It is one of the biggest success and achievement of the Factory legislation of 1881 and 1891.

The strike of January, 1919 was reported to be undoubtedly the beginning of a concerted movement and affected almost some 85 factories\(^{18}\) in Bombay. The result was that, most of the mill hands were on streets and the mills were closed in the city of Bombay. The gathering of the workers outside their mills was the common occurrence. The workers started demonstrating in front of their mills. The primary demand of the workers was to increase in their wages, which was promised to them during the wartime, as the end of the war also lead to major inflation and made it difficult for the workers to live in this financial stress. The wages were not sufficient enough for their survival in the city of Bombay and it lead to the serious cause of worry to them.

The workers also questioned the complete neglect of some of the management of the mills towards their demands and calling it illegitimate proposal. It seems the trouble began with the Century mills workers, who struck work on the 29\(^{th}\) December 1919. They demanded that the consideration shown to be clerical staff should be extended to them also, viz, that they should be given the bonus, if not a month’s wages, of some day’s wages at least, that they should be given a war allowances as in the case of the clerks and from there it aggravated to the other mills. If only the management and the employers of the Century Mill would have handled it effectively by way of collective bargaining, it would not have spread like wildfire to the other

\(^{18}\) Times of India, 10-1-1919, col. 5-6, p. 9.
mills. Some of the prominent mills which were affected by the strike were, The Crown Mills, The Dawn Mill, The Globe and the mills controlled by the Currimbhoys-Mohomadbhoy, Currimbbhoy Pabanay, Fazulbhoy and Pearl Mills, Ruby Mills, the Kasturchand Mills, the Bombay Cotton and Dyeing, the Western India Mills, the two Sassoon Mills, the Hongkong and the Finley at Chinchpokli, the Morarji Gokuldas, Dinshaw Petit, the Jacob Sassoon, the Tata Mills, the Kohinoor and the spring Mills, on Suparibaug Road as also the Shapurjee Bharucha group in Jacob circle and at sewri the Indo-China, Moon, China and Jubilee Mills.

In all, it is calculated that from 80,000 to 1,00,000 mill-hands were on strike. It was for the first time in the history of Bombay mill industry that the working class mobilized in such a big number which led to the complete closure of practically all the mills in the city of Bombay. On 7th January, 1920 the newly formed Bombay Girni Kamgar Sangh (BGKS) a union of the working class with membership of around 8,000 mill workers after thorough investigation on the causes of the strike wrote to the Secretary of the Mill Owners Association as the representative body of the working class.

The letter elaborated their testimony of several meetings with the mill workers and placed four points for the approval to the Association, after which the strike would be withdrawn. The demands included:

1. 85 percent allowance to be given instead of the present 35 percent.
2. Ten hour’s work a day, instead of the present 12 hours.
3. Yearly Bonus to be paid within ten days from the day of resuming the work.
4. Monthly payments to be made before the 15th of the month instead of the present 24th or so (i.e instead of the 24th day of the month or the subsequent days as is the custom at present). Notices if the requests are granted should be put on the doors of the mills as usual over the signatures of the (respective) mill owners.

The mill owners were not much interested to accept these terms and conditions. The struggle continued and the new leaders emerged to express their solidarity and uplift the morale of the
workers like a large meeting of mill workers was held at Poibavdi by Mr. Joseph Baptista who presided the meeting and appealed to the workers that this is the time for them to consolidate and they have no trade union to look after their welfare. Their interests should be their concern and now the labour needs such people who fight for their honor rights and dignity. So the first thing they need to do is to organize themselves as a union. He appealed:

“Let me warn you that the struggle between you and the employer will be a strong one. They have wealth on their side. We have men on our side and in every just contest, honest men must win even against wealthy men. If you fail this time, it will not because your cause is not just but because you are not organized. It is proposed to get you organized within the next month or two so that if such a conflict comes again you are sure to come out victorious even if you fail to do so now. This means real, hard work, but this cannot be done without your help and your will”²¹.

The strike was now more on the scale of an open war between the employers and the labour class.

N M Joshi wrote in his editorial ‘neither the Government nor the Mill owners nor the educated public ever seems to be cognizant of the existence of the large number of the factory workers in the city living under conditions. The greatest pity is that we become conscious of the existence of the mill-hands around us, when they go on a strike and I admit that the workmen have not gone through the usual procedure of petition or previous notice. But this failure on their part is due to their ignorance and unorganised condition for which they cannot be blamed’²².

Mr Joseph Baptista wrote to the Governor to intervene in this situation and find some solution to it. He wrote “It is very gratifying to find that the temper of the workmen is excellent. An immediate settlement is imperative. Delays are dangerous. With labour unorganised and capital culminating unconditional surrender, the right of strike threatens to burst into a storm before we can see the sunshine of settlement. Capital usually disregards the clamour of crowds and treats it contemptuously as the battle of a rattle. Therefore, the supreme necessity of the moment is an impartial and influential mediator. I would suggest to His Excellency the Governor to intervene immediately. Sir Gorge Lloyd would solve the

²¹ Bombay Chronicle, 12-1-1920, col 2-4, p . 10.
problem by appointing a small committee of officials, mill-owners and non-officials in whom the people repose confidence. I would suggest a Committee of Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola, Mr. Clayton, Municipal Commissioner, among officials, Mr. J.A Wadia, Mr. Mathradas Goculdass, Sir Fazulbhyo Currimbhoy, Sir Sassoon David and Mr. Greaves from mill owners and Mr. B.G Tilak, Mr. Jinnah, Mr. Gandhi and Sir Narayan Chadavarkar from among the people. The mill workers have formulated their demands very definitely. It is for the mill owners now the respond with sympathy. It may be that the mill owners are at present in a position to break the back of the strike; but it would be the greatest blunder in the history of the mill industry. The bitterness of defeat will not be forgotten and it will inaugurate resolute struggle between capital and Labour in Bombay altogether foreign to the genius and socialistic temperament of the people. Cleary the Labourers are the architects of the fabulous fortunes of capitalists.\(^\text{23}\) The strike ended in three weeks giving the workers rise of 20%. The strike however opened the arena for many trade union leaders.

The factory worker was never required to exercise his rationale and think beyond his machinery work and to mechanically just engage in his work with long hours with practically no scope for any educational activities as a result he would become merely integrated as one of the component with the machines. The comparison of the uneducated agriculturist of a village rather would appear more intelligent than a factory worker. This process of making automation of human beings was the result of advanced industrial growth in Bombay. This lack of education and absolutely no orientation in the organised trade union was one of the stark features of 1920’s. The workers needed a strong outside influence, but the possibilities of it getting used in a wrong cause or even sometimes against the best interest of the workmen themselves could not be denied at this moment.

There was certainly a strong change in the mental outlook of the workers towards their strength and power of unity displayed during the strikes of 1919 and 1920. The labour understood the importance of his existence and was successfully in beginning to assert it. The feeling that the he plays a vital role as the originator of this wealth and that the capitalist were engaging in this extortion and depriving him of his dues were now part of his realization. The era post 1920 made the labourers anxious to assert their independence with a sense of equality, resentment of injustice and the spirit of freedom. The new unions came into being

\(^{23}\) Bombay Chronicle, 13-1-1920, col.4, p. 8.
mainly through the efforts of agitators whose object was to organise Labour in order to
paralyse the Government, and with it, the trade and commerce of the country. The
development of International Trade Union Conference at Washington around this time
equally put the colonial government under severe stress.

‘The working class developed a spontaneous sub consciousness of class solidarity of their
own, they realized that they must have the necessaries of life, and in order to secure them,
they have to put up a fight, as is proved by epidemics of strikes occurring since 1918’24. The
workers lack of response all these years can also be attributed to the ‘lack of response to
many of the most familiar evils of uncontrolled industrial development. However remote and
impractical it was for him to return to his village, he seldom felt it necessary to fight for
reforms in his urban environment’25. Since both Bombay and Lancashire came parallel in
terms of growth in the textile industries comparisons were drawn between the relative
efficiency, statistics of the number of hands per spindle or per loom and out-turn of yarn per
worker etc.

As Burnett- Hurst draws lines on ‘the hours of labour differ – the longer the working day,
the less efficient is the work ; climatic conditions are in striking contrast and the Lancashire
mills possess more up-to-date machinery and the latest labour-saving contrivances. There is
no denying the fact that the English operative is more efficient. Some factory inspectors place
the relative efficiency of the Lancashire to the Bombay mill-hand at 51/2 to 3. But it should
be remembered that he is better housed, better fed and not a semi-agriculturist’26. The further
analysis will suggest that how the labourers now raised issues beyond their regular wages, the
assertiveness of the growing labour movement with other industrial countries will give us
better insights.

24 A, R, Desai & Sunil Dighe, (ed), Labour Movement in India 1923-1927, Documents, Pragati publications,


26 Burnett-Hurst, op.cit., pp . 61-62.
The data given in Table: X explains the reasons for the workers going on strike in U.K, India, Bombay and Ireland. The classification\(^{27}\) is based on Wages (W), Bonus (B), Leave, Hours and other working arrangements (L), dismissal, reinstatement of Personnel (P), and all others (Z).

The period of study is from 1921-1926.

Table :X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>U. K. 2 years</th>
<th>India 1 year</th>
<th>Bombay 5 years</th>
<th>Ireland 4 years</th>
<th>Percentage distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>U.K. 72.44, India 48.51, Bombay 45.12, Ireland 43.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>U.K. . ., India 4.48, Bombay 10.77, Ireland 9.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>U.K. 5.10, India . ., Bombay 14.22, Ireland 11.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table X clearly illustrates that the workers in Bombay compared to the U.K and Ireland were needed to be more assertive while demanding the hike in their wages (W) as in the period of two years the number of strikes were 952, ie 476 strikes in one year, similarly in Ireland it was 184 in four years giving the average of 46 strikes only to demand hike in their wages and in Mumbai in four years it was 222 with an average of 55 strikes in one year. The figure in Bombay should be considered low; given the fact, the mill operatives in Bombay were considerably higher in the U.K and in Ireland. Similarly, the issue of bonus (B) does not see much of the agitation by the workers in the U.K, perhaps because they had placed an organized formula of issuing bonuses to the mill workers annually without being reminded to their employers. Whereas the ratio for five years in Bombay was 53 giving the average of ten strikes only on the issue of disbursement of the rightful bonus to the working class.

The strikes pertaining to raising the issue of the leave hours and working arrangements in the factories is higher in the U.K with almost 34 in one year, whereas in Bombay the average of five years only 14 per year, it reflects that the workers did not question the working environment nor they considered a better working condition their rightful demand. In fact, the ratio of Ireland comes very close to Bombay with 12 strikes per year. The dismissal or reinstatement (L) of the workers as an individual case was again higher in the U.K with an average of 65 strikes in one year; it strongly reflects a matured trade union that supported their workers in the time of their individual crisis or victimization by their management. This display of collective strength enabled them to keep the check and balance on the mill owners and also give the sense of security to their members.

The total number of strikes in Bombay, for the same category, gives, very dim picture, as the figures indicate that only 22 strikes were reported despite the fact that the highhanded and arbitrary role of jobbers was significant in the suspension and dismissal of the mill workers randomly and as per his authoritarian rule. Finally for the other miscellaneous (Z) reasons the U.K again comes assertively with an average of 82 strikes per year. The exploitation of the
workers through new means and methods were strongly protested by the working class leaders in the U.K. The average number for one year in Bombay was 7 strikes per year on the issues other than the ones mentioned in the chart. This Table, very well explains the inception stage of the working class movement in the city of Bombay. The leaders of Bombay had a lot was to learn, experiment and consolidate to reach to that height of working-class consciousness.

Similarly, Table XI gives us details\textsuperscript{28} of a number of strikes in the U.K, India, Bombay, and Ireland for the period of 1921 (April) - 1926 (March).

Table XI:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Bombay Presidency</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>1924 1925</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>1921 to 1926-</td>
<td>1922-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Annual average in the period)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of strikers,</td>
<td>710 604</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. Number of persons involved in strike.</td>
<td>666 786</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. Duration is working days of each strike</td>
<td>11363 13188</td>
<td>11,865</td>
<td>26,214</td>
<td>5,829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be seen in Table XI that the strikes were relatively more frequent in the United Kingdom. In his editorial NM Joshi reflected his views and appeal to the workers of Bombay after the strike of 1920 he stated “it was one of the most important events of the year which gave all of us cause for considerable anxiety and I would be justified in referring to some of the issues of that struggle at some length. In magnitude that strike affected every textile factory in Bombay and in duration, it involved the stoppage of work for full one month. I

\textsuperscript{28} Madhava, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 253.
would be only too glad to see some efficient machinery established by which disputes could be settled without prolonged strikes or lock-outs and we would be glad to see our workmen so far educated and disciplined as to behave in an orderly manner during such emergency.”

The emergence of Communism in India:

The national movement in India witnessed a big political void in 1920 after the sad demise of Lokmanaya Tilak, a staunch supporter of the working class movement in Bombay. The emergence of many local leaders like Sripad Dange explained the ‘economic structure of society’ the concept of class psychology, which is the real basis for a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond specific social forms of consciousness. This superstructure consisted of various human organization, vague non-coordinated thoughts, and feelings and an ideology.

First, there were general psychological traits found in all classes of a given society, because the situation of those classes may have certain common elements in spite of class differences.

The second element was class psychology which is produced by the aggregate conditions in which the class is stationed, in the economic and social-political environment. Class psychology assumes very intricate forms and does not many a time lend itself to a direct interpretation through its economic content. It can always be explained by the concrete environment of the specific class. It is this systematized class psychology that becomes ideology.

The city of Bombay was also slowly and gradually waking up to the call of Mahatma Gandhi after his appeal of noncooperation movement. It is interesting to note that when Karl Marx analyzed the Indian society he explained that “these small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on the unalterable


division of labour. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky”\(^{31}\).

The international politics also went through a landmark change with the Russian revolution in 1917. The foreign policy of Russia in the form of Communist international was the novel appeal to many workers and the trade union leaders worldwide. The European working classes too were in full swing of the post-war tide. Whether in Britain or in France or in any other western capitalist country, the labour movement registered a steady advance. But the political reactions of the post-war period divided the international labour movement into two distinct courses. One section was led by the International Federation of Trade Unions of Amsterdam and the other was led by the Red International of Trade Unions of Moscow\(^{32}\).

By 1919, the wave of extreme agitation was witnessed in many places, the capitalist were condemned for their role. The late J.R. Roy, brother of T.R. Roy – a Communist of Calcutta – with Mahomed Mohsin Khan, a well-known Khalifat agitator of Aligarh, formed an association named the ‘Bengal Central Labour Federation’ in Calcutta to organize the mill hands of Bengal. C.R. Das initiated another organization of a similar nature, with himself as the president and one Hemanta Kumar Sarkar as secretary. This Hemanta Kumar Sarkar became subsequently one of the leading lights of the ‘Bengal Peasants and Workers’ Party, with Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta and other Communists in Calcutta. Similarly Baidul Alam, a Khalifat agitator with pro-Bolshevik views, also preached Bolshevism and distributed a book entitled ‘Bolshevism in the Koran’.

N.C. Kelkar, B. P. Wadia, Diwan Chaman Lal also proposed to formulate an All India body of the Trade Unionist and very soon the All-India Trade Union Congress(AITUC) was formed in 1920. Its first session was held in Bombay in the same year, with Lala Lajpat Rai as its president and Diwan Chaman Lal as secretary. Mukunda Lal Sarkar, S.N. Haldar, Joseph Baptista and several others assisted Chaman Lal. They also received pamphlets and literature on Labour and the working class from the Workers’ Welfare League of India and from some Labour Unions in England. The external support was provided by J. Potter Wilson, who coordinated with S. Saklatvala, they both were associated with the extreme left wing of


the Independent Labour Party even B. P. Wadia was interested in Bolshevism and he received the Russian Press Review, which had articles on Bolshevism and ideas of communist philosophy. The failure and withdrawal of the Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement gave this newly emerging class more fertile ground to preach the ideas of communism in Bombay.

In 1922 M.N. Roy proposed the formation of the Communist Party in India, he along with Singaravelu Chettiar, of Madras, even sent their anti-capitalist views to the Gaya session of Indian National Congress (INC). The nationalist leaders and the colonial rulers were alarmed by the emerging consciousness of the working class and their inclination to the ideology of communism. ‘Their anti-imperialist character and their passionate denunciation of Great Britain and other imperialist powers sounded a particularly sympathetic chord in the hearts of the workers of the national movement. There was an eagerness to learn about the new gospel and to make use of its lesson. The violent opposition of the British rulers, to the Russian revolution and the communist movement, made them all the more appealing’\(^3\) The slow orientation of ideas of communism tried to hit at the core defect of the labour movement, the lack of education.

The rapid illiteracy was used extensively by the native communist leaders to educate the workers through their new gospel and teachings. The young minds responded much faster to their writings and literature. The labour class in the colonies and semi-colonies has characteristic features which were important in the formation of an independent labour class movement and the proletarian class ideology in those countries. The greater part of the colonial proletariat came from the pauperized village, with which the worker retained their connection even when engaged in the industry. ‘The ruined artisans, the small property owner carries with him into the working class the narrow craft-sentiments and ideology through which national reformist influence can penetrate the colonial labour movement’\(^4\).

The efforts of M. N. Roy through his publication of the journal Vanguard, similarly in1923 Dange started an English weekly called Socialist and in Calcutta Muzaffar Ahmed began the Bengali weekly entitled Janawani. The arena for a massive labour movement was waiting to be guided by the leaders of the Comintern (Communist International) and so many Russian communist agents visited India for the purpose, like Percy. E. Glading alias R. Cochrane,

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\(^4\) Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries adopted by the Sixth Comintern Congress, 1\(^{st}\) September, 1928, p . 21.
followed by George. Allison sent to develop the left-wing inside the All India Trade Union Congress, Philip. Spratt, B. F. Bradley, etc.

In 1923 the ‘Colonial Commission of the communist International sanctioned an amount of £70,000 for support of labour organizations in India, the total amount sanctioned was £1,20,000 out of which £35,000 was for party work, £15,000 was for the support to Dange’s paper, Socialist, and the balance of £70,000 was for support of those labour organization which favoured communism’. The communist had to work against two parallel fronts, one against the colonial rulers and second against the nationalist under Indian National Congress (INC). So by 1920s most of the communists became members of the District Congress Committees and they tried to penetrate in the local wards of the city. Since they formed a very small number we do not find them bringing about much change around or effective in their influence. Similarly, the communist in their initial years in Bombay debated more on the strategy and execution of ideology rather than an open formation of their association amidst the labour class. Their confusion erupted more on deciding to alienate or associated with the existing nationalist forces in the city.

The communist party of India was formed in 1925, but it chose to integrate with the existing bodies like AITUC and run their campaign under their aegis. The promotion of the communist doctrine for the labour class had two applications; one under the capitalistic regime and another under the proletariat regime. Under the former, it insisted on the class war and required the trade unions to launch a campaign of incessant strikes to destroy the whole capitalistic structure and build on its ruin a communistic regime. The primary aim of communist trade unions under capitalism was not to fight for the improvement of the working and living conditions of the labour class by securing reduction in the hours of work, increment in wages, proper housing and social security benefits, but to unite, discipline, and educate the masses with a view to abolish capitalism itself, by constantly and violently using the weapon of strike. They believed that with the downfall of capitalism all the troubles of the labour class will automatically vanish.

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35 Desai, 1918-1920, op. cit., p. 49. The first big attempt of the Government to nip the communist movement in the bud was the Kanpur Communist Conspiracy Case which was instituted in 1924. M. N. Roy was the principal accused in the case. The other accused were S. A. Dange, Muzaffer Ahmed, Shaukat Usmani, and Nilmi Gupta.
In fact in the special Congress of the Communist Party in January, 1923 Roy had proposed to start a Labour Information Bureau which would be affiliated with the Indian Trade Unions. The objective of this Bureau would be ‘to keep Indian Trade Unions and other Labour organisations informed of the progress and plans of Labour in Europe, and to obtain a regular supply of information about the Labour movement in India’\textsuperscript{36}. The Bureau was officially inaugurated in February, 1923 and it also dispatched its copies of the manifestoes to the Indian newspapers and declared their agenda that ‘India’s political freedom must be attained before the economic emancipation of the Indian labour classes could be realised; it concluded; “Fellow workers of India, let us join hands in order that the subject peoples of the East may be freed from the bondage of Imperialism, and that the European Proletariat may break the claims of slavery forged at Versailles by the capitalist robbers drunk with victory; until we will match to freedom”\textsuperscript{37}. The appeal ended with ‘Down with Imperialism and Long Live the workers and Peasants of India’.

The growing influence of the new ideology and support from international agencies soon changed the course of political movement in India. The ‘moderate leaders were swept away from the field and the communists became the leaders of the workers of Bombay’\textsuperscript{38}. The shift of the labour class towards the newly emerged communist leaders made the nationalist insecure and many of them had their reservation of trusting them as they strongly felt that ‘the leaders of the Communist Party and of Labour organisations in India come, almost invariably, from the ‘bourgeois’ class and that they have taken up the cause of labour either from political motives or motives of greed. The great bulk of the actual labourer is illiterate and consequently is not as yet much affected by the literature produced for its consumption’\textsuperscript{39}.

Similarly S. V. Palekar, had also raised his concerns while speaking at the session of Servants of India Society he said that “through almost every movement tended to make the lot of the labourer better, but Bolshevism was nothing but labour left to itself without the control and guidance of the middle classes.It was time that they were told, more of their duties than of their rights”\textsuperscript{40}. The initial five years allowed the communist to engage in the local forces of the labour class in Bombay, but by 1926, ‘the Communists began to make their appearance in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{36} Desai & Dighe, 1923-1927, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 145. \\
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{38} Karnik, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 56. \\
\textsuperscript{39} Desai & Dighe, \textit{op.cit.}, p . 164. \\
\textsuperscript{40} Times of India, 20-8-1919, col. 5, p . 10.
\end{flushleft}
the movement and started inculcating Marxist doctrines. The trial of the loading Communists which lasted for more than a year gave them great publicity and push. By following a policy of supporting all strikes, they had their way in a large number of unions and even completely captured a fairly good proportion of them. The emergence of new ideology and their international connections had both advantages and disadvantages. The only respite the emerging communist leaders had was that they were able to procure good funds for their movement in Bombay, but they also had to face acute skepticism from the native nationalist leaders as Shapurji Saklatwala stated “in a capitalist country to embrace Communism is to court persecution in the economic and social life every day, workers with good intentions have got to find an excuse to keep out of the Communist movement”.

**Role of the leaders:**

The leadership of the working class movement needs some introspection on how the leaders must have been carried on their responsibilities. A leader should have "inter-personal influence, exercised in the situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals". This definition indicates that leadership involves:

(a) The Leader - Who is an influencer - a person in a position to influence or has the power to bring changes in a situation or in other persons.

(b) The Context - The situation, which makes a possible relationship between the leader and the follower (followers). It also includes goals (whether explicit or implied), which create and perpetuate the leader and led relationship. Depending upon the nature of an organization, the character of the led also forms an important part of leadership.

(c) The Process - of communication through which the leadership is affected. It also refers to the process by means of which the leader and the led communicate and also the way the goals of the organization, of the led and of the leader are achieved.

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Accordingly, a leader's role is not necessarily continuous, played by one individual; it changes with situations and is transitory. The definition of leadership given by Bogardus best describes leadership in a trade. According to him, "leadership is a process in which there is a give - and - take between leader and followers. The role of the leader is often self-evident; the function of the followers may be obscured. Yet the follower is vital, for without him there could be no leader". In such a case the choice of a decision is made by the participation of the rank and file, and the leader becomes organizationally responsible to them.

Similarly, a trade union leader is also indirectly responsible for the management, since he must operate within the limits set by the employment organization. Besides, normally that leadership can be effective which makes itself acceptable to the management (at least for negotiations) by rightly interpreting the management problems to the workers. Thus, in a way, he also leads the management to the extent; he is able to influence the workers for the interests of the management. Besides, a trade union leader becomes a public figure, just by the virtue of his position, through State apparatus and political parties. Thus his context keeps on enlarging with the extension of his prominence. The leadership of the labour movement in Bombay had the biggest drawback as the newly emerged leaders were not primarily workers and they had their own ideology and affiliations to follow.

As the ‘unskilled labour is incompetent to fight its own battles and can easily be made to yield in negotiations between them and their educated, resourceful and wide awake opponents’. It equally becomes the responsibility of the labour class not to follow merely the instructions of their leaders, but use this opportunity to orient themselves and take up the leadership in their own hands. The failure to do this would make them completely dependent on this class of leader, who may on occasions manipulate the situations and even bargain; so as to retain their positions in front of the management and the workers. ‘Eventually, labour shall find its leaders from among its own ranks’. Though we do find attempts were being made by some leaders to orient the workers about the situation across the world and they tried to draw the comparison like Mr. G. K. Devadhar, during one such session of the Servants

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45 S, D, Punekar, Trade Union Leadership in India, Lalvani publishing house, Bombay, 1967, pp. 1-3.
46 Desai, 1918-1920, op.cit., p. 326.
47 Desai, 1918-1920, op.cit.,p. 326.
48 Ibid., p. 395.
of India Society, spoke on “The Tendency of Labour Reforms in the West” he described the several stages through which the question of reforming labour conditions had passed, showing the present position of industrial labour in England in the matter of (1) the employment of children, (2) their age, (3) the employment of women in factories, (4) conditions under which the workmen had to labour, (5) the hours of work, (6) scale of wages, (7) other benefits, (8) labour organization and (9) the policy of the State.

Similarly, Mr. B. A. Nariman\(^\text{49}\) mentions about the enormous amount of work done in the West to educate the working class people, and it emphasizes that it was the duty of industrialists in India to see that labour in this country was well-provided education and the amenities of life. Another brilliant trade unionist was N. M. Joshi who was nominated a member of the Central Legislative Assembly to represent labour. Joshi held that position for over twenty-five years and rendered invaluable services to workers and the trade union movement. By his selfless, painstaking, and dignified work in the Assembly, he was able to secure the enactment of a number of labour laws and to invite the attention of the Government and the public to the many difficulties and disabilities of workers. He represented Indian labour in a number of national and international conferences and made use of those high forums for advocating its cause. His work in those conferences was of immense value to the movement\(^\text{50}\).

N. M. Joshi was associated with the All India Trade Union Congress since its inception. In 1925 he was elected the Joint General Secretary. Two years later he was elected the General Secretary. He held that post until the split in 1929. He organized an efficient office for the Congress. Under his guidance and influence, the Congress set up provincial committees and began to hold provincial conferences. It also started the publication of a journal, the Trade Union-Bulletin. In fact he along with Mr. A. C. Chatterjee was selected by the Government of India to represent the International Labour Conference in Washington as the Labour delegate. The internal rivalry and the caste politics did under shadowed his selection, when the Executive Committee of the People’s Union and Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha (Workingmen’s Association) of Bombay, Mr. Bole as the Secretary sent the resolution against him to the Prime Minister of England, Mr. Montague, with a copy to Mr. Lansbury,


\(^{50}\) Karnik, *op.cit.*, p. 42.
Lord Sydenham, and Mr. Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labour of Washington.

“The People’s Union and the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha (Workingmen’s Association) emphatically protest against the appointment of Mr. Joshi of the Servants of India Society as the Labour Delegate for unorganized Indian workingmen at the International Labour Conference in Washington. There were able and independent men available from the masses not belonging to any political party and the Government in selecting Mr. Joshi, a Brahman dependant on employers of labour, has watched more the interests of capitalists than labourers. Mr. Joshi’s selection without consulting any Labour bodies is against the principle of Article 389 of the Peace Treaty”\(^{51}\).

Another leader of the same stature was Chaman Lal, he also hoped to secure the support of the French Syndicalists. He was said to be determined to push on the organisation of Indian Labour under the Third International, and he expressed the intention of ‘attacking bitterly certain British Trade Unionists who were in India, and of exposing them to Indian workers as tools of the British capitalist’\(^{52}\). The strikes of 1918, 1919 and 1920 gave many leaders opportunity to test the ground for their leadership. Amidst it one such leadership emerged that of Joseph Baptist, who being a Christian was not affected by the divisive caste politics. He followed the Fabian Society and the British Labour Party. His local standing was respected for his six-year term as the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Municipal Corporation He was elected to Legislative Council in 1924, to the Mayoralty in 1925 and the Central Legislative Assembly in 1930, his untimely death cut short his bright political career in Bombay. The workers lost the golden opportunity to work for long-term with an enigmatic leader like him. The other young radicals in Bombay were also beginning to find a new ideology. Their mentor was R.B Lotwala, a socialist by ideology and an avid reader who developed his collections of volumes of philosophy and socialist literature available to the young minds. He encouraged study groups and made available his collection of books and pamphlets to them. He was also instrumental in supporting the newspaper of Dange, Socialist along with Joglekar and T.V. Parvate. Dange who had shot to fame with his pamphlet entitled *Gandhi vs Lenin*, which appeared in 1921 became the torch bearer for this new movement of the young intellectuals of the city. The role of S.V Ghathe and S.S Mirajkar also needs special

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\(^{51}\) Times of India 23-9-1919, col, 3, p . 7.

mention, as Mirajkar strived very hard to successfully associate with the Bombay unit of communist party ‘his distinctive contribution to the formation of a communist labour leadership was the somewhat negative quality of not being a Brahman, which made it easier for him to mix with ordinary workers\footnote{Newman, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 105.}.

Similarly the role of Mavji Govindji also needs mention who strongly believed that the city of Bombay has a vital role to play to organise the trade union activities to be followed by the nation. He emphasised that ‘the formation of National Political Assembly, the Indian National Congress, and now again had the privilege of bringing into being the first All-India Trade Union Congress’ \footnote{Desai, 1918-1920, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 30.} has some significant role to play in the national politics and the working class movement.

**Women Leaders:**

The account of women trade union leaders also gives us interesting facts like the name of Miss Maniben. Kara as she championed the cause of the labour class for twenty years and also represented the labour class point of view before International Labour Conferences. She served on various Government Committees and was also nominated on the Central Legislative Assembly, she was court arrested twice and also adorned the President ship of the All-India Trade Union Congress as well as that of the Indian Federation of Labour in the later part she also became the President of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. The other prominent names were, Mrs. Shanta Mukherjee, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, Mrs. Ambika Joglekar, Mrs. Prabhashini Banerjee, Dr. Mrs. Maitreyi Bose, Mrs. Indirabai Ruikar, Mrs. Khedgikar, Mrs. Leela Alwaris, Mrs. Parvatibai Bhore, Mrs. Pujari, Mrs. Radhabai Kambale, Mrs. Bayanbai Deshmukh and Mrs. Dhondabai were some of the noted women who played an important part in India’s Trade Union movement. Mrs. Shanta Mukherjee was the Assistant Secretary of the All-India T.U.C for two years. Mrs. Pujari, a woman working in a textile mill was on the Executive of the Bombay National T.U.C Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali was also one of the Executive, Indirabai Ruikar played a prominent part in the labour class struggles in Madhya Pradesh. Mrs. Parvatibai Bhore was on the Executive of the Bombay Provincial Trade Union Congress and took an active part in the struggles of textile workers since 1938. Mrs. Ambika Joglekar and Mrs. Radhabai Kambale, also played prominent role in encouraging participation of
women workers in the working class movement. Mrs. Shanta Mukherjee had started a monthly “Sharmika Mahila” which was exclusively devoted to the problems of women workers similarly Mrs. Ambika Joglekar had started Kamgar Khabar a weekly.55

In 1921 out of the 77 members of the standing committee of AITUC the only women members were Miss Chattopadhyaya, Miss Reuben, Mrs Avantikabai Gokhale.56 If in the West labour slowly emancipated itself from poverty and slavery and has secured and preserved a decent standard of life with some practical vision of its coming status in new society, it was due to strikers and not due to welfare work or charitable associations. The only salutary substitute for strikes is to recognize the workers will in the mechanism of production, to make him in an industry a citizen and not a subject in a word to grant industrial self-government. The labour class of India, however, ‘did not confine itself into day to day Trade Union movement to realise economic demands alone with the consolidation of its own strength the working class of India stirring itself up from the stage of day to day economic struggles began to appear increasingly as a distinct force in the political arena of India.57 The post-war boom ended in 1922. A period of depression did not immediately set in, but the industrial profits began to decline, consequently the response to workers demands became more and more harsh. A number of strikes failed and workers lost their immediate incentive to form and build up unions.

The series of strikes58 continued to take place as the following Table XII will show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Stoppages</th>
<th>Number of workers involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>3,12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>2,70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1,87,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


58 Karnik, *op.cit.*, p . 41.
The years from 1926 to 1929 constitute an eventful phase of the working-class movement of India, big strikes were conducted during these years. Although the government tried to dub these strikes as ‘communist conspiracies’, these struggles, led by the communists in many cases, were in fact, a sharp manifestation of the simmering discontent of a working-class afflicted with crushing problems⁵⁹.

The labour class movement in India which started extensively growing after the World War I made rapid advance during the subsequent two decades and assumed a very significant role in the national-political movement of India on the eve of another imminent war. Internationally it was a period of gathering strength by the fascist forces, both Italy and Germany had gone under their political sway. The imperialist taught the working class and peasantry in India that the splendid isolation of feudal India is broken up, that its economy is now influenced by international factors⁶⁰. Almost all the future communists were active non-co-operators. In retrospect, they ‘had reservations about Gandhi’s comic over-amplification of the issues, but they were impressed by the scope of his movement and its potential as an instrument of reform’⁶¹. After the successful Russian Revolution and the establishment of the first Workers’ State, a new specter haunted the British Rulers in India, a specter of what would happen if the new Socialist ideology took the grip of the Indian working class.

In order to crush the rise of Socialist ideas in India, the British Government launched a policy of severe repression to terrorise the Indian people against the revolutionary socialist ideology and the attempts of its handful of young revolutionary leaders to establish contacts abroad and associate with the International Working Class in their common cause of national and social emancipation⁶². ‘Moscow gold’ helped substantially many communist activities and adventures. Communist work in trade unions began roundabout 1923. It began in the two cities of Bombay and Calcutta. Some younger workers in the movement were won over to the

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⁵⁹ Sen, op.cit., p. 232.

⁶⁰ Bani Deshpande, Roza Deshpande, Umakant Mokashi (ed), Selected Writings : S.A.Dange, Lok Vangmaya Griha publication, Vol-II Bombay, 1979, p. 20.


communist way of thinking. In fact in 1920 the Government declared that there was a situation of “Communist menace” in India and made every effort to suppress and annihilate the militant section of the labour movement, to isolate it, and create public opinion against it. The Trade Disputes Act, the Meerut Conspiracy Case, and the Public Safety Act were some of the measures taken in quick succession to achieve this objective. The events between 1920 and 1930 allowed the labour leaders more popularity than merely suppressing their movements. The nation on the other was preparing for a national upheaval under the leadership of Indian National Congress and we see parallel to it the consciousness amongst the workers against the unjust laws and exploitation by the naïve Indian capitalist class.

The emergence of the leaders also displays a distinct trend during that as it was the culmination of multiple factors. The class struggle in Bombay was not to just reckon the native entrepreneurs, but also to carve put space for the newly emerging class which would become the main catalyst of the growing economy of the nation. What was interesting is that though there were attempts to combine the class struggle into a revolutionary movement to over throw both the masters ie. Colonial and capitalist, but it failed to garner the required support from the fellow countrymen. Unlike the revolutionaries of the freedom struggle even the workers and the labour class was not able to create it as a mass based movement.

The movement and the leaders were always condemned as outsiders or not one amongst the workforce which perhaps was due to their non participatory approach inside the premises of the mills. The argument however has another advantage that it offered the leaders more bargaining power on behalf of the workers as they were not the direct beneficiaries of the same. The mill management was not able to victimize or enforce their arbitrary guidelines on them. The leaders of the movement emphasized more on the mobilization for the cause or rather to promote their ideological umbrella to them. The multiple unions during these times also suggest that the mill owners did not know which union rightly and credibly reflected the workers views. This sometimes also led to the workers and labour class getting divided over the call of the strike. The non uniformity in responding to the cause of the labour class at times became strong reasons for the withdrawal and failure of the strikes.

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63 Karnik, op.cit., p. 51.
The chord of the labour consciousness was strongly hit after the First World War, but the labour leadership in India was not prepared to respond to it. We do not find them to be in the supportive position during the Great economic depression worldwide. The labour movement in India at this point of time was in its nascent phase, but there international exposure was very wide and varied, still they were unable to offer the support system to the workers during those five years of economic depression. The methods, of applying Context and Process as part of leadership was not visible in the application mode from any labour leader at that time. We find them more involved in claiming the numerical supremacy of the membership rather than resolving the issues. The labour movement on various occasions was directionless and it looked at the Congress leaders for some kind of allied support. The next chapter will deal with the emergence of trade union leaders, who advocated the cause of the labpur and the working class. It will identify the factors for their rise and evaluate to what extent they were successful in their objectives.

SUPPLEMENTARY TO CHAPTER: 2

Role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the Labour Movement:

Background: The roles of various leaders in the Bombay region during the second decade of 20th century were not only effective in generating economic consciousness, but it equally led to the scope for the emergence of a new leader who went beyond the cause of the labourers and the workers. He brought with him a new dimension to look at the struggle of the working class which was missed out by both the early trade unionist and by the Congress party. This stalwart of modern India was Dr. Bhimrao. Ambedkar aka Babasaheb.

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65 The following Chapter should be considered as Supplementary to Chapter-2 of the main Thesis on Emergence of the Labour Movement in Bombay: A Historical Study (1920-1945) of Avkash Jadhav for his Ph D Degree which was submitted on 27th November, 2017. It is been added on the suggestion given by the External Referee Dr. Deepak. Gaikwad.
Ambedkar. He was born on 14th April, 1891. The early life of Ambedkar taught him some serious lessons about life and sufferings which made him associate better with the marginalized and his caste brethrens. He was an erudite scholar and one of the finest economists India could ever produce.

He was awarded the degrees of M.A and Ph. D in Economics by the Columbia University, U.S.A in 1915 and 1917. He also studied at the London School of Economics and India Office Library. He was probably the first leader to associate economic perspective to the social maladies prevalent in Indian society. He was appointed as a Probationer in the office of Accountant General of Baroda.

He later on practiced law at the Bombay High Court and also took up the position of Professor and Principal of the Government Law College. For ten years the untouchable Barrister and Professor lived in one of the ‘Bombay Development Department’s chawls at Parel’66. These chawls were big five-storied buildings, each containing about 100 one-room tenements. They possessed no modern conveniences, each floor had a single lavatory and a single tap for bathing, washing and cleaning cooking utensils. Most of the tenants were mill hands earning on an average Rs. 25 per month. While living under these conditions, Dr. Ambedkar acquired a firsthand knowledge of the life among the workers of Bombay. As rightly said it was this boast that ‘hundreds of mill hands know him personally and have sought his advice and assistance’67. He strongly represented the cause of the Schedule Caste and the marginalized in all the Three Round Table conferences in London.

In the due course he was also nominated on the Legislative Council of Bombay in 1926 and again in 1937, he got elected on the Bombay Legislative Assembly as a rightful representative of the Schedule Caste of Bombay under the aegis of his own political party (will be dealt later elaborately). He was finally inducted in the Cabinet as the Labour Minister in 1942 till 1946. He played crucial role in the Joint Parliamentary Committee which drafted the Bill of the Government of India Act in 1935. His inputs were not only valued, but added the required flair to it.

Ambedkar also wrote extensively some of his prominent books are the The Problem of the Rupee, Provincial Finance in British India, Annihilation of Caste”, Federation versus Freedom, What Gandhi and Congress did to the Untouchables and Thoughts on Pakistan.

67 Ibid.
His journalistic mind led to the emergence of Muka Nayak in 1919, then Bahishkrata Bharat in 1923 and finally Janata. The topics and issues covered in these books or the newspaper made him reach out to the larger masses and it indeed added to his appeal.

**Influence on Dr. Ambedkar:**

Ambedkar had studied various scholars and their philosophy which helped him to shape up his philosophy and work on the strategy to eradicate the injustice from the Indian society. He was an acute and avid reader and he strongly followed William Garrison of the U.S, who strived towards the cause of apartheid movement. William Garrison fought for their civil rights and had started his newspaper by the name Liberator for engaging in the public opinion.

Ambedkar also closely followed Edmund Burke and he describes Burke as ‘the greatest teacher of political philosophy’\(^68\). The political philosophy of Burke has often been quoted by him on different occasions.

In political affairs and in social matters, where the public opinion has always been counted, Ambedkar agreed with Burke’s views that ‘the use of force alone is but temporary, public opinions or the mass psychology cannot be changed by the lashes of whips or by using the police or the military force’\(^69\). On the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar, we can certainly infer that there was a great impact of Burke on him. Ambedkar’s every piece of writing and his speeches were loaded with quotations from the philosophy of great thinkers of the world.

He referred to other great western thinkers, like Jefferson, Bezzot, Adison, Hamilton, Dicey, Bagehot and a number of constitutionalists\(^70\). He was equally influenced by the British Liberal John Stuart Mill, who had studied the society in all its aspects and more important scientifically. Mill’s political theories have been prominently reflected in his books *The Principles of Political Economy* and *On Liberty*. His theories are important landmarks in the history of British liberalism. In the analysis of political economy he showed much more sympathy towards the human suffering. In the words of Morley, ‘He was one of the great

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teachers of his age and acknowledged philosophical leader of English liberalism”\textsuperscript{71}. Dr. Ambedkar was well acquainted with the liberal philosophy of Mill. Although Ambedkar was an independent thinker, he had taken many ideas from Mill and quoted his views in support of his opinions at a number of places. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar refers to the views of Mill from his book \textit{On Liberty} on the problem of the oppression of minority by the majority, ‘The will of the people, moreover, practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people, the majority, the people, consequently may desire to oppress a part of their number and precautions are as much needed against this as against any other abuse of power. The limitation, therefore, of the power of the government over individuals loses none of its importance when the holders of power are regularly accountable to the community that is to be strongest party therein... The tyranny if the majority is now generally included amongst the evils against which the society requires to be on its guards’\textsuperscript{72}.

On various occasions the stand taken by Ambedkar made him face fierce opposition from various sections of the society especially the ones who did not wanted the elevation of the downtrodden. On such occasions Ambedkar reminded them of the work of another great French scholar Voltaire’s statement that ‘Who writes the history of his own times must expect to be attacked for everything he has said and for everything he has not said, but these little drawbacks should not discourage a man who loves truth and liberty, expects nothing, fears nothing, asks nothing and limits his ambition to the cultivation of letters’\textsuperscript{73}. It is equally interesting to note the way Ambedkar being an economist by qualification was able to imbibe many of these western thinkers to shape up his ideology and philosophy as he was aware that they were time tested and had brought the desired results.

While advocating his political philosophy he also very often quoted Harold Laski especially his views regarding the moral order of the society. He strongly believed in the following quote of Laski ‘Reason and toleration are attitudes of mind in human beings. They depend upon an environment about which men feel passionately. Their function only as legitimate expectations are fulfilled by those who have firmly them. When those expectations are

\textsuperscript{71} Morley John (Quoted by Lancaster), \textit{Masters of Political Thought}, Vol. II, OUP, Clacutta,1973, p.102


\textsuperscript{73} Ambedkar B. R., \textit{What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables}, Thacker and Sons,Bombay,1945, p. v. Preface.
insecure, men are no capable of service to reason and toleration than they have been in the past ages. Their ideas of right and wrong are largely born of their position in the society. The intellectual stimulation made him more volatile and he was ‘all sound and fury against social injustice. His weaponry was legal –political, his anathema Hindu caste exclusivism and his ambition social democracy. His life was planning forge, his commitment was to free the ancient unfree, his economics, law and politics were welded into a constitutional militancy and geared to social emancipation movement.

Ambedkar strongly advocated through his writings and his movements the process of Social Justice. The concept of Social justice the reference first appeared in 1840 when a Sicilian priest, Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio defined and it was further documented by Antonio Rosmini- Serbati through his famous work which was titled La Costituzione Civile Secondo la Giustizia Sociale in 1848. It was further used by the British authors such as John Stuart Mill, Leslie Stephen and Henry Sidgwick who associated their writings to this term. John Stuart Mill gave this anthropomorphic approach of social questions, almost the required canonical status, when he observed that society should treat all equally well, who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when the term social justice came to prominence, it was first used as an appeal to the ruling classes, so to attend to the needs of the new masses, the uprooted peasants who had become urban workers. In the due course theorizing about social justice became a major concern in the early years of the twentieth century, and the first book actually called Social Justice was published in New York in 1900.

Social justice can be rightly understood in two senses.

First, ‘the skills it requires are those of inspiring, working with, and

organizing others to accomplish together a work of justice\textsuperscript{78}.

The second characteristic is that it aims at the good of the society, not at the good of one agent only\textsuperscript{79}.

The basic premise of social justice is the emancipation of the underprivileged, exploited, and oppressed sections of society. Its main aim is to liberate mankind from traditional bondages of social and economic exploitation and discrimination. It ‘postulates a social order which can guarantee freedom and equal rights to all sections of society’\textsuperscript{80}.

It was the sense of this social justice which made him appear before the Simon Commission on 29\textsuperscript{th} May, 1928, wherein he submitted a statement before the Indian Statutory Commission in which he demanded protection through adequate representation to the Depressed Classes. While addressing the issue he wrote in his ‘Statement Concerning the Safeguards for the protection of their interests in the Bombay Presidency, and the changes in the composition of and the guarantees from the Bombay Legislative Council necessary to ensure the same under Provincial Autonomy’\textsuperscript{81}. He considered socio-economic justice as the precondition for redeeming political justice.

As rightly stated by Franklin D Roosevelt ‘No business which depends for existence on paying less, than living wages to its workers, has any right to continue in this country’. He began his work as soon as he became the member of Bombay Legislative Council in 1928. He organised a peasant march with Mr. Parulekar, S. C. Joshi, D. W. Raut, Indulal Yagnik and A. V. Chitre to Bombay Council hall\textsuperscript{82}. The deputationists was the enforcement of the minimum standard of wages for agricultural labourers. He also introduced Mahar Vatan Abolition Bill in the Council in 1928 in the interest of landless agricultural labourers.

\textsuperscript{78} Novak, op.cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. p. 12.
\textsuperscript{81} Jeanette Robbin, Dr. Ambedkar and his Movement, Hyderabad, Dr. Ambedkar Publication Society, 1964, p. 131. Also See Writings and Speeches Vol. Vol II, 1982. The testimony/Evidence of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar with Simon Commission on 23\textsuperscript{rd} October, 1928.
Political and Economic Thoughts of Ambedkar:

Ambedkar, promoted democracy and according to him the tenets of Political democracy rests on four pillars:

(1) The individual is an end in himself.

(2) The individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the constitution.

(3) The individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege and

(4) The state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others.\(^{83}\)

The dignity of the individual always rested on the following factors ie political liberty, social progress, economic opportunities, social welfare and equality before law, they all constitute the democratic ideals in any democracy. So in tune to this philosophy Ambedkar believed they need a defined structure to execute these ideals and as he said, ‘indeed, the social structure has a profound effect on the political structure. It may modify it in its working. It may nullify it or it may even make a mockery of it.\(^{84}\)

It should also be added that political thinking of Ambedkar is by no means a philosophical cogitation of an armchair philosopher; it is the outcome of a close interaction between thought and action that took place over a long conflict-ridden life of

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\(^{83}\) Ambedkar B R, States and Minorities, what are their Rights and How to secure them in the Free Constitution of India, Thacker & Company Limited, Bombay, 1947, p. 32.

\(^{84}\) Ambedkar, Thoughts on Linguistic States, Ram Krishna Printing Press, Bombay, 1955, p. 34
a political activist. As such, Ambedkar’s thinking is a guide to experience as well as chiseled by experience\textsuperscript{85}.

It needs to be understood that any revolutionary thinker or leader receives as a legacy a body of ideas, which have appeared from time to time, to stir up human imagination and action; it is these ideas that have become an integral part of our intellectual heritage. Similarly it was the life experience of Ambedkar that impelled him to articulate his ideas and determine his action choices for himself and others who he thought were similarly situated. By this in India, too, the climate of opinion had subtly changed to make the liberal view of man and his world much more palatable. This was further facilitated by a process of inversion that the British presence in India contrived. The process of inversions initiated by what William Jones calls ‘the wand of empire’\textsuperscript{86} was to completely transform the orientation and attitude of at least the intellectuals belonging to the upper strata of Indian society. These ‘inversions went to a long way in propelling an organic society that India happened to be for ages towards becoming an atomistic society. It is this movement that has constituted a great dividing line between traditional and modern India\textsuperscript{87}.

Ambedkar had his opinion on the poverty he called it to be a sin and a crime. ‘To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to prevent, Ambedkar notes, religion, to perpetuate vice and crime and to make earth a living hell’\textsuperscript{88}. He further elaborated that if poverty is tolerated, the consequence is that the poor are made to suffer wants, privation and humiliation not because it was preordained by the sins committed in their previous births, but because of the overhearing tyranny and treachery of those who are above them\textsuperscript{89}.

\textsuperscript{87} Mishra, Ramashray, op.cit., p. 51.

He expressed this view on 4\textsuperscript{th} January, 1938 in Sholapur in reply to the address
While discussing the concept of opinions and majoritarinism state in India, he believed that many a times the opinion was neglected just because it was not in majority has no value or is not considered. He defined democracy as ‘a form of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed’.

And the first thing, among others, essential for the successful functioning of democracy is to see that ‘there are no glaring inequalities and there must not either be oppressed class or a suppressed class’.

It is important to note that his ideology on political and social reforms should be called as precursors, in order to dwell in his role of the labour movement in India.

He makes a sharp distinction between political and social reforms. In his Ranade Memorial lecture he referred to two schools of reforms, one of which favoured social reforms and the other opted for political reforms to remove social ills. He specifically mentioned Justice Telang who, Ambedkar pointed out, held that ‘political reforms were more effective and should have precedence over social reforms’. He rejects this on several grounds one of which needs special mention. He calls Telang’s thesis absurd unless ‘the idea is that the Government should reward those who have vested rights and to penalize those who have none’.

He insisted that a democratic policy committed to the ideal of state socialism must guarantee to all the life of reason. This is possible if everybody has enough leisure to seek the attainment of culture and refinement. This is possible only when physical appetites of the individual are amply satisfied. For this to happen, the use of machines and technologically induced economic growth, that is

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92 See ANNEXURE-A. The speech delivered on Parliamentary Democracy.


95 See ANNEXURE-A.
industrialization, become inevitable. But industrialization alone would fail to solve the economic problem facing India. What is also needed is to make large input of capital and heavy mechanization of agriculture. Thus ‘intensive development of the country’s industry and agriculture must take place side by side’.

Ambedkar equated democracy with fraternity. As he said:

‘An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for covering carrying over a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social osmosis. This is fraternity that is the only other name of democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essential an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen.’

The emphasis was to bring the equilibrium in the society where the capitalist did not threaten the working class and it enabled to balance liberty and equality. While explaining his economic theories we find him bringing the heavy artillery of ‘neo-classical theory of marginal utility developed by “Cournot, Gossen, Walras, Menger and Jevons’’. His books and papers were full of appropriate citations from the great contemporary economists, Irving Fisher, Alfred Marshall, Richard Ely, Alfred Kemmerer, Allyn Young and John Maynard Keynes to name a few.

While addressing the inevitable change he said ‘Society is always conservative. It does not change unless it is compelled to and that too very slowly. When change begins, there is always a struggle between the old and the new, and the new is always in danger of being eliminated in the struggle for survival unless it is supported’.

96 Keer, op.cit., p. 389.
100 Ibid.
In his theoretical formulations, one can see his affinity to Arthur Lewis model of economic development based on the existence of unlimited supply of labour, to others based on inter-sectoral linkages of labour and capital and also to the underlying economic assumptions of the Indian strategy of planned economic development. His idea of democracy was experimenting with socialism realism along with economic equity added with human experience and reason; it was full of pragmatic and humanistic approach towards the nation building.

**Ambedkar’s views on Labour:**

Ambedkar had realized that he was treading on a very difficult turf, when he planned to enter into the labour politics in 1929 in Bombay. The textile industry was primarily dominated by the Communists and the socialist. With his vocal political and economic thoughts of a just society he ventured into the cause of the textile workers in Bombay. The left wing in Bombay were preparing for another upheaval in the arena of industrial unrest. The unsuccessful attempt of the strike of 1928 now made them more volatile and they declared another strike on 26th April, 1929. The movement was spearheaded by the Girni Kamgar Union. It was more of the retaliation to the high handedness of the employer who had vindictively replaced the workers who actively participated in the 1928 strike.

After judiciously studying the situation Ambedkar felt that the ‘weapon of strike should be used sparingly and to the advantage of the workers and not for the political objectives of the communist leaders’. The views of Ambedkar suddenly added a new dimension to the strike; he strongly alleged in his column that ‘the communists were impelled to resort to a strike more with

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103 See ANNEXURE- A.
political objectives than with the object of bettering the lot of the workers\textsuperscript{105}. There was reason why Ambedkar felt so closely to this, as according to him the Communist and socialist never took up the cause of the depressed class workers in the industry, who went through the double jeopardy.

According to him they were deliberately kept ‘away from the lucrative departments in the Mill industry on account of untouchability’\textsuperscript{106}. He felt that the workers at the moment were not prepared to go through another economic crisis as that will add to their perilous situation which was caused due the 1928 strike. He further felt that the issue of their debts and the reason for this vicious cycle also needs to be addressed; the much ignored role of the \textit{Sahukars and the creditors} needed equal attention. The process of the strike should not push the textile workers of Bombay to further misery. Ambedkar, therefore, declared that ‘it was their right to resort to strike with a view to bettering their conditions. There should be a change for the better; it should be affected without doing any harm to the interests of the workers. The disease should be cured without impairing the condition of the patient, he concluded\textsuperscript{107}. This was more apt way of dealing with the situation.

Ambedkar, with two other labour leaders, R. R. Bakhale and Shyamrao Parulekar, carried a very extensive propaganda to counteract the propaganda of the Girmi Kamgar Union. The Textile Labour Union called a meeting of workers on April 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1929, at the Damodar Hall, Bombay. Ambedkar presided over the meeting which concluded after passing a resolution against launching the strike\textsuperscript{108}. The slow and steady popularity which he received made him realise that the textile workers are the formidable force and they need to be directed well. The next few years kept Ambedkar busy in the Round Table Conferences at London and with his social movements for the upliftment of the depressed class.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Keer, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 130.
Factors for the formation of Independent Labour Party (ILP):
The efforts in the labour movements were led by his predecessors like Jyotiba Phule, Narayan Meghaji Lokhande and Tilak which now needed a much required jolt to make it a mass mobilised movement. He felt as there must be a group of representatives to present the grievances of the workers. According to Ambedkar, a trade union may have three different objectives:

(i) Purpose connected with the promotion of their particular interest as workers, wages, hours of work, promotions in industry, etc.

(ii) Social purposes conferring certain benefits, giving old age pension, giving unemployment benefit to these members, providing pensions for their widows, etc.

(iii) Political purpose, viz. freedom to promote a particular line of politics, which the union thinks well suited for the protection of its economic and social position. Ambedkar did not believe in merely floating a party. He felt it should have a practical programme and it must address two things:

In the first place it must establish contact with the masses. It must go out amongst the masses with its wares, its principles, policies, ideas and candidates.

Secondly, it must carry on propaganda amongst the masses in favour of its wares. It was for this he wanted a vigorous propaganda of the party programme in society.

He strongly believed that a political party is formed by men and their ideas. He said, ‘Men are mortal. So are ideas. It is wrong to hold that an idea will take roots pro-prio-vigore. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Both will otherwise wither and die. According to him Men are not interested in principles and policies, but they are interested in accomplishing things. What is necessary for a party is to bring about concerted

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action'.

The political development post The 1935 Govt of India Act, were rapid and India was about to experience the taste of Provincial autonomy. Each political party now began to consolidated and worked on its strategy to expand. It was amidst this that Ambedkar thought of launching his party. It was suppose to address causes of the poverty of the agriculturists and the way out was rehabilitation of old industries and starting new ones. For the benefit of industrial workers the party would endeavour to introduce legislation to control the employment, dismissal and promotion of employees in factories, to fix maximum hours of work, to make provision for adequate wages and for leave with pay and to provide cheap and sanitary.

Moreover, the British Government had passed the Government of India Act in August 1935, which envisaged representation for Indians in the Central and State legislatures on a large scale. Accordingly, the General elections were to be held in 1937. The political parties in India were preparing to contest elections under their respective political banners. It was more than natural that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar also intended to participate in the election under the banner of a political party. According to the Act of 1935, the Bombay Legislative Assembly was to be composed of 175 members, out of which the Scheduled Castes got only 15 seats which were to be elected by a joint electorate as per the Poona Pact. Ambedkar thought that the seats allotted to the Scheduled Castes were meagre in proportion to the general seats. Therefore, he felt it was necessary to contest the elections on his own for a better representation of his candidates.

**Independent Labour Party:** The political situation around that time compelled him to form a political party which could accommodate Dalits and non-Dalits and serve the interests of poor Dalit labourers, and peasants. He announced the name of the party as The Independent Labour Party (henceforth ILP) it was meant to serve the interests of almost all the oppressed. When he was asked what ‘labour’ means, he explained that ‘the word ‘labour’ is used instead of the words ‘Depressed Classes’, because labour includes the depressed classes as well’. The Independent Labour Party was obviously a liberal political party.

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Its object was to bring about suitable socio-economic reforms for the well-being of the common masses. It had faith in peace and constitutional means for achieving these ends. The ILP was not a communal or sectarian party at all. It was expected to be a political platform for all the Scheduled Castes and like-minded caste Hindus equally. It was to work for the betterment of the working-class including Dalits.

It needs to be also remembered while studying the genesis of ILP, that the era from 1920-30 in Bombay was under the influence of the communist leaders. The strikes of 1924, 1925, 1928 & 1929 were massive and it shook the textile industry the strike of April 1929 saw the involvement of 43 textile mills and more than 75,000 workers participating in it. The strike of April 1934 was also on the similar ground. Ambedkar looked at all these strikes as politically motivated. He strongly felt the dalit workers had major economic loss during this time and he wrote about it through his weekly ‘Bahishkrut Bharat’ and later in ‘Janta’ newspaper. His blunt views were condemned by the socialists and they went to the extent of calling him ‘Anti-labour or Enemy of the workers’114.

The foundation of the I.L.P. was formally declared by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on 15th August, 1936. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar became its President and Treasurer, with Shri M. B. Samarth, its Secretary, the position of two Joint Secretaries Shri K. V. Chitre and Shri S. A. Upashyam. The party had its flag with red colour and in the centre Independent labour party was written. On the upper left side of the flag there were 11 stars, it indicated 11 regions of India115. The ILP declared its manifesto before the general elections to be held in 1937. The main principles of the manifesto were as under:

(1) **Political Programme:** The party observed that the Act of 1935 was full of defects, but it was prepared to accept the same with certain modifications. It stood for a representative and responsive Government. It promised to strive for good, efficient and honest administration. It promised to secure the separation of the judiciary from the executive. Further, it promised to give fair opportunity to all castes and communities in the administration.

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(2) **Economic Policy:** The party thought that agriculture should be developed. Therefore, it undertook to establish financial agencies like land Mortgage Bank, Co-operative Credit Societies & Marketing Societies. The party thought fragmentation of holdings a ‘severe handicap’ in development of agriculture. It promised to protect agricultural tenants from the exactions of and evictions by the landlords, especially the Khots and Talukdars. In order to minimize the pressure of increasing population on agriculture, the party proposed to encourage prospective entrepreneurs to start industries and business. It proposed to provide technical or professional education for improving technical know-how. In order to improve the economic condition of the industrial workers, it proposed to make laws to fix hours of work, adequate wages, leave with wages, promotion and retrenchment and to provide cheap and sanitary dwellings for the workers. It even thought to apply the principles of state management and state ownership of industry in the interest of the people.

(3) **Social Policy:** The party proposed to undertake legislation for all necessary social reforms and for preventing social ostracism and boycott. It proposed to deal with the problem of beggars and other destitute. It promised to bring about suitable changes in the outlook of the village people. It promised to amend the ‘Vatan’ system in a way suited to modern conditions.

(4) **Educational Policy:** The party promised free and compulsory primary education. It proposed to undertake the scheme of adult education also. It proposed to facilitate higher education and promised to provide educational facilities to the educationally backward communities\textsuperscript{116}.

Ambedkar launched his election campaign with more vigour and enthusiasm. Though it was a party in its inception stage, he didn’t mince words while addressing the issues. He was clearly aware that he will have to face the age old and strongholds of many political rivals. His new Party was mostly confined to the Bombay Province\textsuperscript{117}. He was of the opinion that his party would require more clear representation than what was in the offering ie. only 15 reserved seats out of 175 seats for the reserved caste. He was sure that without any political party either the Congress or the Socialist would dominate on those

\textsuperscript{116} A Centenary Commemoration, *op.cit.*, pp. 148-149.

\textsuperscript{117} Keer, *op.cit.*, p. 289.
seats. He convened the first meeting of ILP at the Kamgar Maidan\textsuperscript{118}, in Bombay.

The ILP contested in all 35 seats, the first stage of 20 seats (13 Reserved and 7 General seats) for the Bombay Provincial Assembly. It also went on to contest 15 seats (10 Reserved and 5 General seats) for the C. P (Central Provinces) and Berar Assembly. The elections were held on 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1937. In the Bombay Presidency, the ILP could win 14 seats (11 Reserved and 3 General seats). The candidates who got elected on reserved seats and their constituencies were, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Bombay City, North), Shri B.K. Gaikwad (Nasik West), P. J. Roham (Ahmednagar South), R. R. Bhole (Pune-West), J. S. Aidale (Solapur North-east), D. G. Jadhav (Khandesh East), K. S. Sawant (Satara North), Baburao Bhatankar (Thane South), Gangadhar Ghatge (Ratnagiri), B. H. Varale (Belgaum North) and Revappa S. Kale (Bijapur North). Those candidates elected on General seats and their constituencies were, Bhausaheb Gadkari (Pune-East), Bhai Chitre (Ratnagiri-North) and Shyamrao Parulekar (Ratnagiri-South).

From the region of the Central Provinces and Berar, 7 candidates were elected on reserved seats and none was elected on general seats. The candidates elected on reserved seats and their constituencies were: Shri L. N. Hardas (Nagpur-Kamathi), Raghobaji Ghodichor (Bhandara-Sakoli), Devaji Bhivaji Khobragade (Chanda-Brahmapuri), D. K. Bhagat (Yeotmal-Darva), Sitaram Patil (Nagpur-Umred), Deshrath Laxman Patil (Hinganhat-Wardha) and Ganpat Jambhulkar (Chindawada-Sonsar). Apart from this, two members – Dr. Purushottam Solanki (S. C.) and S. C. Joshi (Non S. C.) were nominated by the Governor to the Bombay Legislative Council. This clearly displayed that the ILP could achieve a spectacular success in its first attempt\textsuperscript{119}.

Ambedkar reiterated his views and expressed his firm determination to work for the new constitution for what it was worth in the best interests of the Depressed Classes. The first general meeting of the Independent Labour Party was held at, Nagpada, Bombay, on 7\textsuperscript{th} August, 1937. Ambedkar was elected President and Treasurer, M. B. Samartha, Bar at law, General Secretary, the other Secretaries were K.V. Chitre and S. A. Upasham. K. V. Chitre as the provisional organizer and who was also called the trusted chief of staff in Ambedkar’s personal

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{119} A Centenary Commemoration, op.cit., p. 152.
Cabinet. While addressing the general meeting, Ambedkar said that it did not occur to him to move at the time of the R.T.C. proceedings that the cabinet of every Province should contain a representative of the Depressed Classes\textsuperscript{120}.

It should be noted that ‘when Ambedkar floated ILP many socialist leaders felt that this party will create further split amongst the workers and so there was no need for the independent labour party’\textsuperscript{121}. While addressing a rally at Manmad of Railway Workers Union, Ambedkar had explained the objective of such party.

He said “While raising the issues of the textile workers, the dalit workers always get secondary treatment or they are neglected by the leaders due to the fear that they may lose their over other workers and so a party is needed to also safeguard the rights of the dalits. He further went on to prove that how the dalits many times lose out on the opportunities and promotions due to their caste\textsuperscript{122}.

The role played by the ILP in the politics of Bombay, and the C. P. and Berar and in the national politics, is of great importance. It can be summarized in the following way:

1) **The Political Aspects:** Thought the ILP thought that the Act of 1935 was not fully acceptable, it did not oppose the Act. Babasaheb Ambedkar could not favour the idea of the Federation envisaged in the Act. He thought that people in India ought to be free from the slavery of princedom and bureaucracy. When the British Government declared India’s participation in the war against the Axis countries, Ambedkar declared his full support to the government. He, however, declared that ‘it was unfair to India that it should have no voice in her foreign policy in declaring war and in the making of peace’\textsuperscript{123}.

2) **The Economic Aspects:** The role of the ILP in the economic affairs is vital importance. It was on 17\textsuperscript{th} September 1937, that a Bill was proposed in the Legislative Assembly as part of ILP agenda, to abolish the Khoti system of land tenure (an exploitative serfdom of agricultural tenants) prevailing in the Konkan region. It aimed at abolishing the Khoti system with a view to securing occupancy rights to the tenants. It was indeed the first of kinds attempt by any Indian Leader to

\textsuperscript{120} Keer, *op.cit.*, pp. 294-95.
\textsuperscript{121} Jadhav Narendra, *op.cit.*, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{122} *Ibid.*
\textsuperscript{123} A Centenary Commemoration, *op.cit.*, p. 153.
address this issue. The Bill contemplating the same issue was later on also introduced by S. C. Joshi, ILP member, in the Legislative Council\textsuperscript{124}. Similarly a peasant’s march was arranged on 10\textsuperscript{th} January 1938, to protest against the ‘Khoti’ system and it also submitted a memorandum of demands on behalf of the agricultural tenants and the peasants.

We also see him Ambedkar staunchly opposed the Industrial Disputes Bill of 1938 (discussed in detail later) introduced by the then Congress Government. The said Bill proposed was to make strikes illegal in certain circumstances. However, the Congress Government passed it, irrespective of strong opposition to it from the opposition. Therefore, a one-day strike was successfully observed by the ILP and other opposition parties and trade unions in Bombay on 7\textsuperscript{th} November 1938 to protest against the anti-labour policy of the Congress government.

The ILP also played an important role in solving labour problems in the C. P. and the Berar province also. The ILP member Shri R. G. Ghodichor introduced a Bill in 1939, to improve the lot of the bidi-workers in the Vidarbha region, but it was in vain. Ambedkar convened the Railway Workers’ Conference at Manmad on Feb12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1938, where he asserted very categorically that, ‘there were two enemies of the working classes in the country and they were Brahminism and Capitalism’\textsuperscript{125}. Thus, he tried to bring about a new awareness amongst the labourers in India and Bombay in special.

3) **The Social Aspects:** The philosophy of his party was to reconstruct the Indian society on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity\textsuperscript{126}. The ILP was definitely successful in leaving an indelible mark in the national politics post 1937 elections.

The success of 1937 elections made Ambedkar more vocal and in his presidential address to the G.I.P. Railway Depressed Class Conference held at Manmad on February 12\textsuperscript{th} – 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1938, he appealed to the labourers and the working class ‘you must join a political party which is based upon class interests and class consciousness. Applying this test, I find no other party than the Independent Labour Party which you can join without detriment to your

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{125} A Centenary Commemoration, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
interests’. He lamented on the facts that the labour never got the scope to discuss their economic grievances.

Ambedkar then asked the untouchable workers to compare the opportunities of their class with those of a worker who were not an untouchable, and said that the untouchable workers had less opportunities of obtaining work, securing service or advancement in his respective occupation. He observed that it was notorious that there were many appointments from which a Depressed Class worker was shut out by reason of the fact that he was an untouchable especially in the textile industry. In other words, he told the workers that they must uproot Brahminism, the spirit of inequality from among the workers, if the ranks of labour were to be united. He then referred to trade unionism in India and said that it was in a sorry state. It was a stagnant and stinking pool, because its leadership was timid, selfish or misguided. The warfare between different unions was far more deadly than what existed, if any at all, between workers and owners. The communists had misused the power which they had once secured.

He was surprised to note that M. N, Roy opposed the existence of a separate party of labour inside or outside the Congress. He said ‘that Roy was a puzzle to many as he was to him. A communist and opposed to separate political organization of labour! A terrible contradiction in terms! A point of view which must have made Lenin turn in his grave! It might be, he added, that Roy looked upon the destruction of imperialism as the first and foremost aim of Indian politics. But if, he proceeded, after the disappearance of imperialism, labour would require to fight the landlords, millowners and money lenders who would remain in India to bleed the people, it should have its own organization from the moment to fight capitalism as much as imperialism.’

On his arrival in Bombay, a small purse was presented to Ambedkar on March

129 Ibid.
19, 1938, by R. K. Tatnis, editor of the Vividha Vritta\textsuperscript{130}, on behalf of the Depressed Classes, at Tadwadi, Bombay, Replying to the address, Ambedkar urged his people to join the I.L.P.

Ambedkar’s appeal value was always objective and rationale in nature so when he questioned aptly, How are we to bring about unity among labour? It was to suggest that the way to bring about unity is to identify the threats or the practice of these social distinctions which result in unfair discrimination and eventually affect the solidarity of workers.

While addressing the questions to them on which party they would trust and support to be followed by the criteria of identifying such party, he tried to orient them in a more reasonable form. Similarly while addressing the Congress he asked the labourers to question themselves while supporting the party. Will it help the cause of labour? He further reiterated that ‘I have no hesitation in saying that labour should have a separate organisation in politics independent of the Congress. You must join a political party which is based upon class interest and class consciousness. Applying this test I find no other party than the Independent Labour Party which you can join without detriment to your interests’\textsuperscript{131}. As far as his opinion on the communist was concerned he strongly felt that ‘there was no possibility of him joining them. He declared that ‘he was a confirmed enemy of the Communists, who exploited the labourers for their political ends’\textsuperscript{132}.

\textbf{Ambedkar and the Industrial Dispute Bill of 1938:}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Report in The Times of India, dated 14\textsuperscript{th} February 1938.

\textsuperscript{132} Keer, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 296.
The formation of Independent labour party was indeed a landmark event for Ambedkar. He formulated the party to envision his socio-economic and political dreams. He categorically mentioned that the farmers and the workers should take the reins of government in their hands. According to Ambedkar the Trade Dispute Bill cannot be studied in isolation as it had various strings attached to the previous Bills like the Bill of Conciliation of 1934. The process of Conciliation as per the Bill was that during the strike was to be with the consent and voluntarily, from both the ends of employers and employees during the period of strike. However this new Bill removed the process of voluntary Conciliation to Compulsory Conciliation which according to him certainly raised many doubts. While speaking on the Bill he also reminded the Legislative House that when in 1934, Sir Robert Bill introduced this Bill in 1934, he also initially suggested compulsory conciliation, but during his discussion on the same he changed his position and kept voluntary conciliation as the key element in the Bill.

Dr. Ambedkar also reminded the House that even Mr. Saklatvala the then member in the house equally favoured the voluntary conciliation proposal in the Bill. Dr. Ambedkar presented his well studied statistic acquired from the labour Gazette and released from the labour office, that drew the attention of the house on the fact that the number of strikes from 1921 to 1927 have reduced considerably. While citing the example of Bombay, Dr. Ambedkar stated that on 1921 the numbers of strikes in Bombay were 103, in 1922 it was 143 and in 1923 it was 109. He calculated that the number of strikes from 1924 to 1927 was reduced almost to 50%. In 1928 it was 114 and from 1929 to 1937 the numbers of strikes were between 88 to 53 in number.

He further elaborated the number of working hours had also reduced in the due course. As in 1928 with major industrial strike it was 24,000,000 days, then in 1925 it was 71,000,000 days, but by 1929 it descended down to 8,000,000 days. In 1937 it commendably reduced to merely 817 days. The above statistics of Dr. Ambedkar indeed offered more clarity to the

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134 Articles in the *Janta* newspaper of 1st October, 1938, 8th October, 1938 & 15th October, 1938.

135 Gaikwad Pradip, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p. 32

136 Ibid.

137 See ANNEXURE –C, for similar debate and statistics.
discussion and his argument that how mandatory or compulsory conciliation clause was not required in this Bill.

In the detailed argument opposing the Bill he elaborated that the Bill declared the industrial strike as illegal under the laws, but the application of laws he believed should also be questioned here. He argued that if the workers were breaking of Code of working contract then it needs to be traced to the genesis of the contract labour. Dr. Ambedkar reminded the house that the Breach of Contract Act of 1859, had a reference in the Indian Penal Code Section 490, 491 and 492, but the confusion prevailed as under which code it should be tried civil or criminal.

According to Dr. Ambedkar the workers going on strike do not come under the criminal category so the application of punishment was not valid there and moreover when this Act was designed it did not include industrial workers so this Act cannot be applied on them. He further argued that depriving of the workers to go on strike is as good as forced labour or slavery he cited the reference from the constitution of the United States of America, as per the constitution, ‘Forcing anyone against their will to work is termed as slavery’ \(^{138}\). Ambedkar took this analogy and argued that, it is not illegal for the workers to go on strike, rather forcing them to work during the period of strike was equivalent to slavery.

While defending the right of the workers to go on strike he took a dig at the Congress party, that they were more adamant in categorizing the rights of workers to go on strike as an illegal Act. He reminded the house about the Indian Penal Code 120, on the Act of Conspiracy, as per the said proposed Bill, was indicative that the workers on strike were conspiring, but the strike cannot be labeled as conspiracy even if it is done collectively. He strongly condemned the Congress party for introducing the clause against the strike, as it indirectly promoted industrial slavery on the workers. He finally condemned that the Bill should be right by called ‘Act against the Civil liberties of the workers’ \(^{139}\).

The Bill also banned the strikes of all kinds in the first year of its acceptance. Ambedkar raised the question over the longevity of the negotiation and conciliation time as per the Bill. As per the Bill the workers were suppose to give advance notice about their demands, the

\(^{138}\) Gaikwad Pradip, op.cit., Vol. III, p. 33. (Translation from Marathi to English)

\(^{139}\) Ibid. p. 35.
period of negotiation or conciliation was extended till four months and an additional 25 days were given for final conciliation. During this time the workers were not allowed to go on strike, the Bill offered more gestation time to the employers than the workers.

Ambedkar confessed that ‘I do not have any direct experience of labour movement and mobilisation but as per my study of the labour movement in Bombay, I can definitely conclude that it will be difficult for the union leaders to mobilise them for the strike after the stagnation of four months’140. Ambedkar felt that the Bill would gradually and systematically lead to the decline of working class movement. If not this Bill the government with the consensus of employers Union will come up with some other Black Act against the Union141.

He gave his speech on 16th October 1938, during the conference of Independent labour Party and Trade Union Congress at Mumbai Kamgar Maida, Parel as the meeting was presided by the President Jamnadas Mehta. It was to condemn the Trade Dispute Bill of 1938. The meeting was attended by more than 50,000 workers142. It was also to decide that 7th November 1938, would be called as One day bandh in Bombay. During the meeting Jamnadas Mehta also showed the blood stained clothes of workers who were injured by few hooligans (claimed to be Congressmen) while they were campaigning in the vicinity.

Ambedkar gave his ‘unconditional support to the strike’143 they strongly condemned the government and the Congress party for favouring a Bill which was pro-capitalist. He further asked the workers to mobilise under a non political party, preferably a party which would only promote and raise the issue of the workers. He said, ‘Our strength will give us direction’144.

Ambedkar convened another meeting on 6th November, 1938 at Mumbai Kamgar Maidan, Parel. While addressing the assembled workers, Ambedkar asked the workers from Bombay to introspect about the role played by the Congress Party leaders and the labour union. He

140 Ibid. pp. 36-37.
142 Ibid. p. 53.
144 Ibid.
asked the workers to be united throughout and their struggle would not end with One day strike of 7th November, but 'they will have to keep their struggle as a continuous process’\textsuperscript{145}.

A one day strike was declared by the I.L.P. and by B.P.T.U.C. on Monday 7\textsuperscript{th} November 1938, with a very proactive propaganda and the Bombay city and the industrial workforce was prepared to respond to it. The strike call was responded by almost 60 different unions from Bombay city, who strongly felt against the Bill. Finally it was decided to call for a meeting of the Council of Action of the Trade Union Congress, to be held under the Chairmanship of Jamnadas Mehta on 6\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938 at 8 a.m, to give final touch to their programme for November 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1938 D- day.

Ambedkar, Parulekar, Mirajkar, Dange, Nimbkar\textsuperscript{146} and others were present for this meeting. The Council planned a procession and decided to launch peaceful picketing in front of all mills and factories in Bombay and sent forth an appeal to the workers in industrial towns to express their indignation at the Bill. Ambedkar also addressed the elected members of his party during this time asked them to participate actively.

Interestingly the socialist from the Congress party refused to support this strike as they looked at the strike as merely a platform which Ambedkar was using to gain political mileage. S. K. Patil, the steam roller of the Congress, arranged for anti-strike meetings and addressed one himself at Cotton Green\textsuperscript{147}.

In a repressive measure, the law and order department of the Bombay city deputed about 300 armed Reserve Police with twelve officers from the bordering districts of Bombay and placed them at strategic points near the mill gates in the Bombay city\textsuperscript{148}.

In response to this the ILP members chose a more peaceful way of reaching out to the masses in the form of pamphlets. The response of 80,000 workers in the

\textsuperscript{146} Keer. \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 313-316.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
labour rally at Kamgar Maidan of November 6th had alarmed everyone. The rally had also condemned the Congress ministry from its dais, in the form of Jamnadas made a scathing attack, Indulal Yagnik asked the workers to break the bonds of the Black Bill, Dange lashed at the ridiculous psychology of the Congress leaders. Ambedkar condemned the Congress Ministry on different counts, and said ‘it was the duty of the workers to make the strike a success’149.

The rally with a huge procession started from the Kamgar Maidan and navigated its course through Parel, Lalbaug and DeLisle Road, it ended in the Jambori Maidan at Worli. At night, a chief supervising committee was formed with Jamnadas as its Chairman and Ambedkar, Dange, Nimkar, Mirajkar and Pradhan as its members150.

Out of twenty-five hundred volunteers engaged in this propaganda 90 per cent belonged to Ambedkar’s Party151. Till then the strike was rather avoiding unnecessary unrest. The strike commenced in an atmosphere which was quite peaceful. Ambedkar and Jamnadas Mehta, ferried the city on lorry to give assurance to the textile workers and to urge them to make the strike successful. The strike was not only successful but it opened up the arena for debates over various labour issues and its upcoming leadership. The media didn’t give the strike its due credit and gave lopsided reports against the strike. Although there were some cases of violence like at DeLisle Road, the nerve-centre of the mill area, was the stone throwing there, some people were injured. One police officer and some constables were injured and the police opened fire to disperse the crowd, when two persons were wounded. There was an unpleasant incident at Parel Road about eleven in the morning when the car of Munshi was attacked by a man who smashed the window screen and the glass to pieces.

Sardar Patel, Mathuradas Trikamji and Bhavanji Khimji, who were in the car of the Minister, were not hurt. In all seventy two persons were injured, eleven

149 Ibid.
150 Keer, op.cit., pp. 313-316.
151 Ibid.
severely wounded, and thirty-five were arrested during the day\textsuperscript{152}. The city of Bombay under the new leadership was brought to complete halt and the labourers were actively involved in the shutdown of the work. The response and the air of the strike were also felt outside Bombay in cities like Ahmedabad, Amalner, Jalgaon, Chalisgaon, Poona and Dhulia\textsuperscript{153}.

The strike ended and on same evening a meeting was convened at Kamgar Maidan, which was presided by Jamnadas Mehta and attended by Ranadive, Pradhan, Nimkar. Dange and Mirajkar\textsuperscript{154}, they were all prominent Communist leaders. The symbolic protest of burning the copy of the Industrial Dispute Bill took place with few congratulatory speeches by the leaders. Ambedkar once again appealed to people of having their own representatives. He even went to the extent of saying that ‘he would join the Congress if it really started a genuine fight against British Imperialism’\textsuperscript{155}.

The reactionary Congress could not swallow the success of the strike and finally Sardar Patel issued a statement saying that ‘the labour leaders had used coercive methods’\textsuperscript{156}. In reply to this, Ambedkar said that Sardar Patel’s statement ‘was from beginning to end a tissue of untruths\textsuperscript{157}.

The one day strike of the workers in Bombay on 7\textsuperscript{th} November, 1938 was successful with more than 1 lakh workers\textsuperscript{158} participated in it. Dr. Ambedkar after congratulating all the assembled workers, also exposed that how the print media had given the adverse news about the success of the one day strike. He accused the prominent newspapers of misguiding its readers by giving the news that the strike was failure. He however also gave to the workers the political orientation at the same time. He asked them to actively participate in the government from the municipal, Local Board Council etc. He appealed to them that due to less representation of the workers in various governing bodies, the labour laws are made against the workers. He reiterated that the success of today’s strike should not be determined

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{154} Keer.\textit{op.cit.}, pp. 313-316.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Ibid.}
by weekly closing down the industries, but by taking active part in the process of election, either contest or rather vote for anyone, but the congress party. He finally appealed that the Mumbai municipal elections were approaching ... ‘the workers should out rightly boycott voting for the congress party’159.

The success of the 1938 strike brought out clarity in the labour movement of Bombay, it however did catapult Ambedkar as the new leader of the workers, but also simultaneously gave impetus to his ILP. Moreover the communist who at that point of time were also struggling with the membership and agendas got new life due to the temporary collaboration with Ambedkar and the ILP. The rise of Ambedkar as the leader of the Labour or workers class was now inevitable.

In another series of his meeting in Bombay he called for meeting at Foras Road, Municipal Cement Chawl on 3rd December, 1938 on the funding of separate building for the Independent labour party. While appealing to the people for generously contributing to the fund, he asked the participation of workers and their family for the upcoming municipal elections. He announced that I.L.P has fielded Nine candidates and they should be given maximum votes. He further remarked ‘that most of the political parties have failed against congress party, so ILP is the only party which promotes the voice and issues of the marginalized and so it should win in the upcoming elections’160.

The growing popularity of Ambedkar was now not just limited to the peripheral regions of Bombay, but it went beyond the Presidency as Swami Sahajanand161, the Peasant leader from U.P, came down to meet Ambedkar at his residence in Bombay on December 25th, 1938 and had a talk with him about the labour problem in Bombay and the agrarian reforms in general. He tried to persuade Ambedkar to join the Congress to form a united front against imperialism. Ambedkar replied that he would be glad to liquidate the I.L.P. and join the Congress Party if the Congress decided to fight imperialism. But he said that the Congress was using the constitutional machinery to advance the interests of the capitalists and other vested interests by sacrificing the interests, of peasants and

workers, and therefore he could not join such as organizations. But the congress Ministry was determined to pass the Bill, which they ultimately did. That indifferent attitude created a big tide of opposition outside the Legislative Assembly in the industrial towns and cities which voiced disapproval of the Bill.

In fact Ambedkar who opposed the very idea of strike, changed his stand and played a vital role in the strike of 1938. It is equally important to understand this transition of Ambedkar. While addressing the strike of 1929, he wrote in ‘Bahiskrit Bharat’ that, ‘the dalit workers were under the economic traps of the money lenders and pathans, who acted in more exploitative ways so the strike at this moment would put the dalit workers in further deterioration’162.

During the All India Executive Committee meeting on 21st March, 1939 at Bombay Ambedkar announced officially that ILP henceforth will continue its struggle for the complete Independence, ‘if that requires us to struggle against our own brethren who are pro-capitalist and against the downtrodden and marginalised’163. He further announced that, the ILP will henceforth take active political interest in the freedom struggle of India.

Similarly while addressing his meeting against the arbitrary increase in the taxes by the government at Cawasji Hall in Bombay, on 12th July,1939 he brought to the notice of the workers that how by increasing the taxes, will further deteriorate the conditions of all the section of the people. He provided statistics that in Mumbai itself the population was 13,000,000 and out of which 6,00,000 are workers, and due there is acute unemployment prevalent among them, especially after the closure of night shifts in the factories under such circumstances, to levy further taxes on people will create more perilous situation164. The breaking of World War II brought some new phase in the Indian freedom struggle and also to the role various leaders and political parties were playing so far. The emergence of Ambedkar as an independent voice of the labourers and the downtrodden now was about take a definite shape and new turn of events.

**Ambedkar as the Labour Minister (1942-1946):**

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162 Narendra Jadhav, *op.cit.*, p. 56.
The ILP supported the British in their efforts to eliminate the Axis powers during the phase of World War II, though there was a stark opposition from the Congress party.

The expansion of the Viceroy’s Executive Council took place in the last week of July, 1941, whereby Eight Indian representatives were nominated on the Defence Advisory Committee. Ambedkar was appointed on the Defence Advisory Committee along with Jamnadas Mehta, Ramrao Deshmukh, M. C. Rajah and other well-known Indians and Indian Princes. In the due course Ambedkar joined as Member of Viceroy’s Council on 20th July, 1942, to look after the portfolio of the labour ministry.

We do by this, Our Warrant Our Sign Manual; appoint you, the said Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar to be, during Our pleasure, a Member of the Executive Council of Our Governor-General of India.

(II) And we do hereby appoint that so soon as you shall have entered upon the duties of your office, this our warrant shall have effect.

Given at our Court at St. James’, this ninth day of July in the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and forty-two and in the sixth year of our Reign.

By His Majesty’s Command

Sd/- L. S. Amery

The nomination in the central Assembly on 2nd July 1942 was indeed an historical event for him and for country, as the labour minister on his appointment Sunday Standard newspaper of Mumbai reported that ‘the man who spent his entire life to fight for the rights of the workers and the dalits this is an apt and ideal ministry’.

His role as a Labour Minister is evident through his work and prominently through his speeches in which he raised many pertinent questions. He vocally brought out the split in the trade union as the primary cause for the deterioration of conditions of workers. He also pointed out the disparity that ‘the capitalist invested heavily in the war, but if they had


166 Jadhav Narendra, op.cit., p. 60.
diverted the same amount for the welfare of workers, for their education and medical services, it would have been a great cause and even this should have been thought about. The Congress papers criticized it softly saying that if might bring in good for the labour. The Times of India, Bombay, observed that ‘it was the first time in the history of the country that an untouchable Hindu was appointed a Member in the Executive Council of the Government of India’. 

On 6th July, 1942 the Independent Labour Party and the Bombay Municipal Labour Union held a meeting to congratulate their leader. He told the labourers that although the main task before the Executive was the defence of the country, much of what he would accomplish would depend upon the colleagues in the Council.

At another meeting held at R. M. Bhat High School, Bombay, by peasants of Konkan Districts and States, Ambedkar declared that ‘he would never surrender in the battle he would have to wage for protecting and advancing the interests of the working classes in India; but added that he would not at the same time threaten his colleagues in the Cabinet with his resignation at every point of minor difference’.

When he faced constant criticism for his ILP, he replied to the charge that ‘a separate organisation for the Depressed Classes was prejudicial to the interests and solidarity of the Labour Classes in general, he observed that the struggle which comprised the lowest strata of society was bound to help in the amelioration of all other sections of the working class because when the bottom most stone in a structure was shifted from its place, those above it were bound to be shaken out of their positions’.

His appointment as a Labour Member of Viceroy’s Executive Council was for the period of 1942 to 1946. During his tenure as Labour Member, he initiated many welfare measures for workers and Tripartite Labour Conferences, involving Government of India, employers and

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167 Ibid. p. 61.
168 Keer. op. cit., pp. 346-47.
169 Ibid. p. 349.
170 Ibid.
employees become a regular feature to discuss labour problem and find suitable redress mechanisms for them. He addressed several conferences on the problems of Indian Labour. Early in his tenure, while addressing the tripartite labour conference in New Delhi on 7th Aug 1942, Dr. Ambedkar stressed the need for uniform labour legislation throughout India to avoid the dangers arising out of the provisions of Government of India Act of 1935. He also deliberated on laying down the procedure for settlement of industrial disputes and labour matters of national importance, between employees and employers favoured the scheme for establishing employment exchanges for skilled and semiskilled employees on a voluntary basis.

Dr. Ambedkar, in his first speech as Labour member while opening the two-day session of the 4th Labour conference in New Delhi in 1942, defined the main objectives of the Conference ‘The promotion of uniformity in Labour Legislation, the laying down of a procedure for the settlement of industrial disputes and the discussion of all matters of all India importance as between employer and employees.

He advocated the necessity of having a Permanent Labour Conference a permanent organisation to meet at least once a year, to form a Standing Advisory Committee of this Conference which would meet whenever Government thought it necessary to invite them to meet and to advise Government on matters placed before it, and to define in general terms the procedure for the constitution of these bodies’. He also proposed the constitution of two bodies – a Plenary Conference and the Standing Advisory Committee.

While addressing a gathering at R.M. Bhat High School, Parel, on 13th July, 1942, he made it clear to them that ‘as a representative of the depressed and the workers. I will never compromise as any issue which goes against their rights and liberty. He further said “I also

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do not flaunt my resignation in my pocket as a threat, or to engage in such childish act of quitting from the cabinet’.\footnote{173}{Gaikwad Pradip, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 116-117.}

The task which he undertook required him to tour the country and so he prepared the ground for a long drawn formidable legislation for the labour, so as to exempt them from the unrequired struggle. On one such occasion he was invited to New Delhi on 7th August, 1942 at the Joint Labour Conference, where he proposed the need for Uniformity in Labour Legislation, he appreciated that, ‘it is for the first time, however, in the history of these Labour conferences that the representatives of the Employers and the Employees have been brought face to face within the ambit of a joint Conference. To my mind this is a feature of the conference which should find a very ready welcome from all concerned and particularly from the representatives of the Employees’:\footnote{174}{Moon, S- W/S, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. X, pp. 11-18.}

While specifying the aim of the conference which was also his agenda as a Labour minister into three main division:

i. The promotion of uniformity in Labour legislation;

ii. The laying down of a procedure for the settlement of industrial disputes; and

iii. The discussion of all matters of all-India importance as between employers and employees:\footnote{175}{\textit{Ibid.}}

He addressed the issue of a Uniform labour legislation with the intention that there was no such machinery available which would pacify the labour unrest or would lead to quick settlement of industrial disputes. Also the interference of the Government was equally necessary to balance the relations between the employers and the employees. He appealed to the gathering to decide upon the following matters

(1) The desirability of establishing a Labour conference a permanent organisation to meet at least once a year;

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item Gaikwad Pradip, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 116-117.
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\end{enumerate}
(2) The desirability of instituting a Standing Advisory Committee of this Conference which
would meet, whenever Government thought it necessary to invite them to meet and to advise
Government on matters placed before it; and

(3) Defining in general terms the procedure for the constitution of these bodies.\(^{176}\)

In the process he further elaborated the composition\(^ {177}\) of the two bodies:

(1) A Plenary Conference and
(2) A Standing Advisory Committee.

He suggested that the Plenary Conference would be composed of representatives of the
Central Government, of Provinces, of States, of employers and of employees and The
constitution of the Standing Advisory Committee would be more rigid, and would have
representatives from the following fields:

(1) Representatives of the Government of India.
(2) Representatives of Provinces,
(3) Representatives of States,
(4) Representatives of employers and
(5) Representatives of employees, with the Labour member of the Central
    Government as its Chairman.

Ambedkar based his selection on the following criteria’s, first, equality of representation
between Government and Non-Government representatives. This is illustrated by the
provision contained in article 7, Clause 1, whereby out of 32 representatives 16 represent
Governments and 16 represent employers and workers. We have given effect to this principle
by giving 10 seats to Government and 10 seats to Industry. The second principle is equality
of representation as between employers and employees.\(^ {178}\) The following 16 Non-
Government seats were divided equally between employers and employees, thereby
distributing the 10 seats allotted to Industry equally between employers and employees. The

\(^{176}\) Ibid.
\(^{177}\) Ibid.
third principle based assurance of representation to certain interests by reservation. A resolution setting up a Plenary Labour Conference and a Standing Committee was unanimously adopted at the Tripartite Labour Conference.

The Conference was attended by nearly 50 delegates. The Plenary Conference was proposed to consist of 44 members with the Labour Member of the Government of India as Chairman. Also Twenty-two members would be representing various Governments, 11 workers and 11 employers. Similarly the Standing Committee would consist of 20 members with the Labour Member as its Chairman and it would have equal number of representatives of Government on the one hand and of employers and workers on the other.

The approach with which Ambedkar resolved and defined the issues of the labour needs special mention. The influence of French revolution and the writings of Voltaire gave him further scope to introduce new perspectives of the dictum of France. While addressing a broadcast from the All India Radio on 1st January, 1943, he discussed the issue of Why Indian Labour is Determined to Win the War? In his speech he stated that Labour wants is a fair condition and in his explanation of what Labour means by fair conditions of life, he recalled the dictum of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

According to Ambedkar Labour wanted liberty, and the concept of liberty was not merely the negative conception of absence of restraint nor mere recognition of the right of the people to vote in the electoral process, but labour’s conception of liberty was very positive as it involved the idea of Government by the people. Government by the people, in the opinion of Labour, does not mean Parliamentary Democracy. The concept of Parliamentary Democracy is discussed elaborately in his speech (See ANNEXURE-A).

He further elaborated the concept of equality and by equality, labour meant abolition of privileges of every kind in law, in the civil service, in the Army, in taxation, in trade and in industry, in fact the abolition of all processes which lead to inequality.

While explaining the last principle of fraternity, Ambedkar explained it meant an all-pervading sense of human brotherhood, unifying all classes and all nations, with ‘peace on

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179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
182 Ibid.
183 See ANNEXURE –A.
earth and goodwill towards man as its motto\textsuperscript{185}. It is also important to know that the labour movement post 1940 had become too volatile and equally politicised, Ambedkar tried to bring back the movement to its core value. The reflections through such ideas to a great extent did pacify the situations across.

The complete neglect of the Congress party on the labour issue provoked Ambedkar to engage in the discussion on the concept of nationalism. According to him ‘if nationalism means the worship of the ancient past—the discarding of everything that is not local in origin and colour—then Labour cannot accept nationalism as its creed. Labour cannot allow the living faith of the dead to become the dead faith of the living. Labour will not allow the ever expanding spirit of man to be strangled by the hand of the past which has no meaning for the present and no hope for the future, nor will it allow it to be cramped in a narrow jacket of local parochialism. Labour must constantly insist upon renovating the life of the people by being ever ready to borrow in order to repair, transform and recreate the body’\textsuperscript{186}. He categorically warned the labour ‘if nationalism stands in the way of this rebuilding and reshaping of life, then Labour must deny nationalism’\textsuperscript{187}. According to him the creed of labour was internationalism.

He felt ‘nationalism to Labour is only a means to an end. It is not an end in itself to which Labour can agree to sacrifice what it regards as the most essential principles of life’\textsuperscript{188}. As the nation was groped in the era of rigorous Quit India in 1942, Ambedkar felt that more emphasis ought to have been placed on New India—\textit{and less on ‘Quit India’}\textsuperscript{189}. The appeal of a New India with a New Order is bound to be greater than the appeal of independence. Indeed the vision of a New Order in a New India would greatly strengthen determination to win freedom. Such an approach would certainly have stopped the many embarrassing questions which are being asked, namely, freedom for what and freedom for whom.

In his concluding part he reemphasised his appeal of trusting the ILP and his philosophy on the correct form of leadership, which the country was in dire need, but the unresolved issue was who could give such dynamic and farsighted leadership, especially when India was at the threshold of independence. He urged that ‘I venture to say that Labour is capable of giving to the country the lead it needs. Correct leadership apart from other things, requires idealism and

\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid.\textsuperscript{185}]
\item[Ibid., p. 40.\textsuperscript{186}]
\item[Ibid., p. 41.\textsuperscript{187}]
\item[Ibid.\textsuperscript{188}]
\item[Ibid.\textsuperscript{189}]
\end{enumerate}
free thought. Idealism is possible for the Aristocracy, though free thought is not. Idealism and free thought are both possible for Labour. But neither idealism nor free thought is possible for the middle-class. The middle-class does not possess the liberality of the Aristocracy, which is necessary to welcome and nourish an ideal. It does not possess the hunger for the New Order, which is the hope on which the labouring classes live. Labour, therefore, has a very distinct contribution to make in bringing about a return to the sane and safe ways of the past which Indians had been pursuing to reach their political destiny\textsuperscript{190}.

Ambedkar was instrumental in also opening up positions for Assistant Labour Welfare Officers, who were deputed to important industrial areas, to take stock of what was being done for Labour’s betterment during the wartime in India. He appointed Mr. R.S. Nimbkar\textsuperscript{191} Labour Welfare Adviser on the recommendation of his co member Firoz Khan Noon. Mr. Nimbkar was a very active labour leader all his life and was imprisoned many times while relentlessly raking up the cause of the labour. His work for the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union, one of India’s biggest unions, had shown his capacity as an organiser of workers and also as a member of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Nimbkar was also the official delegate to the International Labour Conference. This successful experiment gave Ambedkar the required confidence and he appointed seven Assistant Labour Welfare Officers to help Mr. Nimbkar\textsuperscript{192}. Ambedkar assigned them the duties of maintaining the contacts on behalf of the Central Government with the Labour and to keep the Central Government apprised of Labour conditions in different parts of India and also to explain to the workers the policy of the Central Government in Labour matters\textsuperscript{193}.

The Tripartite Labour Conference, met at the Bombay Secretariat on 7\textsuperscript{th} May 1943, under the Presidentship of Ambedkar. One of the important proposals that came up for consideration was the question of setting up Joint Labour Management Committees\textsuperscript{194} at least in factories and industrial units employed in war work. Such Committees were established in the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. He also proposed starting of employment exchange for the labourers and the working class\textsuperscript{195}. On May 10, 1943, the Bombay Presidency Committee

\textsuperscript{190} Moon, S- W/S , op. cit., Vol. X, p.43.
\textsuperscript{191} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. I of 1943, 16\textsuperscript{th} February, 1943, pp. 270-71
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Keer, op.cit., p. 359.
\textsuperscript{195} Keer, op.cit., p. 359.
of the Indian Federation of Labour gave tea party in honour of the Labour Member, where he lamented on the fact that the split in the labour union was indeed cause of worry and it is because of this ‘Indian Labour movement was hollow and most superfluous’\textsuperscript{196}. Unlike Britain he also dreamt of having the labour Government in India. It was not enough, he concluded, that India should get Swaraj; it was more important in whose hands that Swaraj would be\textsuperscript{197}.

On the same day ie 10\textsuperscript{th} May, 1943, he addressed the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Bombay. In the course of his address he said that ‘the world was sick of war and suffered from three diseases. The first was imperialism of one nation over another; the second was the colour bar which must be tackled and solved in some manner, so that peace might not be disturbed any more: the third was poverty. The way out to equalize the position between nations was to make a weaker country strong. He, therefore, held that ‘India’s economic and industrial strength would resolve the problem of imperialism and the problem of colour’\textsuperscript{198}. On 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1943, meeting of Standing Labour Committee chaired by Dr. Ambedkar proposed to secure compulsory recognition of Trade Unions to be incorporated in the Indian Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill, 1943\textsuperscript{199}. The Workers’ representatives welcomed the idea of compulsory recognition of Trade Unions.

While answering on the question to Amarendra Nath Chattopadhyaya\textsuperscript{200}:

(a) Will the Honourable the Labour Member please state the functions of the Labour Welfare Advisers and Labour Advisers appointed in the Labour Department?

(b) How many such officers have been appointed so far?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Responded….

(a) The functions of the Labour Welfare Advisor and his Deputy and Assistants are to report to Government and advise on all such meters relating to the welfare of industrial labour in India as Government may direct. The duties of the Labour Adviser

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid. p. 360.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid. p. 367.
\textsuperscript{200} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. III of 1943 12th August 1943 p 657. Also see Moon, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. X, p. 675.
were to advise on all important matters of labour legislation and administration, and in particular the manner in which labour problems that were under consideration or might arise had been or were being dealt with in England.

(b) There is one Labour Welfare Adviser, one Deputy Labour Welfare Adviser and 7 Assistant Labour Welfare Officers.

(c) One Labour Adviser was appointed from December 1942 to June 1943.

(d) There is at present no Labour Adviser.

The changes which Ambedkar brought about as Labour minister had its genesis from the labour movement he was associated since the days of struggle in Bombay. It will be rather apt to say that his trail and errors in Bombay amidst the textile workers gave him enough insight to introduce some of these landmark changes.

Ambedkar’s exposure to the western philosophy, literature and handling of labour issues gave him further scope to be the pioneer in introducing the concept of Social security which was not much thought of in India. During the first session of the Plenary Labour Conference in New Delhi held on 6th and 7th September in 1943201, he clearly identified its motive that it was for the first time that such an attempt was being made that where all the three stakeholders of the industry are being brought together i.e. the employers, the employees and the Government. He placed before the gathering a very thoughtful agenda, which to some extent became the base for future course of collective bargaining in the industry. The agenda also reflects his penetrative study of the subject, the act of balancing between the unrest and conciliation and finally to strive towards an atmosphere more cordial for the development of all the three stakeholders. The agenda proposed had in all eight areas202 for consideration:

1. Involuntary unemployment, due to shortage of coal, raw materials etc.

2. Social Security; Minimum wages.


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201 Moon, S-W/S, op. cit., Vol. X, pp. 100-105. Also see Indian Information, September 15, 1943, pp. 143-44.

5. Adoption of the Rules of Procedure for the Plenary Conference.

6. Setting up of Tripartite Organizations in Provinces.

7. Representation of Labour in the Legislatures and other Bodies.

8. Model Rules for Provident Funds.

The terms were rather more in favour of the voiceless and the marginalised class. Through these terms he assured the workers that the labour ministry was not there just to pacify them, but to also engage in some concrete steps to better their conditions in the long run.

Ambedkar further urged to the labourers to take the lead in participation and governance of the newly organised India. During his speech before the study circle organised by the Indian Federation of Labour on 17th September,1943, he appealed to them that the first thing to do is to discard the mere establishment of trade unions as the final aim and object of ‘Labour’ in India. It must declare that its aims are to put labour in charge of the government. For this it must organize a Labour Party as a political party. Such a party will no doubt cover trade unions in its organization. But it must be free from the narrow and cramping vision of trade unionism. It must equally dissociate itself from communal and capitalistic political parties such as the Hindu Maha Sabha or the Congress.

The second thing for Labour in India was that without much knowledge there can be no power. When a Labour Party is formed in India and when such a party puts forth its claim to be installed on the ‘Gaddi’ (throne) before the electorate, the question ‘Is Labour fit to govern?’ is sure to be asked. Labour will have to prove positively that it can govern better. Let it not be forgotten that the pattern of a Labour government is more difficult than that of other classes’.

He said, ‘What has ruined parliamentary democracy is the idea of freedom of contract, Parliamentary democracy took no notice of economic inequalities and did not care to examine the result of freedom of contract on the parties to the contract should they happen to

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be unequal. The result is that parliamentary democracy in standing out as a protagonist of liberty has continuously added to the economic wrongs for the poor the down trodden and the disinherited class\textsuperscript{204}.

Another landmark judgement and policy of Ambedkar was his introduction of The Indian Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill\textsuperscript{205} which he tabled in the Assembly on 13\textsuperscript{th} November, 1943. It was to further the amendment in the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926. The Bill had three important features. In the first place, the Bill sought to compel an employer to recognise a trade union, secondly place, the Bill imposed certain conditions on a trade union in order to make the trade union. The third feature of the Bill was to make non-recognition by an employer of a trade union, which has observed all the conditions prescribed in this measure and which has therefore qualified itself for recognition, an offence which was made punishable by law.

Ambedkar also reminded the House that ‘the Royal Commission at that stage stated that they would very much desire if the recognition was achieved voluntarily by the consent of the employers without any legal obligation upon them. The House will also remember that the Royal Commission\textsuperscript{206} reported in 1929,—practically 12 years have elapsed—and there has been no willingness on the part of employers to recognise trade unions voluntarily. Indeed the objections which the employers made before the Royal Commission for opposing the recognition of trade unions are still the objections which the employers are pressing for non-recognition. Consequently the situation has certainly not improved\textsuperscript{207}.

The media covered this Bill with a different perspective, for example The Free Press Journal\textsuperscript{208} newspaper had the title \textit{COMPELLING THE CAPITALIST, Compulsory Recognition of Trade Unions Ambedkar’s Bill, New Delhi, November 8. ‘It is felt that the time has now come when the compulsory recognition of Trade Unions must be provided for by legislation’}, declares the statement of objects and reasons on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s Bill

\textsuperscript{204} Report in The Free Press Journal, dated 18\textsuperscript{th} September, 1943.

\textsuperscript{205} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. IV (1943), 13th November 1943, pp. 252-54.

\textsuperscript{206} See ANNEXURE- B.

\textsuperscript{207} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. IV (1943), 13th November 1943, pp. 252-54. Also see Moon, S- W/S , \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. X, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{208} The Free Press Journal, dated 9\textsuperscript{th} November 1943. Also see Kunte, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 275.
introduce in the Central Assembly today, further to amend the Indian Trade Union Act. “With all its limitations, recognitions, recognition by statute will at least clarify the position and give organised and well conducted trade unions the status they deserve. It may achieve much more”. The bill provided for the compulsory recognition of trade unions under certain conditions and defined what recognition will imply. Unions formed on a communal or sectarian basis were not eligible for the recognition.

As the labour minister he handled the question and answer sessions meticulously and judiciously. On 16th March, 1944 Mr. N. M. Joshi had raised the question during the cut motion on the policy of the Labour Department during the war, as it was argued that the department had given too many exemptions to the employers from the Factories Act, also there was limitation to the labour’s right to go on strike, unless there was a prior 15 day’s notice to the employer. Also the Govt had introduced the National Labour Service Ordinance and the Technical Personnel Ordinance, under which the labourer could not switch to other jobs and were compelled to remain in the same work place. The mobility of the labour between factories for employment and better opportunities was curtailed temporarily. Ambedkar responded to the motion of Mr. N. M. Joshi asserted that the situation was not so severe and the Labour department was engaged in bringing about parity in the system.

In his reply he said ‘I think two new principles have emerged from it. The first is that the Government of India for the first time has taken upon itself the responsibility which it never did before of fixing the conditions on which a labourer may be employed. I think this is altogether a new principle which had no place in our labour legislation so far, and I am sure that this principle which has found its place in wartime legislation will be given a permanent place in the labour legislation of this country’.

The second important principle which this wartime labour legislation contained was the principle of compulsory arbitration. While responding to it Ambedkar said ‘Sir, I think my friends, Mr. Joshi and Mr. Jamnadas Mehta, will allow me to say that I have some personal experience of labour. I have known and seen the wasting efforts that labourers have made by going on strike in order to obtain certain advantages from their employers, and I think I can say without exaggerating the matter that I know hardly of a case where the workers, after a

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209 Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. XI, 16th March 1944, pp. 1187-91.
long, arduous, painful, wasting struggle, extending over months together, had ultimately to surrender to the employers and go back on their old conditions or conditions much deteriorated\textsuperscript{210}.

He further gave details on the functioning and successful expansion\textsuperscript{211} of the Labour department under his aegis. He mentioned that before 1942 there were only one Under Secretary, but after his taking over there is one Deputy Secretary and two Under Secretaries. Apart from that there are also positions for the Labour Adviser and Mr Nimbkar was appointed around that time. The department was further expanded with having eight Assistant Labour welfare Advisers and also a Statistician to collate, collect and compile the data. There were additional staffs to deal with the technical issues of the labour department.

He rightfully claimed that ‘I do claim credit for the Tripartite Labour Conference, that, if we have done nothing more, we have at least done one thing, namely, to induce, if not to compel, the representatives of employees to meet the representatives of employers and discuss matters of the utmost and gravest importance’\textsuperscript{212}.

While giving details on the Question raised by Mr. K.S. Gupta\textsuperscript{213} on the post of Labour Adviser on 27\textsuperscript{th} March, 1944 in the Assembly, Ambedkar gave information that the post of labour Adviser was created after he took over the ministry in December, 1942 and initially it was held by Mr. D.T. Jack till June, 1943 and later on Mr. B. L. Waters joined till the time. The salary drawn by Mr. Waters was around Rs. 2000\textdollar. The most important part was that Ambedkar had deputed Mr. Waters knowing about his background of previous service. Mr. Waters had served in the British Ministry of Labour and National Service. He further elaborated that the Labour Adviser is to advise on all important matters of labour legislation and administration, and in particular the manner in which labour problems that are under consideration or which may arise, have been or are being dealt with in England\textsuperscript{214}. The precision with which he would draw people from various stream made him a good statesman.

\textsuperscript{210} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{211} Moon, S- W/S , \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. X, pp. 149-151.
\textsuperscript{213} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. II of 1944, 27th March 1944, pp. 1559-60.
Ambedkar introduced The Factories (Second Amendment) Bill\textsuperscript{215} which was the amendment to the Factories Act, 1934 in the Assembly on 30\textsuperscript{th} March, 1944. The select Committee had introduced some changes like, the first change that the Select Committee has made is to save the rights to any holidays with pay that might accrue to a workman, otherwise than under the Act, such as holidays that was permissible under other enactments or holidays that may be permissible under an award or an agreement or a contract of service. That provision did not exist in the original Bill. But it was now introduced by the addition of sub-clause (2) to section 49-A.

The second change which the select committee made was to extend the benefit of the holidays with pay to children which again were not found in the original Bill as it was introduced to the House. For a workman the holidays were only seven days. But to a child, the holidays the proposed were to be 14 days. The new amendment to section 49-B was introduced. Another new principle which was introduced in the Bill was the power given to the Inspector to act on behalf of a worker who was able to get his holidays or was not able to get the pay which he was entitled to obtain as a result of the holiday.

Another important change which was made by the select Committee was with regard to the making of the rules. The Select Committee therefore recommended that the Government of India should have the authority to give directions to the provinces in the matter of making rules so that the desire or the object of securing uniformity in these rules would be achieved. The Bill\textsuperscript{216} was finally introduced on 3\textsuperscript{rd} April, 1944 in the form of motion in the Assembly\textsuperscript{217}. The Bill was further discussed and Ambedkar convincingly put across his arguments of the amendment of the Bill.

He emphasised that the Bill proposes to make four amendments\textsuperscript{218} and the sections which are sought to be amended by this Bill are sections 9, 19, 23, 45 and 54. The rationale which he offered for the following sections are quoted below:

‘The Section 9 is a section which legislates that the occupier of a factory, before starting the factory, should send to the Inspector of Factories a notice giving certain particulars. So

\textsuperscript{215} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. III, 30\textsuperscript{th} March, 1944, p. 1798.

\textsuperscript{216} Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. III, 30\textsuperscript{th} March, 1944, p. 1798.


section 9 is amended and the amendment gives powers to Government to ask for certain particulars which the Inspector requires for his purposes.

Similarly Section 19 deals with the supply of water and washing places in the factory.

Section 23 deals with fire-escapes to be installed in a factory. Section 23 has been amended by the present Bill in order to give power to Government to prescribe the requisite number of fire-escapes which the Factory Inspector may find it necessary in the circumstances of a particular factory.

Sections 45 and 54, deal with two matters. They deal with hours of work which a child and a woman is required to work in a factory. They also deal with what are called the limits of the spread over. All that the present amendment does is to alter the limit of the spread over by changing 7-30 p.m. to 8-30 p.m. This change has become necessary on account of two reasons. Firstly, it is due to the change in the standard lime and, secondly, it is due to the necessity for saving light.

Some of these insights which Ambedkar received were due to his frequent visits to the Bombay mill land areas, like he met the Mr. Kanji. Dwarkadas 219 who was the Labour Officer of the India United Ltd mill in Bombay and he also inspected the crèche, grain shop, canteen and other departments run for the welfare of the operatives and expressed his satisfaction with the work being done.

Ambedkar was also keen to promote technical and scientific training to the labourers. He explained the importance of promoting such skill during his speech 220 at the Technical Training Scheme Advisory Committee in Calcutta on 24th August, 1944 that ‘No plan for the future development of the country can be deemed to be complete which does not provide for technical and scientific training. This is the age of Machine and it is only those countries in which technical and scientific training has risen to the highest pitch that will survive in the struggle that will commence when the war is over, for maintaining decent standards of living for their people. The Government of India is not oblivious to these considerations and would like to see the Technical Training Scheme not only maintained but extended all over the country and become a permanent part of the country’s educational system’.

219 The Times of India, dated 12th April 1944. Also see Kunte, op.cit., p. 279.
Ambedkar gave the data that due to the efforts of his Labour department there were 170 training centres which could effectively train almost 32,000 trainees. He equally proposed to send Indian Labour Officers or the Labour Advisers to Britain for taking further training at the cost of the Labour Department. As he strongly believed that the object is to have experienced and suitably trained staff to tackle problems of labour administration, e.g., industrial relations including the settlement of Labour disputes, factory inspection, and labour welfare, wage regulation and inspection, employment exchanges, demobilisation and resettlement, which are of immediate importance to India.

While addressing the issue of starting the Labour Exchange Bureau in Assembly on 21st February, 1945, he answered to the Question raised by Mr. T. S. Avinashilingam Chettiar on the Number Labour Exchange Bureaus. He answered that Employment Exchanges have been established at ten centers in India, viz., Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Madras, Calcutta, Dhanbad, Cawnpore, Delhi, Lahore and Karachi. The number of people who found opportunities to work through this service was almost 5,909 till 31st December, 1944. Thought the proposal for such Bureau was launched with much difficulty in December, 1943 Ambedkar felt that they were holding on very well with each month. He further gave the statistics that the number of people registered with Bureau was 14,697 and they were trying to equate the demand and supply of opportunities to work through the Bureau in a more organised manner.

Ambedkar did not believe in blaming the current system he always tried to find ways of reforming it and bringing about changes which would cater to the larger interests. He believed in empowerment and steady change. His tenure as Labour minister at times made him feel that he could do so much or rather wanted to do a lot. While addressing the conference of National Service Labour Tribunals, who assembled in Simla on April 19th 1945, he tried to give example of Great Britain and their system of labour governance. He said in the United Kingdom vast powers are vested in the minister of Labour and National Service but they are powers which can be exercised to an equal extent in both directions i.e., against

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221 Also see ANNEXURE- C. For an elaborate data from 1942-1945 which he presented in the Assembly.
223 Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. II of 1945, 8th March 1945, p. 1039.
224 Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. I of 1945, 21st February 1945, p. 584.
the employer as much as against the worker. These powers have been used to bring employers and workers together so that there may be greater collaboration between them. It is this spirit of co-operation which I should like to see inculcated in India and I am sure that it can be done if we exercise control with firmness but with full justice. This kind of vision and analysis required more support from the employers and employees, though the task for Ambedkar was not easy, but according to his zest and efforts not impossible either.

He always favoured the cause of the labour and felt that they should not be put to further miseries by promoting unnecessary industrial unrest. In one of his address to the students of Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Bombay he stated ‘the compulsory conciliation was a great advantage to labour and hoped to make that principle a permanent feature of the labour Code’. In tune to applying the code he appointed three Regional Labour Commissioners, Mr. D. G. Jadhav, Dr. Seth and Mr. Abu Talib—have been appointed by the Central Government at Bombay, Calcutta and Lahore respectively for administering their new machinery which has been set up to deal with industrial relations in industries. Mr. S. C. Joshi, was appointed the Central Government’s Chief Labour Commissioner. Ambedkar also appointed, Nine Conciliation Officers and twenty four Labour Inspectors and One central Inspector of Industrial canteens.

Ambedkar inaugurated the Conference of the Regional Labour Commissioners at the Bombay Secretariat in the first week of December 1945. During his inaugural address he reemphasised that three vital things were necessary to mitigate or prevent industrial disorder, first machinery for conciliation, second to bring about amendments to the existing Trade Disputes Act and finally to promote minimum wage legislation. He observed that ‘industrial peace on the basis of power was no longer a possibility. On the basis of law, it was possible, but not certain. Based on social justice, he continued, it was a hopeful preposition. It evolved a triangular approach which must start with the workers who must recognize their part their duty to work, the employer on his part must pay reasonable wages and provide comfortable conditions of work and thirdly the state and the society must realize that the maintenance of proper relations was a public affair and not mere matter of a contract between the employer and

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228 Ibid.
229 Report in The Bombay Centinel 14/12/1945.
the employee\textsuperscript{230}.

In his meeting of 6\textsuperscript{th} December, 1945 at the Labour Secretariat for the Commissioners, Advisors and to the Officers in Mumbai\textsuperscript{231} he stated that the struggle of the labour is equally an important part to be understood. It is to be remembered that you can pay and get labour, but also understand that you cannot treat them as you like. Labour/worker is also human being, and the rights which every human being has inherently are equally applicable to the worker. He further explained that ‘though our struggle for political independence seems to be over, but the contention between the capitalist and the working class is far from over and it should not be neglected. The government has three alternatives to bridge this gap, first conciliation, second to decide upon the minimum wage point and finally to draw guidelines for the relation between the workers and the employers’.

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Ambedkar’s role as a ‘sentinel for India’s labour welfare’\textsuperscript{232} went beyond the ambit of Viceroy’s Executive Council. The Drafting Committee of constituent assembly chaired by Dr. Ambedkar put the subject to Labour in the concurrent list of the constitution with an avowed objective to safeguard interests of labourers adequately by uniformity of legislations throughout the country. Ambedkar had ‘explicitly analyzed the differences in the degree of subjugation and economic exploitation of labour belonging to sudra and dalit groups’\textsuperscript{233}.

In essence, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had tried to formulate\textsuperscript{234}:

1) A full employment policy for labour.

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\textsuperscript{230} Keer, *op.cit.*, pp. 374-375.


\textsuperscript{232} Dhaktode, *op.cit.*, p. 370.


\textsuperscript{234} *Ibid*, p. 53.
2) A State supported, patronized labour welfare system

3) A tripartite labour tribunal system to solve industrial disputes and

4) To develop an idealist labour participatory mechanism in nation-building by asking the unionized labour not to be totalitarian in nature because of their collective bargaining power.

The life history of Dr. Ambedkar epitomised the ‘relentless struggle of a downtrodden community in our country against social ostracism and economic oppression. By his personal example, he showed how, by a total faith in self-reliance and by indomitable courage and perseverance, one could raise himself to a life of purposive greatness and be a constant source of inspiration to his fellow men’235. When Dr. Ambedkar was chosen to be the chief architect of free India’s Constitution, it was a rare distinction and honour conferred on one who was so eminently qualified for it. His untiring search for knowledge, his incredible industry and his unflinching aim could not have been put to better use than in the work he did in that Assembly.

Ambedkar perhaps was more focussed on the issue of labour and didn’t lose his grip on the subject. His approach was much wider in scope and long lasting236. While addressing in the Assembly on the issue of Social Security for labour he emphasised, ‘in this country Government is not the only party that employs labour. There is a large amount of labour employed by private employers. As everybody in this House would agree the Government of India while framing its policy for the betterment of labour should frame it in such a manner that it should not create a privileged class on the one hand and an under privileged class on the other. The Government of India is not merely an employer of labour. It is a State. It is a government and it has not only responsibility for those who are in the immediate employment of the Government of India. It has also a responsibility for labour in general’237.

235 Ahluwalia, op.cit., p. 3.
236 See ANNEXURE-B when he gave details on India’s performance after the Report of Royal Commission on Labour. In his speech in New Delhi on November 26, 1945.
The whole Marxist political theory was unacceptable to Dr. Ambedkar, because he had profound respect for parliamentary democracy, though it suffered from its own weaknesses in the social milieu in which it had to function. Dr. Ambedkar was a champion of individual liberty which was least permitted in the Marxist political system. The application of the proletarian revolution in India, as Dr. Ambedkar visualized, was impracticable because of the traditional social system. Such a revolution required feelings of equality, fraternity, and above all of justice, in the minds of all revolutionaries, but the ‘Indian social system did not encourage the proletariat to cultivate these values for the sake of change and unity’.

Therefore, he argued ‘Men will not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed. Can it be said that the poor in India recognise no such distinctions of caste or creed, high or low? If the fact is that they do, what unity of front can be expected from such a proletariat in its action against the rich. How can there be a revolution if the proletariat cannot present a united front?

The Marxist critics have also charged that Dr. Ambedkar did not join hands with the left forces of the country in order to ameliorate the conditions of the Untouchables. It can be further explained as ‘the aloofness of Ambedkar and his followers resulted in weakening left forces in the country. The efforts of trade unions in fighting social inequality were not sufficient. The result was that untouchable workers did not become one with the socialist movement in the country. His separation from other powerful-social and nationalist forces gave room to communal politics’. He was always careful not deviate from the issue and it was primarily to elevate the ones who were socially and economically suppressed. ‘Ambedkar by temperament was a liberal. His liberalism was of a bourgeois type. His attitude towards reforms was liberal, and it never took a revolutionary form’. Ambedkar tried to settle the differences within the trade unions and openly advised them so during his interaction with them, when a tea party was given in his honour by the Bombay Presidency Committee of the Indian Federation of Labour, in May, 1943.

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238 See ANNEXURE- A.


241 Kuber, op.cit., p. 289.
His appeal was to ‘Sink Your Differences and Present United Front’\textsuperscript{242}. The utter hollowness and the superficiality of the present Labour Movement in India was deplored by the Hon. Dr, B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member to the Government of India, at. Maniben Kara, welcomed Dr. Ambedkar and said that it was to be regretted that there was schism in the Labour Movement. She paid tribute to the ameliorative work done by Dr. Ambedkar within the short period since he took up the reigns of office as Labour Member.

Dr. Ambedkar referred to the growth of the Labour Movement in Britain and traced how it had captured the reins of Government twice wresting power from the hands of the ever-dominant Tories. It was an example for the Indian Labour Movement to emulate. He urged the need for the formation of a United Labour Party in this country, on the model of the British Labour Party. In conclusion, Dr. Ambedkar said that if Democracy in England had failed, it was because it was in the hands of the Tories. It was, therefore, important in whose hands Swaraj would be. He exhorted the Labour leaders of India to see that when Swaraj came it could be in the hands of Indian Labour\textsuperscript{243}.

Dr. Ambedkar represented a dedicated spirit, an uncompromising faith in the justice of the cause he fought for. Whether one agreed with him or not in his approach to problems or in his method of dealing with them, ‘his power of appeal, his capacity for clear expression and the sincerity with which he put across his point of view always commanded respect and attention\textsuperscript{244}.

The life of Dr. Ambedkar is a constant reminder to us ‘how much we owe to society to rid it of its evils born of prejudice and customs which had no sanction either of morality or of decent conduct. ‘Social equality is not a creed for propagation; it has to be recognised as a fact of life’\textsuperscript{245}. While drawing lessons from history he suggested that ‘we study history with a

\textsuperscript{242} Report in The Bombay Chronicle, 11/05/1943.

\textsuperscript{243} Kunte, op.cit., p. 271.


\textsuperscript{245} Alhuwalia & Shashi, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 4-5.
view to know the errors people have made and how they could be avoided. History is not always an example. More often it is a warning\textsuperscript{246}.

In the true sense he was ‘a champion of a revolution to be brought about by the dynamics of public opinion, through a change in the laws of the land. He was not a utopian, but a realist’\textsuperscript{247}.

Acharya Atre paid a befitting tribute to him when he wrote ‘many leaders take refuge of religion and try to bring social order in the society by Dr. Ambedkar is different kind of personality, who fought for the social equality and rights of all the classes. He introduced many new perspectives and new thought process in the country which touched all the sections’\textsuperscript{248}.

His concept of Parliamentary Democracy\textsuperscript{249} was far ahead of his time as he always believed and stated that ‘Democracy must learn to give a respectful hearing to all who are worth listening to\textsuperscript{250}.

\textsuperscript{246} Moon, S-W/S, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. X, p. 296.
\textsuperscript{247} Jatava, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{249} See ANNEXURE-A.
\textsuperscript{250} Report in The Times of India, 4/01/1938.
Nationalism, a Means to an End

Labour’s creed is internationalism. Labour is interested in nationalism only because the wheels of democracy—such as representative Parliaments, responsible Executive, constitutional conventions, etc.—work better in a community united by national sentiments. Nationalism to Labour is only a means to an end. It is not an end in itself to which Labour can agree to sacrifice what it regards as the most essential principles of life.

From Dr. Ambedkar’s Broadcast on All India Radio, Bombay in December 1942.

Quoted from Moon Vasant (ed) Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Selected Writings and Speeches Vol. X, Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1991, First Page.