One thing that needs to be stressed and remembered is that Gandhi was not a labour leader in the sense of organizing individual trade unions or leading particular strikes. He was not a labour leader in the sense of being an insider to the movement. He was predominantly a political leader of the national struggle for freedom. But being such a leader of the national struggle he understood the importance and necessity of organizing the emerging working class. He was a nation builder and his view of the Indian nation was that it had to be a multi-group and multi-interest nation. He rejected the idea of class-state, be it run by the capitalists or by the working class.

The only method dear to his heart was to reorient the national politics on the broad lines of uniting all national forces for joint action against imperialism and enlisting active cooperation of the peasants and workers. One of the most important developments that occurred during this period under Gandhi's initiative, was the creation of a new form of organisation of the working class i.e. the Ahmedabad Labour Movement which had great potential to transform the nature of working class participation in Labour Movements of India.

Moreover, when the concrete realities began to change the ground realities, he made necessary adjustment in his thinking. Assertion of power from the labouring classes must be considered from the historical aspect; it changes together with a change in the class nature of society. The labouring classes which have always been champions of their class-interest showed surprising change in their thinking under his leadership. Under
Gandhi, their hatred for the exploiting classes gave way to collectivism, truthfulness, humanism and cooperation with the mill-owners on the basis of common interests.

He spoke before many workers' meetings in different places throughout India. These speeches as well as his articles on problems of workers and strikes in 'Young India', 'Harijan', 'Gujarati' and other papers represent the core of his argument about labour movement in India.

During the period under review (1918-1934) the ideas expressed by Gandhi about labour were significant in certain respects. First of all, Gandhi had a labour philosophy of his own which developed and changed according to situation from time to time. Secondly, because Gandhi had a leading role in Congress so he urged upon the Congress to adopt and pursue a particular strategy in relation to labour movement, though the strategy advocated by him was substantially different from that of other Congress leaders like C.R. Das, Subhash Chander Bose and Jawahar Lal Nehru. Thirdly, we find that what the Congress did was closer to Gandhi's line of thinking than that of other leaders. In other words, Gandhi had a more determining impact on the Congress party's approach towards labour. The radical leaders within the Congress who had shown some reservations for many of the formulations of Gandhi, in practice if not at the level of theory, increasingly began to accept them without any criticism, though no significant change in the objective situation in India occurred which would warrant such a shift.

We had seen that during his South Africa's visit he came in close contact with the labour class. Soon he developed deep interest in their problems and when he returned to India, his early movement particularly Ahmedabad Movement brought him all the more close to the labour class.
Significantly his first brush into the labour class was largely confined to his concern for safeguarding and multiplying social wealth along with mutual respect between the mill-owners and the workers. According to his viewpoint, this was possible through honesty and integrity, moral purity, simplicity and modesty in social and private life.

Experiment in Ahmedabad instilled a new sense of confidence in workers' ability to lead their own class organization. This organization under the leadership of Gandhi became an important controlling factor in the management of the mills with which the millowners fully cooperated. Even the government did not feel alarmed from their activities. Thus it opened a new era in labour build up in Indian political horizon.

In fact in Ahmedabad Gandhi was the choice of millowners as well as the workers for settling the disputes. The millowners knew that Gandhi had influence over the workers which they made use of by inviting him on such occasions.

Gandhi who enjoyed the confidence of the workers would mediate to avoid a strike by workers by contacting and arranging with the millowners. The process was not simple. Gandhi had to work untiringly to inculcate mutual confidence which was hard to come. Many a time his opponents found themselves on the sidelines. The mill owners, to begin with, were hesitant but soon they too became intimate and integral part of this experiment. The movement had the benefit of their money, their intelligence and their courage. Though they practically controlled everything else in the management they surrendered leadership to Gandhi with faith that he would do justice to them as well.
Gandhi used to teach the workers the sort of relation they should keep with millowners. Though the living conditions of the workers were very bad, even then Gandhi and his followers never allowed the workers to take any drastic step out of frustration. The union of workers was totally under the influence of the followers of Gandhi. The interests of the workers were never allowed to dominate the interests of the millowners. The union of workers formed by the followers of Gandhi was not allowed to be affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress by Gandhi. It was because he thought it to be too extreme and was totally opposed to his idea of non-violence and class-harmony.

Gandhi did not propose to examine the duty of the capitalists. In Gandhi's view if only the workers had understood their rights and responsibilities and confined themselves to the purest means, both must gain. But two things were needful; both the demands and the means adopted to enforce the millowners must be honest and clear. The words, both must gain may be noted. He wanted the workers to put such demands which were reasonable. He wanted the workers to put their demands by purest means by appealing to the good sense of capitalists. The demand which seeks merely to take advantage of the capitalists' position, according to Gandhi, was unlawful demand. Similarly, if the workers asked for enough wages to enable them to maintain themselves and to educate their children decently, without violence and by an appeal to the good sense of the capitalists by arbitration, was lawful means.

Disputes, he observed, must be resolved through arbitration and not by strikes. This he thought was the purest means.
Gandhi was fully in favour of arbitration. He thought, if both the parties had accepted the principle of arbitration then strikes would forever become an impossibility and also it was a matter for satisfaction for all the concerned parties. He believed that strikes were an inherent right of the working class but it would be a crime if the capitalist had already accepted the principle of arbitration. In such a situation he ruled out the idea of strike by the workers.

Gandhi tried to cool down the workers by saying that wages were improving and there was every possibility of their continual improvement. Gandhi wanted the workers to be satisfied with the increase in wages and reduction in working hours.

In Gandhi’s world-view the Labourers should avoid class antagonism. This would harm their basic interests. He reserved the same advice for the capitalists also. For instance, he was fully aware of contradictory position of labour and the millowners on the question of wages. He always tried to convince the workers that the improvement in wages is a continuous process and therefore they should have patience in demanding improvement in their wages. According to him, each such demand must have not only its logic but it should be pursued peacefully. The critics were, however, not convinced. They argued how could it be? The capitalist for every increase in wages wanted it to be compensated by increase in labour input. They quoted the millowners’ observation to Gandhi that the workers were lazy, did not give full time to their work and were inattentive. However, Gandhi had answer for them that when the hours were reduced to ten, the labourers would put in better and almost the same amount of work as in tentative hours. He gave them the example of England that reduction
in hours of labour had brought about happy results there. He advised the workers to identify themselves with the interests of millowners. By so doing, they would improve and with them the industry and the millowners would show better results. Gandhi thought, the reduction in working hours would be nullified by increase in labour input. In this way, mill-hands and millowners were asked to cooperate with each other instead of fighting.

Since Gandhi believed in harmonious relations between the labour class and capitalist class, he was not in favour of strikes. He advised the method of arbitration for solving the disputes between them because this was the only way for reaching a settlement with the consent of both the parties without violence and as a result a sense of brotherhood would prevail between the mill-owners and labourers. We find that Gandhi made use of this system successfully in Ahmedabad. Right from 1918 to 1934, the disputes at Ahmedabad were amicably decided through arbitration and both the parties continued to have faith in this system. A permanent arbitration board existed there.

Besides, Gandhi formulated his Trusteeship Doctrine with the intention of bringing about a change in the capitalist order of society converting it into egalitarian one. The doctrine did not recognise capitalism as such and provided the capitalists an opportunity to reform themselves under the belief that human nature is never beyond redemption. If the Trusteeship Doctrine of Gandhi is adopted in practice there will be an atmosphere of fraternity between millowners and labourers, their interests will become common and a new era of good relations will come into existence. In such a situation there will be no place for conflict.
As regards trade unions, Gandhi established a unique and model association 'Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association' which had its own rules and regulations. When the All India Trade Union Congress came into existance, we find that Gandhi kept himself and the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association aloof from it. On being criticized on this account Gandhi put up a strong plea in his favour saying that he was not against formation of any labour union on all India basis but time was not ripe enough for such an association. In fact, the main issue before Gandhi was his fight with the British Government and if the disputes between millowners and workers were increased, then the aim of independence would no longer remain on the forefront. Rather it would become a secondary issue which he never wanted.

The study of strikes, which occurred between 1919 and 1927, reveals that economic issues were the main reasons of most of the strikes. These, however, gained strength from the political situation of the country and the workers were filled with enthusiasm. Specially, at the time of Non-Cooperation Movement, the display of determination by the workers was note-worthy. But it was not the aim of Congress leadership to instigate the workers to go on strike. They discouraged strikes. The local leaders of Congress were forbidden to involve the workers in national movement by the party guidelines. Congress tried hard to keep the strikes violence-free.

We don't find any national leader of the time making any attempt to mobilize the workers for taking part in national movement.

The sympathetic strike of Assam Bengal Railway in 1920 was condemned by Gandhi, C.F. Andrews and Hardayal Nag even though it could have been an occasion for the national movement for entering the labour class into it. The Congress leaders tried to settle the Kanpur strike through
but they were not free from Gandhi's influence. Inspite of their socialistic ideology they could not go against the congress policy towards working class which was infact dominated by Gandhi's ideology. Keeping in view the congress policy the socialist Jawahar Lal Nehru took no notice of the legal and justified demands of the workers of Golmuri Tin Plate Company. Similarly Subhash Chander Bose took the side of Tata Iron and Steel Company at the time of workers struggle of 1928 with the excuse that Indian Steel Industry must be saved from bankruptcy. This was because Subhash Chander Bose could not go against the congress policies formulated by Gandhi. At the time when Civil Disobedience Movement was withdrawn, Communists were in jail under Meerut conspiracy case and Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries were hanged, Communist element in All India Trade Union Congress raised its voice against Gandhi's compromising attitude towards British but Subhash Chander Bose opposed it as he wanted All India Trade Union Congress to follow congress policies.

As far as stand of the government is concerned, we find that government used to be a lone spectator before communist influence. It only intervened on some rare occasions on the pretext of law and order situation but after the entrance of the Communists in labour field, the government began to take action on strikes and declared them as anti-government.

The critics of Gandhi severely criticized his thoughts and said that Gandhi had influence over workers who were illiterate and simple. They blindly followed Gandhi who took advantage of their simplicity. In Ahmedabad Gandhi would immediately mediate to avoid the strike by contacting and arranging with the millowners. Such mediations were more beneficial to the millowners than to the workers. The workers being simple could not understand this game.
As regards Ahmedabad, we must keep in mind that the government, the millowners of Ahmedabad and Anusuyabehn Sarabhai (sister of a millowner) had invited Gandhi to Ahmedabad but after taking stock of the entire situation there he decided to side the labourers as according to him they were fighting for a just cause. Gandhi's principle was to fight against injustice. So it was not necessary that he had to be on the side of labourers. He would side those with whom injustice had been done. He neither declared himself the enemy of capitalists nor a friend of workers. He had cordial relations with both and whosoever was found guilty by him he would give a warning without any ill feelings.

The critics of Gandhi tried to establish that the millowners got protection from Gandhi and the workers were allowed to be exploited by the millowners because the union of workers was totally under the influence of the followers of Gandhi. When Gandhi said 'both must gain' then it becomes clear that Gandhi never wanted to reduce sufficiently the exhorbitant profits of the millowners. According to them it was nothing but begging when the workers were asked by Gandhi to put their demands by purest means by appealing to the good sense of capitalists. They did not understand how both could gain at the same time.

The critics also criticised the principle of arbitration. They argued that telling the workers that the strike was an inherent right of workers was nothing but befoulng them when in the same breath Gandhi declared strikes to be considered as crime when capitalists accepted the principle of arbitration. According to them arbitration bring nothing to workers. It only protected the capitalists and forced the workers to smooth down a bid and bow down before the law.
They said that Trusteeship Doctrine of Gandhi was also in fact in favour of capitalists. Trusteeship method could be utilized by any capitalist to keep his property within his control. Thus a sort of protection was provided to them.

But all the criticism is based on the fact that the principles adopted by Gandhi were theoretically very attractive. No doubt they were based on goodwill and humanitarian grounds but when put to practical test they proved a failure except at Ahmedabad. Even at Ahmedabad they failed on some occasions. In fact Gandhi was neither an economist nor wholly a labour leader. He had a vast field before him where he wanted to work for the benefit of all without exception. His major aim was to form a united front against British Government consisting of people from classes, religions and castes. He was so involved in his main goal of freedom that he had no time to put his principles to practice.

Critics argued that from the very start Gandhi remained in contact with the business and trading class and was also helped financially by rich Indians. EMS Namboodripad gives data about some notable rich Indians who gave donations at the time. They were:

1. Ranjit Samshedji Tata Rs. 25000/-
2. Aga Khan who collected donation at the All India Muslim League Session Rs. 3000/-
3. J.B. Petit Rs. 400/-
4. Nizam of Hyderabad Rs. 25000/-

T.V. Parvate in his book 'Jamnalal Bajaj', A Brief Study of His Life and Character' has supplied a list of 14 persons from whom Gandhi received donations.
From this and several such examples of donations from capitalists, the critics of Gandhi formed a firm view that Gandhi was in favour of capitalists and capitalism but those people had not tried to understand that personally he did not require money as he was a simple man but money was needed for carrying on the social and political activities. Gandhi himself admitted that rich people were his friends. He was aware of the fact that he was being criticized on this account yet his motive behind it was to receive money from capitalists for several constructive programmes of social reforms along with the national movement. Gandhi said, "My relation with them is ethical. I can never give up my association with the capitalists because of fear of anybody. To do so, in my opinion, amounts to be a betrayal of the cause of the poor."

In fact Gandhi's attitude towards capitalism is as visible as sunlight. While maintaining good relations with the capitalists and fully depending upon them for financial support, he continued his attack on them.

On the other side, capitalists had some different goals. G.D. Birla's intention was that capitalism should flourish in India and for that reason he helped National Freedom Movement. Fact remains that on account of his influence over the capitalists, some of them did join and actively participated in freedom movement. The net result is that Gandhi restricted his activities within the labour field of Ahmedabad. No attempt was made by him as well as Congress to organise the labour at large in the country. He publicly condemned sympathetic strikes which were non-political and were aimed at enhancing the moral of the strikers. Such an action of Gandhi was neither beneficial to the cause of labour nor in any way was helpful for the political movement. Basically all congress leaders like
Gandhi wanted to keep the working class in their control and to restrict growth of militancy in their campaigns but they differed in methods of handling the labour. Gandhi had faith in class harmony and was not in favour of use of force either by millowners or by workers. But other congress leaders who associated themselves with All India Trade Union Congress, though believed in class harmony, differed with Gandhi's methods—these were N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, and Diwan Chaman Lal. The leaders like Sardar Patel, Rajinder Prasad and C. Rajgopal Acharya were in favour of repressive methods of control over the working class activity. This is why, Birlas and Tatas supported them. The third type of leaders, who had imbibed socialist ideology were Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. In spite of their socialist behaviour they could not go against the Congress policy towards working class which was in fact dominated by Gandhi's ideology.

In short, Gandhi's response to labour movements during the period of our study clearly show that Gandhi was not in favour of class struggle. Instead his entire effort was devoted to create harmonious relations between the capitalists and the workers. The obvious reason was that Gandhi stood for 'united front' of all classes to fight against British imperialism. Antagonism between various classes would have weakened the struggle against the British Raj which was the primary goal of Gandhi. Gandhi experimented with Ahmedabad Labour Movement and hoped that workers of India would take some lessons from this movement as also from the technique he adopted to solve the labour problems. In other words, All India labour movements except that of Ahmedabad were independent of Gandhi's direct intervention. However, he did influence other movements or strikes without controlling them from the front. Unlike Karl Marx, Gandhi did not use
labour as a vanguard of resolution. He had his own reservation about their ability to experiment with Satyagraha and non-violence. As such he tried to contain the Labour's anger whenever such opportunity came. However, it must be immediately recognised that Gandhi never completed his ambitious plans for a description of his new world and the role of labour in this world. His convictions for Non-violence, Satyagraha, Arbitration, Trusteeship etc. led him into many fanciful elaborations, experiments and sometimes some exaggerations. The credit to Gandhi, however, lies in the fact that he charted out his responses vis-a-vis labour with reasonable exactness, moderation and impartiality.