CONCLUSION

The contemporary labour studies, with a few exceptions, suffer from the problem of sociologism. In their singular obsession with the anthropological character of labour or formal trade unionism in post-colonial India, they tend to neglect the labour mobilisation strategies and their ideological underpinnings which, as stated in Introduction, have decisive influence on the growth of the working class. The question of the working class formation needs to be seen through the political dynamics of struggle between labour and capital. As a methodological procedure, we have earlier proposed Gramsci's six-fold scheme to overcome the impasse of sociologism. In this scheme what is important is to enquire into the questions such as whether the political formations assert 'integral autonomy' of the workers vis-a-vis the ruling class and state power or whether these assertions are partial and limited in character or whether these are mainly intended to conserve the assent to the ruling class politics, etc. Thus, in Gramsci's scheme, given the social context the moments of struggle indicate the formation of the working class. Let us now rearrange the materials presented in the previous chapters on the above line of enquiry.

In a recent study based on the opinion survey of 3785 supervisors of 51 companies in a sample drawn from different parts of India, Baldev Sharma, one of the well-known sociologists of industrial relations, argues that the industrial organisations - both public and private - believe that 'safety and security' and monetary benefits constitute the most important needs of the workers. As a result, he continues, they have neglected important dimensions of organisational climate such as political
participation, redressal of grievances, training and advancement'. In other words, the management's in response to the labour demands have to the extent possible simply pursued the politics of high wages to coopt the workers while the political atmosphere of the work places continues to be repressive. Thus the politics of economism seems to be consistent with the undemocratic factory regimes. The thirty years long story of the Rourkelca Steel Plant (henceforth RSP), as charted out in our previous chapters, is not far from this general industrial relations scenario in the country.

When the construction works began, the big German firms engaged by the RSP were allowed openly to subvert the labour laws of the Independent Indian state. Neither the public sector management nor the elected representatives of the Government were anxious to implement the labour laws in the firms of the foreign contractors who were employing thousands of the contract workers in Rourkela. The workers had to struggle through the different unions like the RMS, SUCI, AITUC to force the implementation of the Industrial Disputes Act, Factory Act, Compensation Act, etc. The German firms refused to be governed by the Indian laws and did not even come for conciliation. The RMS had no option but try through the ICFTU (German branch) to put pressure on the West German Government to instruct the German contractors to talk to the local union(s), to follow the Indian labour laws and settle all disputes regarding the regular payment of regular wages, the fixation of working hours and leave. Even the weekly off-days had to be fought for.

1. See Baldev R. Sharma, Not by Bread Alone: A study of Organisational Climate and Employer-Employee Relations in India. Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, Delhi, 1987.
From the moment of its genesis the Rourkela Steel Plant management was in hand-in-glove with the contractors. And the elected representatives of the new nation state preferred to ignore the labour demands 'to bend the stick' of the German firms engaged in the construction of a state sponsored industrial project in Rourkela. It was perhaps of no mean coincidence that the RSP was established with the technological collaboration of the German firms who listened to the West German Government, not the new national Government of India. Only the Rourkela labour movement could bend their sticks.

In the 60s, the permanent workers wrested many of their rights through a series of struggles around the job evaluation, proper gradation and corresponding pay fixation, also the implementation of Factory Act, Industrial Disputes Act, Compensation Act, etc. The politically organised workers now resisted their deployment in the unsafe and unnecessarily lengthy hours of mining, cleaning, loading and unloading done in the Traffic, Coke Ovens, Refractories, Foundry and other departments where incidences of physical cleaning operation were (are still) very high. In the late 60s, in response to the militancy of the permanent workers, the RSP management began the policy of casualisation of these jobs involving physical cleaning operation. As a result, by the early 70s, the number of contract workers increased two fold, from about 4000 odd in 1968 to 8000 odd in 1971. This time the management adopted a new stick to bend the workers: the familiar stick of divide and rule. A new segmentation of the labour surfaced. The steel labour was broadly fragmented into contract and permanent workers—the contract workers were employed more in the manual cleaning jobs in the manufacturing
stage and the permanent workers in the processing stages involving mechanisation and less physical labour. Thus a broad dichotomy surfaced in the labour process.

The politics of high wages and the so-called participative culture (such as the workers' access to the Joint Committee cells to fulfill their needs) pursued by the management for the permanent workers have simply reinforced the dichotomy between the permanent and contract workers. The trade unionist politics has no less contributed to strengthening of the dichotomy, even though occasionally in a symbolical gesture in a gathering of contract workers it might issue calls for the permanent workers to come forward to strengthen the struggle of the contract workers.

For the moment let us confine our discussion to the strategy of the factory regime. The RSP has never pursued the principle of 'equal wages for equal work'. While a contract worker engaged in the cleaning operation in any of the manufacturing stages would get Rs. 750 per month as minimum wage, a permanent worker doing the similar work would get Rs. 1400 per month, almost two-fold of the income of the former. Indeed, there was no uniform wage policy for the contract workers till the CITU entered the Rourkela scene, organised almost hundred per cent of them and demanded the same. That was in the early 70s.

From the 1974 onwards, the uniform wage policy was introduced. But the unions did not struggle for the uniformity of the wages among the permanent and contract workers engaged in the 'equal work' in the manufacturing or in the processing stages. As a result, from the 1970s onwards, the contract workers have been receiving the minimum wages almost half as that of the permanent
workers. Thus the politics of unequal wages between a contract worker and permanent worker who actually perform 'equal work' in various stages have no less reinforced the dichotomy in the labour process. This question of equal pay for equal work was emphasised by the Supreme Court in one of its recent judgments on the regularisation of the contract workers of the RSP. This issue was raised by the Rourkela Shramik Sangh, mainly a body of the contract workers, as we have seen in Chapter 4.

The struggles of the contract workers grew in isolation from those of the permanent workers in the 70s and 80s. Moreover, beginning from the 70s, the plant authorities used the contract workers as strategy to keep the permanent workers in the 'bargain happy' situations. The struggles of the permanent workers did not attempt to break this divide-and-rule policy of the factory regime. The permanent workers have fought for proper job evaluation, upgradation, pay fixation, national wage policy, incentive awards and, last but not the least, the formation of many joint committee cells. All these issues are equally important for the contract workers. The Industrial Disputes Act clearly stipulates that the Works Committee be formed in the case of an employer with more than 100 contract workers. Occasionally there has been demand by the contract workers to include them in the electorate of the Works Committee.

True, the factory regime in collaboration with the state power and recognised union suppressed the formation of the Works Committee - an issue which has made the management as well as the recognised union extremely unpopular among the permanent and also contract workers. But the unions were more bothered about the reformation of the Works Committee for the permanent workers,
excluding for ever the contract workers from its purview. Such political demands of the permanent workers were organised separately. Only in recent times, the Rourkela Shramik Sangh pleaded before the DLC to look into this largely neglected political issue of the contract workers. Thus, the dichotomy between the permanent and contract workers persists in the political sphere as well.

The economic and political instances of the dichotomy between permanent and contract workers have been significantly strengthened by their ideological cleavages. If we see the settlement and cultural patterns we could easily glean this fact. There exists a great divide between the majority of contract workers residing on the south side and the majority of the permanent workers staying on the north side of the factory. Most of the contract workers visit their work sites either by walk or by bicycle. The steel plant buses are meant for the permanent workers only. Even though about 40 per cent of the regular employees stay in the nearby villages or bastis where the contract workers are usually settled, their 'togetherness' is surely missing. As described in Chapter 1, in the bastis like Golghara, Jalda Blocks, Durgapur Oram para, etc., it was found that there is not much of interaction between these two categories of the steel workers. They are rather culturally divided. Even among tribals, a cultural division has surfaced. The permanent tribal workers are more inclined to 'Hinduise' themselves by renouncing Handia drinking (a country liquor), cock fighting, etc. - usually observed in their festival days - whereas the contract workers are more inclined to pursue their 'unique' cultural traditions. Even in the bastis they are more or less settled in the opposite rows as in the Durgapur Oram para (street).
Thus, the dichotomy between the permanent and contract workers exists at the three levels of abstraction: economic, political and ideological. The broad differences in the job allocations, the unequal wages for the equal works, etc., prevalent among the two categories of labour are expressions of the dichotomy at the economic level. The economic level is reproduced by the political and ideological spheres. In the absence of united struggles, the separate struggles of the permanent workers on the one hand and contract workers on the other hand have only reinforced the division at the political level. Their settlement and cultural patterns have also different markings at ideological level. The three levels of the dichotomy between permanent and contract workers have, as it were, split their political potential for ever.

The domination of capital over labour is exercised not merely through the economic political and ideological instances of the dichotomy between the contract and permanent workers. It is also supplanted by a hierarchical relationship among the permanent workers as well as a directly coercive policy towards labour in general (inclusive of the permanent employees). The dichotomy between the unorganised and organised labour has led many commentators to conclude that the organised labour is in 'bargain happy' situations in contrast with the dull compulsions of an economic life of the unorganised labour. Such propositions gloss over the factory based oppression of the organised labourers. In other words, they ignore the political and ideological levels of the factory apparatus. They emphasise only the economic instances of the organised labour - the job security, safer work conditions and higher wages. This emphasis may be termed as economic reductionist approach which treats political and ideological
instances as epiphenomena. The hierarchical division of (organised) labour into mental and manual labourers as well as the processes of regime coercion on their work places are reduced to be insignificant aspects. The former is an ideological instance and the latter a political instance, being ignored by the economic reductionist framework.

If we take into account the politico-ideological instances of the permanent employees (organised labour) of the RSP, we find that barring the high skilled workers (roughly 30 percent of the work force), the permanent workers too are subject to the oppression of a 'power-knowledge' system of the factory apparatus. Let us first proceed to examine this formulation in terms of its ideological instance, i.e., hierarchical division of labour. The high skilled workers constitute about 30 per cent, semi-skilled workers 44 per cent, unskilled workers 22 per cent and clerical staff 3 per cent of the total non-executives in the factory site. This is more and less the pattern over time. The 30 per cent (high skilled) workers mainly consisting of supervisors and senior chargemen exercise political and ideological domination over the rest of the factory workers, i.e., about 70 per cent of the non-executives. Indeed they act as the agents of the RSP management in the work sites. They relay both 'power' (political) and 'technical knowledge' (ideology) of the factory regime.

As described in Chapter 1, they record the attendance, work performance of the lower grade workers and report these events to the management. They also execute redeployment, recommend punishment and counselling of the errant workers. Thus the supervisors and senior chargemen are positioned to implement 'power = knowledge' of the factory regime. With their 'policing' of the
work process the factory apparatus could run smoothly. Thus their main interests lay in the economic sphere of the factory: the high wages and promotion to the executive cadre. As a social cluster they do not have material interests in reordering the power knowledge system of the factory regime. Their interests chiefly lay in the unionism - the articulation of economic instances of the factory apparatus so that their wages could grow and the promotion be ensured. They do not have any outlook beyond 'trade unionism'. No wonder, then, they are perceived as the agents of the factory management by the semi-skilled and unskilled workers. It is indeed not-for-anything that a supervisor or senior chargeman engaged in radical activities is inflicted with the severest punishment by the factory management. This in turn implies that the management treats them as their agents in the shop floor and work processes.

Seventy per cent of the Executive Committee members of the recognised union RMS belong to the high skilled grades. As stated before, since the early 70s the RMS has abandoned struggle as an instrument of social change. It has instead adopted collective bargaining as the key strategy to 'resolve' labour disputes. In any case, it has collaborated with the RSP management in suppressing even minimal democratic bodies like the Works Committee - the only elected body of the workers to look after their welfare. It has never looked beyond the economic issues like proper job evaluation, incentive, promotion and high wages (at the factory and national level). In other words, the political and ideological instances of factory apparatus have not been challenged at all. No wonder, then, the union's collective leadership - the Executive Committee, the highest decision-making body - is mainly consisting
of the high-skilled workers. It is not surprising to find that in one of the most vulgar display of trade unionism, the union's members working as supervisors in the Horticulture Department of Town Administration recently refused to take the attendance of about 400 contract workers agitating for 22 days for higher wages, simply because they belonged to a new rival union Rourkela Shramik Sangh. The management recorded its 'failure' to persuade the supervisors to do their duties!

True, few individual members of the high skilled grades participated in the radical politics from time to time. They led a few important strikes of the lower grade workers and established communist trade unions. The cases of high skilled workers like K.C.Mohanty (CITU), Ajit Roy (AITUC), Mehman Singh (SUCI) and others were outstanding. For their radical politics -the 'communist' label they carried - they paid heavy penalties. As stated before, K.C.Mohanty and Ajit Roy were dismissed, and Mehman Singh was kept as 'bonded labour' of the factory regime. They were interested in challenging the 'political sphere' proper.

Indeed, Mohanty and Singh were branded as 'naxalites' by the RSP and also ironically, by their respective parent unions in whose cause they fought and lost their jobs. Anyway, the key point to be noted is that their cases are specific cases of militancy of individual members of the supervisory cadre. They are atypical. The Executive Committee of the RMS, the recognised socialist union, represents the typical outlook of the supervisory cadre: the outlook of trade unionism that occasionally manifests in vulgar forms. All these show that the high skilled workers have interests in the hierarchical division of labour and they articulate this division in politico-ideological terms.
Let us look into a few more political instances of coercion of the permanent employees. These instances would explode the myth of the 'bargain happy' situation of the organised workers of the RSP. The plant management has pursued an authoritarian policy over time. It has dismissed workers who agitated through legitimate means especially on the left platform. It has removed people from pay rolls on slightest pretexts like unauthorised absence, minor theft, small problems in medical fitness, etc. In recent times it has forcibly redeployed the workers in the areas where they are not initially trained and has threatened to punish in case they resist forcible redeployment. It has suppressed the democratic aspirations of the workers by withholding the elections to the Works Committee for the last 15 years. As stated in Chapter 1, these elections turned out to be referenda on the policies of the plant management and the recognised union. The referendum was not tolerable for either party.

No political organisations of the workers other than the recognised union RMS have been tolerated. More often the management has refused to sit with the other unions for conciliation of labour disputes. The management has not entered into any agreement with the organisations other than the RMS. Just as in the TISCO, the management has evolved a corporatist union INTUC for all major conciliation of disputes through many joint plant committees and all its agreements, the Rourkela Steel Plant authorities too are following this strategy. The collective bargaining policy of the socialists suits the RSP authorities who have followed an authoritarian policy towards the workers and other organisations.
It is a myth to claim that the permanent workers (organised labour) are living in 'bargain happy' situations. The myth, however, is perpetuated on the basis of certain facts as follows. If we take into account the total earnings of the Rourkela Steel workers, we find that the workers on an average seem to have gained in their real earnings. The earnings per workers have gone up by three and half times or more than what existed a decade back. Against this, the Consumer Price Index for the Rourkela industrial workers has increased by two and half times. The rises in consumer prices seem to have been compensated by corresponding increases in the income levels of the workers for each year during 1971-1981.

In addition, another very important trend is that the growth of the wages has in turn contributed to the reduction of disparities between various grades of the permanent workers. The wages of the high skilled workers in comparison with those of the unskilled workers were 5 times more in 1959, 2 times more in 1970 and only 1 1/2 times more in 1983. Since the wage policy is evolved by the all-India tripartite wage settlement bodies, the trade union involvement in its formulation has over time contributed to the reduction of income disparities between the various grades of the organised labour. It would be interesting to remember that the disparities between the contract and permanent workers have remained steady over time: The former receives half of what the latter gets. These facts have led many commentators to conclude that the organised labourers are the pampered lot living in 'bargain happy' situations. However, such conclusions are derived by ignoring the political and ideological instances of
exploitation of labour (in general) by the factory regime, as stated before. It also glosses over the political and ideological distinctions within the organised labour.

Moreover, the wages have increased in commensurate with the Consumer Price Index and the income disparities have been reduced not by any voluntary effort of the factory apparatus rather due to the trade union organisation of the permanent workers at the all-India level. Indeed, the incentives and promotions - the two key issues left to be decided at the factory level - are not implemented properly. While the wages have increased by 2.05 per cent the incentive earnings of the workers have increased by 1.65 per cent only and the promotions are tardy. The new promotion policy of the RSP - the Cluster Policy - is designed to redeploy the workers in the new multi-trade designations rather than offer any substantial promotion to the workers stagnant for decades as Khalasis or Chargemen. All these facts point out that the factory regime does not have any intrinsically egalitarian wage or non-wage policy. Its policy is rather essentially authoritarian in economic political and ideological instances.

Unaided by the permanent workers, the many organised political actions of the contract workers ended in whimpers, even though they began with the massive fluttering of the red flags as in the early 70s and early 80s. A divided struggle coupled with adventurism of its left leadership was easily repressed by the factory as well as state power. However, simply because of their massive agitational course, the factory regime conceded to the demand for a uniform wage policy for all the contract workers in equivalent grades of jobs and also regularised a section of them in 1983. Echoing Rosa Luxemberg, one may say that the failures too have political
value. In the aftermath of their moments of struggle, they discovered that the uniform wage policy and regularization were implemented despite the failure of their struggle.

Interestingly, after being let down by many political unions in the 70s the permanent workers have also developed interests in litigation. The courts stretching from the Deputy Labour Commissioner (Rourkela) to the Supreme Court (New Delhi) have of late become the chief domain of settling labour disputes. So, like the contract workers, they have also rallied behind the Panicker union which gained foothold among them after winning the famous overtime arrears case of the 1500 ministerial employees in the Supreme Court in 1986. Paradoxically however when the permanent and contract workers appear to be for the first time united in their belief in legal struggle, they are most divided politically. The litigation as a mode of struggle could not forge their political unity. Indeed, litigation cannot resolve their dichotomous existence at the economic, political and ideological levels. For it demands separation of cases dealing with the separate issues. It injects certain degree of practico-inertia among the clients because the cases are fought by the professional lawyers, not by the clients.

Unlike a political struggle whose proceedings can educate the workers in many things, there is little room left for them to learn from the court room proceedings. Indeed, the workers celebrate the court victories in awe and bewilderment. They just do not grasp its processes simply because they are not actors of the court room struggle. They stand only in its witness box. Since their cases have to be fought separately in the court in the midst of their
passivity, the unity between permanent and contract workers or even among contract workers alone is ruled out. Only a common political programme and a common political campaign can establish that. In fact, there are few common issues at the factory level like equal pay for equal work, the re-formation of the elected bodies like the Works Committee, etc., in which the factory regime has least interests. United struggles, to begin with, can grow around these possibilities at the factory level.

However, when political struggles failed due to the adventurism of the left political leadership in the early 70s and early 80s (in the case of contract workers) and due to the parliamentary cretenism of the socialist leadership of the RMS or 'Braja Mohanty Union (BSPEA) in the 70s (in the case of permanent workers), there were many moments of practico-inertia among the workers throughout the 80s. This inertia was partially broken in the late 80s by the workers (permanent and contract) throwing all their weights behind the 'Panicker union' (RSS) to settle their factory-based disputes through the court-room struggles. Panicker became popular also because he established an emotional rapport with the workers. He gave them sympathetic hearings. He was easily available to them at his residence-cum-office. He lost his daughter when he was fighting their cases in the Supreme Court. Yet he remained unruffled. In a public meeting he showed his bank balances in a stunning gesture towards the workers. His sacrifices became the talking points, first, among the contract workers and later among the permanent workers. In the overall context of labour politics beset with the careerist leadership interested in many insidious forms of control over the workers, Panicker's
Informal approach appeared to be refreshing. Without these pre-
conditions, his legal method could not have carried any meaning for
the workers.

The broad dichotomy between the contract workers on the one
hand and permanent workers on the other hand has not been
challenged at all by the labour organisations who have merely
preached their unity and common struggles. Thus, the union
strategies - their partial departmental strikes/dharnas - have re-
inforced the managerial practices in maintaining a broad division
between contract and permanent workers, a dichotomy primarily meant
to exercise domination of capital over labour.

Initially, the communists wanted to have one union for the
factory and mine workers. Their unit in a RSP mine even got an
early recognition. However, they suffered severe setbacks after
the failure of the Blast Furnace strike and the resultant lock-out,
and also due to the state repression on them following the Indo-
China war in the early 60s. Their unit was bifurcated into two
unions: One looking after the factory and the other mine workers.
Due to their arrests under the DIR during the Indo-China war, a
political space was left open for the socialists under the
leadership of Dhuleswar Bastia to move out from the town
administration to factory sites.

As the socialist movement grew up in strength engaging in a
war of nerves with the State Congress Government and RSP
management, the factory workers got organised in a way which
undoubtedly made them aware of the job patterns, job safety, manning
as per the respective skills, proper wages, incentives, etc., but
alienated the tribal workers from the purview of the socialist
movement. By the time the socialist union RMS was recognised in 1967, the simmering discontents of the non-coastal and tribal workers were felt all over the steel factory. As the socialists concentrated mainly on the proper manning (evaluation and upgradation) of the skilled grades, the issues of the local workers interested in the local conveyance allowances, short-range LTC and the labour contract cooperatives etc., were marginalised.

Indeed the tribals and scheduled caste workers constitute about 30 per cent of the workers who mostly work as un-skilled labour. So the socialist campaign was essentially focused on the coastal workers of Orissa. Moreover they used to campaign among the Oriya workers that the RSP management was following anti-Oriya policy. This campaign had some weight in their perceptions because the managerial cadres in the 60s were non-Oriyas. Thus, what was essentially anti-labour policy was given an ethnic colour to appeal to the sentiments of the Oriya workers who constituted 50 per cent of the entire work force. This ethnic oriented campaign also alienated the tribals and non-coastal workers from the growing influence of the socialist union RMS.

The adivasi workers and non-coastal Oriya workers challenged their marginalisation in the late 60s. Their challenge was articulated by an 'autonomous' union Ispat Shramik Sangh ably assisted by the Catholic churches and Christian teachers. The Jharkhand Party had a few activists who also participated in this process. In the following Works Committee elections in 1969, the ISS won 9 out of 10 seats. The union was less than two years old. The non-coastal workers rallied behind the ISS, not because it was a non-party autonomous union rather because their local issues were increasingly marginalised by the centralised party-based trade
unionism. Moreover, the adivasis were alienated from growing influence of the socialists who partly raised certain ethnic slogans in their campaign against the RSP. The emergence of the ISS in a sense signified the resistance to the upper caste coastal leadership. However, the ISS immediately collapsed due to the immoral character of its leadership, its inability to win over the other workers and also due to the repression by the factory apparatus. This process led to the consolidation of the upper caste coastal leadership of the RMS which increasingly relied on collective bargaining rather than struggle to effect changes in the factory apparatus. This strategy best suited the Rourkela Steel Plant management. Moreover the top PSP socialist leadership of the RMS twice changed the party. In the early 70s, they merged with the Congress which was the ruling party of Orissa. During the emergency days, they quit Congress and joined the Janata Party after the Emergency. The Janata was the ruling party in Orissa in the post-Emergency period, 1977-80. Their shifting political stances in supporting the ruling party in Orissa helped them to ward off any challenges to their recognition status.

Indeed there were two significant challenges to the RMS's hegemony during 1971-80. The first challenge was thrown up by the CITU in the early 70s. It was a massive challenge by the CITU-led contract workers who for the first time demanded higher wages at par with their counterparts of the DSP and insisted on a uniform wage policy for contract workers. The red flags hitherto never fluttered on that massive scale, with almost 10,000 workers raising this banner. The movement was ruthlessly suppressed by what an activist described state terrorism and such was the intensity of repression that few activists had to go underground. Due to its
failure among the contract workers, the CITU could not also expand among the permanent employees. Indeed, about 11 permanent employees participating in the CITU’s activities were dismissed in the early 70s. Four of them were branded on 'naxalites' and the Rourkela Steel Plant authorities put posters and their photos along with the others all over the factory warning the workers to disassociate from them. By labelling some of its activists as 'naxalites', the management gave the final warning signal to the workers regarding 'red flag' unions. Thus the RMS saved its skin. The Rourkela Steel Plant management then entered into an agreement - the first of its kind - with the RMS regarding the regularisation of some contract workers in 1973.

The 'Braja Mohanty union' also challenged the RMS hegemony immediately after the Emergency. The permanent workers rallied behind Braja Mohanty, a Lohia socialist leader. Mohanty's method of go-slow protest was very popular among the workers in the mid-70s. Mohanty was elected as MLA on the Janata ticket from the Rourkela MLA constituency in 1977. However, he failed in all his attempts to persuade the state Janata leadership and also Biju Patnaik, the then Central Minister for Steel and Mines, to order for the re-elections of the Works Committee and recognition status to his union which was actually growing in popularity. When the state refused to intervene because by then the RMS leaders were with Jaya Prakash Narayan and the Janata Party, Mohanty felt frustrated. The workers felt let down by his leadership which relied more on the state patronage rather than on their strength to achieve their goals. In the 1980 Assembly election, the Congress was returned to the Assembly by the Rourkela workers and the Janata was defeated.
Thus, the RMS once again succeeded in warding off a formidable challenge - on this occasion - thrown up by the permanent workers under the leadership of Brajā Mohanty.

Once two major challenges failed in the 70s and their minimum demands to hold election to the Works Committee were not even fulfilled, the workers relapsed into various moments of 'practico-inertia'. True, man hours loss has rapidly declined impressing a misleading picture of 'bargain happy' situation of the permanent workers. But the un-recorded forms of protest such as oral complaints in the shop floor, signature campaigns on memoranda to the DLC and moreover the whispering campaign against forcible redeployment, 'golden handshake' policy, etc., have not ceased at all. As these forms of protest usually do not cause manhours loss in the factory, these are not also recorded in the official industrial relation files. These forms of protest may be called 'practico-inertia' of the workers who resort to these tactics usually after the failure of the 'organised' protests. This has been the situation in the Rourkela Plant throughout the 1980s.

One of the logical culminations of the 'practico-inertia' of the 1980 has been the rise in the litigation cases to settle the labour disputes. The 'Panicker union' is a phenomenal expression of the legal methods which make the workers politically inert. They do not learn anything about their industrial relations from the court room struggles. But, as stated before, in the overall context of the failure of the 'organised' unions and the rise of many insidious forms of control over the workers, they have rallied behind the Panicker union as a last resort. Panicker's informal style of functioning gave them a refreshing lease of life. Thus his preaching of the legal method has gained popularity among the
permanent as well as contract workers. In 1989 his union won a thumping majority in the Works Committee which was formed after 15 years of the suppression of the only democratic body of the factory workers.

The left challenges, as already stated earlier, rose and fell because of what the left activists describe 'state terrorism'. With their downfall the political struggles receded into the backdrop and the legal battles overtook later. But the left movement, as stated in Chapter 3, failed also because of its sectarian nature of struggles, parliamentary cretenism, individualistic leadership, economism, its fuzziness about the hierarchical division of labour, its overall alienation from the peasantry and only marginal growth of organic intellectuals. In the early 60s, the AITUC which was stronger than the RMS in the factory sites fell into oblivion because of its adventurist and sectarian character of the struggle in the Blast Furnace on the one hand and its defective approach to reform the public sector management through pressure tactics on the other. A broad based non-sectarian approach to struggle was substituted by the sectarian pressure tactics of the labour. Though the SUCI - led UTUCC (LS) did not believe in 'pressure tactics' other than 'struggle', it mainly followed a sectarian programme. Even though it succeeded in building a few intellectual activists from among its rank-and-file workers, its mass base more or less adhered to an economistic line just as the AITUC. When the massive communal riots took place in 1964, 400 and more permanent worker activists of the UTUC actively participated in engineering the riots thus signifying the failure of economism to counter the organised communalism and communal consciousness of the ordinary workers. The union lost its base
among the permanent employees of the Fertilizer Plant of the RSP because the union had no option but to disown the workers who participated in the riots.

Unlike the AITUC or CITU, the SUCI union has later conducted many study circles to politically educate its activists. They usually study and discuss the party newspaper or party literature every Sunday. Thanks to its programme of political education, a few workers have graduated to its leadership at the local and state levels. S.K.Tripathy and Sheikh Kasim, as described in Chapter 3, are the respective cases of the workers graduating to the leadership position. This trend is not noticeable within the AITUC or CITU which mainly relied on the 'outside' leadership and did not seriously prepare the ordinary workers to handle the leadership mantle. However, this growth of organic intellectuals - the intellectuals formed from within the rank-and-file workers - is extremely minimal and insignificant because their formation is on the line of economism and trade unionism.

Moreover, the problem of the left leadership has got aggravated because of the predominance of the individualistic leadership especially in the CITU and SUCI. This has retarded the unification of different voices within the organisations. The democratic relationship between the leadership and workers has been marginalised. The General Charters of Demands have been formulated without consulting the workers let alone explaining them the class character of the demands. The leadership has more often tried to build the organisations as party 'cells'. Others from within the organisations have argued to develop them as 'mass fronts' where the activists or workers would not be necessarily party members and non-party activists would not be less privileged than the 'card
holders'. In addition, the parliamentary line of the left leadership has converted the organisations into careerist unions who raise similar demands of the workers and adopt similar agitational programmes but divide their struggles under different banners simply because of the obsession with the number game of the parliamentary politics.

The recent cases of the acute inter-union rivalry within the CITU and AITUC on the one hand and intra-union rivalry within the CITU on the other in the field of contract workers signify the parliamentary cretinism of these organisations. The respective union leadership wants its 'own' workers to get jobs in the construction works of the on-going modernisation project. They intimidate and physically prevent the 'other' contract workers (i.e. the workers of the 'other' union) from taking up these jobs. L.N. Behera, a veteran socialist leader, says that the contract workers have become a 'cake' for which every union now vies to share, own and control because the permanent workers do not any more listen to their slogans and agitational programmes. Being more than 50 per cent of them the first generation workers who will retire soon by 1995, the permanent workers have lost interest in the union 'politics'.

The left unions have not adopted any exceptional strategy to organise the contract workers. Parliamentary cretinism has dominated the CITU. In 1973 K.C. Mohanty, its first General Secretary, was denied a ticket from the Rourkela assembly constituency for his alleged 'naxalite militancy'. K.C. Mohanty was increasingly marginalised and finally pushed out from the CITU and CPI(M). His contribution to the struggles of the workers in the Traffic movement which actually led to the formation of the CITU...
was altogether demeaned by the game plan of the party's parliamentary politics. In 1985 this history repeated itself in a tragic turn of intra-union rivalry in the CITU. N.K. Mohanty, the then General Secretary, was removed from his post for his alleged lackluster election campaign for the party's candidate Bishnu Mohanty who was contesting from the Rourkela Assembly constituency in 1985. Once again in this game plan which was lost sight were the efforts of N.K. Mohanty in rebuilding the union, in uniting different factions and his emphasis on collective leadership, etc. during the post-Emergency days. Thus a terrible sectarianism and parliamentary cretinenism have resurfaced in the CITU. The present leadership of the CITU attempts to find the culprit in 'state terrorism' in its efforts to conceal the internal weaknesses.

Moreover, one of the major weaknesses of the left working class movement is that it has failed to organise the peasant movements in the hinterland of the steel town and establish its alliance with the workers. As Marx said, the workers can be politically conscious of themselves only be aligning their struggle with that of the peasantry. Since those days, the communists all over adhered to the worker-peasant alliance as the core of class struggle. The Rourkela left movement religiously adopted the slogan of 'worker-peasant alliance' without ever concretising it. Neither the hinterland peasantry who are mainly tribals could be led by the working class movement of Rourkela. Nor, for example, the workers who were supporters of the communist movement in the peasant belt of the Ganjam district (Orissa) could be convinced about the trade union politics of the left movement in Rourkela. The Ganjam workers maintained ambivalent positions on the
communist movement in Rourkela. They were more with the RMS. And the local adivasi workers have never been integrated by the left trade union movement. They have been more or less marginalised by the communists and socialists who have only religiously raised the slogan of 'worker-peasant alliance', without ever giving it any concrete shape. The result has been that the workers could not grow beyond the trade unionist politics.

The essence of trade unionism is that it conceives the factory apparatus in labour market terms, treats the factory in isolation from the state power and directs the struggles of the workers in isolation from the peasantry. In other words, trade unionism is basically the politics of labour market in its immediate surroundings. Indeed, the left trade unions have been mainly concentrating on the problems of the wages, incentives, bonus and allowances of workers. These are all labour market issues which are the immediate concerns of the workers. True that a small left organisation like the SUCI has made attempts to raise a few democratic issues like the home delivery of the coking coal, opposed the construction of swimming pool and the display of vulgar posters of a play where the local ADM was supposed to act. These are all women-related issues. Moreover, the workers also participated in an agitation demanding the Bimalgarh-Talcher railway link - an issue concerning all the sections of the Rourkela population. This railway link - yet to be established - would be a vital connection between Rourkela and Bhubaneswar. The wives of some workers showed exemplary courage during the agitation which involved all opposition political organisations, students and youths. The women broke through the jail cordon to greet their arrested comrades and husbands on the day of Holy.
The workers have participated in raising democratic issues concerning different sections of the population, not simply with the factory-based issues. But such democratic movements, significant as they are, were sparked off their self-interests. In the demand for home delivery of the coke, they were guided by the protection of the chastity of their women who were being harassed at the time of fetching coal from the Central Depo. In the demand for the Talcher-Bimalagarh railway link, they were concerned with the opening up of a short distance link with their native places in the coastal areas.

However, in the entire history of trade union movement in Rourkela during 1957-89, there was not a single political agitation of the workers undertaken on behalf of the hinterland peasants who are mainly tribals. No wonder, then, the unionisation of the factory workers also failed to bridge the gulf between tribal and non-tribal workers. The tribal workers resisted their marginalisation separately but not under the patronage of the central trade unions of the communists or socialists of the Rourkela steel town. Hence it would be fair to conclude that the overall unionisation could not proceed beyond trade unionism. The chief limitation of the left movement is that it has imposed trade unionism on the Rourkela steel workers.

In a recent survey of the state responses to the labour protests in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, etc., Ramaswamy concludes that the interest of labour seems to suffer the most as the state in nearly every situation has served the interests of the factory regime. The state responses have varied across space. In Bombay, it was reluctant to intervene in the labour disputes during the textile strike of the early 80s. In Madras and Bangalore it
shoved open hostility to the labour protests. It was inclined to control labour in Calcutta. All these varied moments of state intervention are however found in Rourkela. The state responses have varied from conciliation to coercion from moment to moment.

The state power has very actively collaborated on behalf of the RSP management in situations of crisis or imminent threats by the communists. The offices of ADM and SP of Rourkela have been directly involved in booking the communists under DIR, MISA, etc., physically prevent them from carrying out apparently legitimate agitational programmes. In normal times the office of the Orissa Labour Commissioner has mediated to conciliate the labour disputes raised by the different unions (including the communists). More often the Rourkela Steel Plant management has refused to negotiate with the unions other than the recognised union. Thus the nature of the state intervention in the factory disputes in Rourkela Steel Plant has varied from time to time, depending on the course of disputes raised by a particular group. The state has adopted a more coercive policy towards the left-wing trade unions all through. In the early 60s, it was engaged in a war of nerves with the socialists till their union formally got recognition. After that, one of the common policies of the factory regime, state power and recognised union - the three key agents of status quo - have been to suppress the left movement whenever it tries to raise its head in Rourkela. It would be needless to repeat the many instances of state coercion we have already cited in this presentation.

In the end, the story line of the formation of the working class in Rourkela may be abstracted as follows. The policy of trade unionism through collective bargaining, i.e., the moderate trade unionism, has been the main plank of hegemony over labour set by the three principal actors, viz., the factory regime, state power and recognised union of the socialists. The left-wing unions have set limited and partial counter-hegemony patterns through a policy of militant trade unionism. Once the terms of their struggle (as against the collective bargaining of the socialists) were set on the lines of individualistic leadership, parliamentary cretenism, economism and factory-based militancy in isolation from agrarian struggles, their counter-hegemony grew weaker and weaker. The chief defect of the left hitherto has been to counter moderate trade unionism with a militant type, signifying thereby a challenge to hegemony in terms of the discourse set by the ruling bloc of the factory regime, state power and recognised union. They have thus ceased to operate as distinct ideological forces. As their political struggles have grown weak, the workers have finally resorted to the legal method signifying a 'end of politics' in one sense and readiness for struggle in another sense. But the central purpose of the legal trade unionism is to enforce in subtle ways the final assent to the ruling class politics: the court room as the domain of labour politics. What appears for the workers as their struggles against factory regime have finally ended up in the celebration of the legal wing of the state power. That is how, in the event of failure of political struggles, the final assent of labour to the ruling class politics has been obtained through legal means in Rourkela.
The possibility of breaking with the trade unionism of the moderate or militant or legalist types is now historically jettisoned because S.K.Kabi, a senior leftist worker, says that about 50 per cent of the factory workers belong to the first generation who would be retiring by 1995. They do not have any stake in the work place in the long run. By 1995, however, the RSP's manpower would be drastically changed with the 'new worker' entering into a fully mechanised plant whose on-going modernisation would also be completed. The policy of economism might not appease to the new skilled worker who would be actually on the high pay rolls of the new management. In post-modernised steel plant, the numerical strength of the new worker would be reduced as compared to the present strength of its counterpart. But the new worker would be looking for political options which might turn out to be the potential grounds of challenge to the newly recognised factory hegemony. In this eventuality, S.K.Kabi argues with tremendous optimism of will, the new worker would have to look for the potential allies like the underemployed urban workers and the hinterland peasantry especially adivasis to exercise new political options. Only through this political process, the new worker would be able to break with the long history of trade unionism which so far has created only partial autonomy for its predecessors. The new worker, thus, may signal the beginning of a search for 'integral autonomy' of the workers and peasants as a whole. Echoing Gramsci, one may conclude that the decisive battle for 'integral autonomy' of the new worker will ultimately depend on the course of its political options vis-a-vis the state power and its ability to create 'new democratic organisations' in India today.