CHAPTER - III

THE LABOUR MOVEMENTS :
1919-1927
In the previous chapter, we have discussed the relationship between the workers and capitalists after the world war in Ahmedabad. In fact capitalists got huge profits during the war period but they did not want to share it with the workers. On the other hand, the condition of workers became miserable, so they fought for their rights. Because of the intervention of Gandhi, the conflict got country-wide attention. Now in the present chapter we will discuss the workers' struggle and Gandhi's attitude towards their struggle not only in Ahmedabad but also in all other important industrial centres in the country.

Prior to 1919, the political associations and the Congress in India took little interest in the labour problems. Some social reformers, however, had shown some concern over the factory legislation but the nationalist leaders were silent. If at all they expressed themselves, it did not go in favour of the working class and had even no sympathy towards labour.

The Congress demanded, through a resolution passed in 1888, that a commission be appointed to enquire into the industrial condition of the country. Later in 1896, another resolution was passed by Congress relating to Assam coolies and tea-garden labourers demanding the repeal of the Emigration Act. Again in 1900, Congress passed a resolution regarding Indian Coal Mines Bill suggesting omission of restriction imposed on
the employment of labour. In the year that followed i.e. 1901, we observe a change in the attitude of Congress when it passed a resolution asking for enhancement of wages of coolies in Assam. These consecutive resolutions contradictory to each other suggest this change in attitude. The resolutions of Congress that followed (between 1904 and 1918) were regarding promotion of indigenous industries but we find no mention of the plight of the labourers.

At that time, the Indian Labour Movement was gaining strength but it failed to impress the Congress. Significantly the Congress was a silent spectator over Morrison Commission and the Indian Factory Bill under consideration of Imperial Council during the period 1908-1911.

After the strike of Ahmedabad Textile Workers in 1919, an appreciable change in the policy of Congress could be observed. In its Amritsar Session, the Congress passed a resolution asking the provincial committees and affiliated associations to promote labour unions for improving the economic and political conditions of the working class and securing for them a fair standard of living and proper place in the body 'Politic' in India. The motive was political as was clear from the resolution. At Amritsar Session of the Congress, Gandhi emerged as a force in Congress. In September, 1920, a special session of Congress was held at Calcutta. Here Gandhi’s popularity received another boost and his personality overwhelmed his contemporaries. At Nagpur another session of Congress was held the same year i.e. 1920.

In fact after organising Kheda, Champaran and Ahmedabad movements Gandhi emerged as a mass leader and the year 1920 marks the

beginning of the Gandhian Era in Indian History in general and in Congress in particular.

However, the labour scenario was little mixed up. The authority of Gandhi was recognised. The success of Ahmedabad experiment had underlined the obvious that Gandhi, henceforth, would actively intervene in the labour problems. Similarly, there were other important leaders and political groups who were lending support to the labour class. Generally speaking the entire period under review i.e. 1919-1927 was characterized by the Indian Labour Movement alliance with various political parties and interest groups. Both these aspects came under close interaction. In times of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement which was conducted under Gandhi's leadership, the Indian Working class could not remain aloof from the nation's struggle for freedom. It was only during such crucial times that the Indian working class forged ahead with grim determination. The fundamental factor, which ushered the Indian working class into a new epoch, was world war I. Actually during the first world war, the economy of not only India but of the whole world underwent a drastic change. There occurred a sudden boost in industry to cope up with the requirement of war and allied nations. At the same time, import of several commodities was reduced due to restricted movement of cargo ships. As a result of the increased demand of manufactured goods within the country (India) and for war the prices of Indian goods rose rapidly. Industrialists made huge profits during the war. It was, so to say, the emergence of Indian capitalism.

Alongwith the increase in industry, industrial labour also increased enormously. "In consequence of the industrial advance' the number

of factory workers also swelled during the war. In 1919, the large scale industries of the country employed 1,367,000 workers. Of them 306,300 were employed in 277 cotton spinning and weaving mills, 140,800 in 1940 Cotton grimming factories and 276,100 in 76 Jute factories and presses. The railway shops employed 126,100 workers. Two third of the factory workers were thus in the three branches of the large scale industry. It also employed as many as 207,800 mining workers."

The post war scenario was no different. "These conditions gradually grew in acuteness. Till 1917, their effects made themselves manifest even in the remotest parts of India. Disturbed economic conditions naturally gave rise to agrarian unrest* especially in Bihar and Orissa and to industrial strikes in urban centres."4

A general unrest in workers was mainly due to high cost of living. From the government statistics we find the index of prices of all articles from 1914 to 1920. Taking 1914 as the base year, the wholesale price index in 1920 had increased from 100 to 190 in Calcutta, 203 in Bombay, 208 in Madras, 177 in Karachi and 190 throughout India."5

The cost of living rose by leaps and bounds and reached its highest level in 1920, as can be seen from the following figures:

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<td>1914 (before the war)</td>
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* After the First World War and especially after the last decade of the worldwide economic crisis, dissatisfaction among the farmers increased very rapidly and its effect converted them into revolutionaries day by day. The worldwide economic crisis disturbed the agrarian economy. Farmers started their campaigns, in every part of India, against the heavy crisis, serfdom and confiscation of land. They united themselves in 'Gram Samities' against the landlords and money-lenders.


66
The wages of workers were not enough to compensate the high cost of living even though the wages were increased during the war time. The wages of the workers did not increase according to the prices. The pitiable condition of Indian workers was also a contributory factor for their unrest. 7

The fact that the increase in wages was not enough to cope up with the increase in prices was clearly mentioned in the report submitted by the Royal Commission on Labour in 1931. It said, "A sharp rise in prices took place toward and after the end of war. Increases in wages were granted in the leading industries, but these did not as a rule meet the rise in the prices and by the middle of 1920, the level of real wages was generally lower than before the war." 8

Another noticeable feature was the exploitation by the British rulers. They not only drained raw material from the country at cheaper rates but also tried to meet the war expenditure by increasing the taxation. Thus, 'Financial robbery of the country during the war thrust a heavy burden of misery on the working people.' 9

Tracing the history of emergence of strikes the Royal Commission on Labour stated in the report, "The end of war saw an immediate change. There were some important strikes in the cold weather of 1918-19, they were more numerous in the following winter and in the winter of 1920-21, industrial strife became almost general in organised industry. The main cause was the realisation of the potentialities of the strike in the existing situation and this was assisted by the emergence of

7. Saha, P., op. cit., p.32
9. Sen, Sukomal, op. cit., p.120.
trade union organisers, by the education which the war had given to the masses and by the scarcity of labour arising from the expansion of industry and aggravated by the great epidemic of influenza.\textsuperscript{10}

The report gives a hint that there was awakening of masses especially the industrial workers and the new consciousness that was born in them, produced restlessness, discontent, a spirit of defiance as well as new ideals and aspirations.\textsuperscript{11}

The awakening of the workers with a new zeal in the post war period was a worldwide phenomenon. The Indian working class was not out of it. The political situation of India had also its influence on the working class.\textsuperscript{12}

As a result of the awakening, the workers were more conscious of their rights and were bold in demanding their fulfilment. The political movement for Home Rule had already started. It was followed later by the countrywide mass campaign of non-cooperation under the leadership of Gandhi. The political developments had their impact upon workers. They developed in the minds of workers a new sense of solidarity and a keener desire to secure improvement in their conditions of life and work. They also brought to them the services of a number of social and political workers who were prepared to help them in organising themselves and conducting their struggles.\textsuperscript{13}

The fatal blow which the first World war dealt on the world imperialist system and the deep economic crisis which it bred in the imperialist world and the tide of world revolution generated by the October

\textsuperscript{10} Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India 1931, p. 333.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Saha P, op cit., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{13} Karnik V.B., Strikes in India, Bombay, 1967, p.61.
Socialist Revolution of 1917 exerted a far reaching effect on the national liberation movement.  

The people of India who had great hope of getting self-government at the end of war were greatly disappointed when this promise was not fulfilled. Some minor concessions given were very inadequate and disappointing.

Then came the repression from the British Government. The Rowlat Bill was passed under which anyone could be detained without assigning any reason and suspected persons were not allowed to move freely.

Fresh with the experiences of South Africa, Gandhi by then, had fully entered into Indian Politics and took up the task of organizing passive resistance against Rowlat Act and announced countrywide hartal (Suspension of day's business) on April 6, 1919 to be followed by Satyagraha*

The Royal Commission on Labour while analysing the causes of industrial strife stated, "At certain periods, factors which were not economic had an important influence on industrial strife. The worst period of such unrest (1920-21) coincided with the occurrence of intensive political agitation. A few strikes were organised by political leaders, more frequently opponents of government used their influence to intensify disputes which were economic in nature. Recently, other influences have appeared, the spread of the communism have affected the workers in certain places,


* Satyagraha - literally meaning persistence in truth used as the method of passive resistance.
particularly Bombay and the big mill-strikes which have occurred there during the last few years; communist leaders and organisations have played a leading role. But, although workers may have been influenced by persons with nationalist, communist or commercial ends to serve, we believe that there has rarely been a strike of any importance which has not been due entirely or largely to economic causes.\textsuperscript{17}

Though the Royal Commission did not find any strike entirely linked with political situation in the country but fact remains that people at large including the workers had an awakening.

While the repression of the government continued, the Congress decided to start non-violent non-cooperation movement in the special Calcutta Congress session of September, 1920, which awakened the slumbering masses from age old sleep. The labouring populations inspite of their drawbacks was also tremendously influenced by this movement.\textsuperscript{18}

The immediate post war period (1918-20) saw the emergence of Trade Unions which provided an inspiration and goal to the workers whereas the latter supplied young and enthusiastic leaders, who proposed to exploit the workers organisation in their political struggle for freedom.\textsuperscript{19}

The post war period witnessed spurt in prices of commodities, disappearance of commodities from the market due to hoarding by a few and black-marketing. Industry which had flourished during war began to decline and there was large scale retrenchment of workers. Due to unemployment and high cost of living prevailing at that time, the common

\textsuperscript{17} Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931, p. 335.
\textsuperscript{18} Saha, P., op.cit., p.36.
\textsuperscript{19} Bahl Vinay, The making of Indian Working Class — A Case of Tata Iron and Steel Company, New Delhi, p. 207.
people especially labourers were hard pressed. Their condition was miserable. At the same time, Muslims of India were unhappy about the status of Khilafat. The discontentment among the poor people was very large and consequently there was a sudden spurt in industrial strikes. Denial of self-government and massacre of Jalianwala Bagh at Amritsar in 1919 added fuel to the fire. At this juncture, Gandhi gave call of non-cooperation and Khilafat Movement against the British Rule in India.  

Gandhi had certain reservation about the ideological instance of the labour class. Ahmedabad experiment had not given him enough confidence to seek their support against any anti-imperialist movement yet their support was not completely rejected. It was his belief that labour was not yet ready to join the non-violent satyagraha. Moreover, he feared that the capitalist class might resent such a move. Further, the traditional leadership still exerted powerful influence and the assumption prevailed that the labour was under the influence of radical groups who believed that capitalism was dividing the industries into two social groups, one capitalist and one labour - separate and unequal.

Inspite of all this, the workers showed great interest in anti-imperialist strikes. Consequently the workers of Congress at certain industrial...
centres seized the opportunity to organize workers to make the non-cooperation movement a success. 1500 labourers from Kumardhubi and Kutli were addressed by a local leader on January 17, 1921 stating that Congress was concerned about labour and its organisation. 21

In Bengal, there was spurt in labour movement at the time of Non-Cooperation and was due to the influence of this national movement. 22

Prior to this i.e. before declaration of Non-Cooperation, the strikes in Bengal were based on economic issues and the political leaders had taken no interest to mobilize the workers politically, having been separated from them by barriers of language, culture and various trends of anti-imperialism. In the period of late 1920 to early 1922, a change occurred in the history of agitations and struggles of Calcutta industrial area workers which distinctly showed unity of mass forces and various trends of anti-imperialism. 23

In Jute industry, the unrest among workers was caused due to reduced working days per week which reduced their wages. However, the causes of unrest were multifarious. Political, social and economic developments of past few years had the influence over labour situation. 24

The message of nationalism and Non-Cooperation was carried to the industrial areas around Calcutta by the national leaders by holding meetings infusing new elements of political situation in them. 25 Workers

22. Home Department (Political), March 1920, deposit 89, July, 1920, Deposit 13 & 104.
were taking part in national movement was evident from the nature of charges imposed on some workers for taking disciplinary actions. In July, 1921 several sardars of the Albion Jute Mill, Budge-Budge were dismissed for participation in Non-Cooperation activities.26 In Jalpaiguri district the plight of the plantation workers was miserable and there was wide spread unrest among them. They worked in remote corners of the forest and hence were out of reach of the local leaders of the Congress who wanted to involve them in national movement. Moreover, most of the Congress and nationalists had indifferent attitude towards their plight because of the Gandhian ideology. In July 1921, however, unrest among the garden coolies was officially reported and Non-Cooperation took its advantage to urge the coolies to take over the land and management, several strikes occurred.27

There were nation' wide strikes on November 17,1921 as a protest against the visit of the Prince of Wales when All India Trade Union Congress backed the call for Hartal to proclaim India's boycott of the visit showing sign of political consciousness among the workers.28

In Wellington Jute Mill a worker was dismissed on his arrest in Calcutta as a Congress volunteer. The workers went on a three week strike from December 22; 1921 to January 16, 1922 voicing their protest and identification with the nationalist cause.29

Similarly in the North Brooke Jute Mill Champdany, nearly 4500 workers resorted to a strike on December 28, 1921, to protest against dismissal of a number of workers who had been arrested as Satyagrahis.30

26. Intelligence Bureau Report, for the week ending August 4, 1929.
29. Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 12, 1921.
30. Industrial and Labour Bureau, 881 of 1921 Serial No. 99.105
The nationalists and non-cooperators took part in formation of Railway Unions in Eastern Region in 1921, Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union was formed at the behest of the non-cooperators, Gandhi also advised railwaymen at Kharagpur to form a separate union for Indian workers.  

The decision of Congress to start Non-Cooperation movement had remarkable effect on the tramway workers of Calcutta who were struggling for higher wages and ending of oppressive attitude of management. The strike started on January 26, 1921 and continued up to February 23, 1921. Company yielded to the determination and unity of workers. The class consciousness and self-confidence of the workers had tremendously increased.

Strikes in East Bengal of Assam Bengal Railwaymen, Island Steamer Employees and other group of workers from May 1921 were strikes inspired by Non-Cooperation movement.

The Railway and Steamer strike in East Bengal occurred in sympathy with the Assam Tea Garden coolies on hearing about the firing at Chandpur Railway Station by Gorkha Police on the coolies. On May 24, 1921 railway staff at Chandpur and Laksham went on strike and on May 25, 1921 the railway union at Chittagong also declared a general sympathetic strike and on May 27, 1921 steamer service men joined them. Arriving at Chandpur, C.R. Das defined the railway and steamer strike as part of Non-Cooperation movement.

33. *Indian Annual Register*, 1922, pp. 28-29, PC.
The whole land and water traffic route of East Bengal was in dead-lock for some months together. J.M.Sen Gupta of Chittagong and C.R.Das with a large number of volunteers organised this huge strike.°

Gandhi advised the workers not to go to work but offered no material help to the striking workers. Gandhi was against the sympathetic strikes. In an article in 'Young India' he declared, "In my opinion the labourers and artisans of India have not yet arrived at that degree of national consciousness which is necessary for successful sympathetic strike." But while addressing the workers at Chittagong Gandhi said to them that they had struck work not for any rise in wages but for the sake of others... He had not imagined that workers in India had become strong enough to go on a strike out of concern for other peoples' suffering. That is not true of the entire working class, but in their case, he was told, they had struck work only out of sympathy with the sufferings of their brethren. And if that is the reason why they had gone on strike, it became their duty not to return to work, any of them, until the hardships of plantation labourers had ended, until they got justice. Gandhi advised the workers not to go to work but offered no material help to the striking workers.

Prior to the call given by Gandhi for Non-Cooperation, i.e. the year 1919, there was turmoil in general public in Tamilnadu due to Rowlat Act and Khilafat movement. The anti-Rowlat Satyagraha of 1919 politicised every section of the population. Public meetings became the order of the day especially in the months of March and April, 1919. Gandhi visited several

36. Young India, September 22, 1921.
places in Tamilnadu and addressed mass meetings.\textsuperscript{38} The Congress organised a mass meeting on the Madras Beach on March 30, 1919 to request the Secretary of State to exercise the crown's power to vote in the case of Rowlat Bill and to exhort the people to observe a fast on April 6, 1919. The message of Gandhi was also read at the meeting.\textsuperscript{39}

Meetings were also held in Tamilnadu at Madura and Tanjore in which Rowlat Act was condemned and people were motivated for Satyagraha. Such activities affected the factory workers also. On April 6, 1919, the declared day of the fast, a huge procession of the factory workers started from Roypettah in the city and reached the Madras Beach to participate in the public meeting.\textsuperscript{40}

The nationalist consciousness of the workers was further accelerated by the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movements. After the end of the First World War, there were undoubted signs of agitation over the Khilafat and Holy places question among the Muslims of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{41}

A large meeting was held in connection with Khilafat Day in the evening of March 19, 1920, at 5.00 P.M. on the Beach opposite the Presidency College, Madras. Madras Labour Union, Tramway Union and Aluminium Company's employees organised processions and marched to the places of the meeting along with other Mohammdans crying out 'Hindu Musalman Ki Jai.'\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} Local Government Fortnightly Report, Madras, April 21, 1919.
\textsuperscript{39} The Swadesamitran, March 31, 1919.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., dated March 19, 1920 of Assistant Commissioner of Police.
Gandhi while addressing the meeting declared his intention of leading a Non-Cooperation campaign on August 12, 1920. Gandhi along with Shaukat Ali visited Madras again. Just before the train arrived at 9.30 a.m., a very big crowd numbering about 10,000 greeted them. Labour unions were represented by Madras Electric, Tramway men's union, Kerosine Oil Workers Union, Simpson and Company's Employees Union and Government Press Employees Union.\(^ {43}\)

On that day in the evening, Gandhi addressed a large meeting on the beach and explained the ideas on Non-Cooperation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali also addressed a meeting of labourers in Madras city on August 15, 1920.\(^ {44}\)

The Non-Cooperation Movement was gathering strength. Public meetings were held in favour of Non-Cooperation in certain places.\(^ {45}\) And the repressive acts of Madras government began to increase as the Non-Cooperation Movement gained strength. Yakub Hasan leading Khilafatist and non-cooperator and three others were arrested on February 16, 1921 and were sent to jail.\(^ {46}\)

A Hartal followed this incident and people gathered at the Tripluane chawl. A large section of the workers actively participated in the procession. The workers of Burma Oil Company, Aluminium Workers' Union etc. were amongst them. They carried banners and crescent flags bearing inscriptions 'Victory is near', 'Victory for Non-Cooperation'\(^ {47}\)

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) Local Government Fortnightly Report, March 1, 1921.
\(^{46}\) The Swadesamitran, January 22, 1921.
Majority of labour in Tamilnadu consisted of workers of Textile Mills situated at Madras, Coimbatore, Madura and Tinnevelly. The Madras Labour Union of Textile Workers was formed on April 27, 1918 at Madras by B.P. Wadia, Thiruvi Ka and others. The formation of this union was the collective effort of Home Rule leaguers and Congress propagandists. The leadership of the Textile workers in Madras was taken over by Congress activists in 1921 when B.P. Wadia left the city. The Congress took keen interest in labour affairs from 1919. Congress leaders like Shiva Rao, NS Ramaswami Iyengar and S.R. Varadarajulu Naidu guided the textile workers.46

There was unrest among the workers in Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in 1918 due to non-payment of annual increment, no increase in wages and no reduction of working hours. A meeting of workers was held on March 2, 1918. About 1000 coolies from Buckingham and Carnatic Mills attended the meeting which was addressed by T.V. Kalyanasundra Mudaliar. He placed the picture of Gandhi's life before them and prompted them to follow his example. A petition was submitted to the management for increase in wages and reduction of working hours. In the meantime, the management granted an increase in wages and thus a major strike was avoided. Still, the workers were keen on organising themselves.49

The Government and the mill management were watching the organisational activities of the workers. The workers in Buckingham Mills came to know that some officers of mills were trying to break the union. On October 20, 1920, some workmen in weaving department were offered some post which they refused to take as it belonged to some senior man. The claim

49. Ibid., p. 61
of the senior was being overlooked because he worked for union. The workers who refused were dismissed.  

Some of the weavers represented against the dismissals. They pleaded with Bentley, the weaving master who lost his temper and threatened to shoot them. On October 21, 1920, the mills were closed and a lock-out notice was hung up at the gate In a meeting of the workers on November 6, 1920, B.P. Wadia asked the workers not to go into the Backingham Mills, locked-out men should go about cheerful and should keep a watch on Binny and Company who were trying to get men from outside Police resorted to firing when the workers tried to check the coolies who were being brought in the mill from Binny & Company. Workers attacked a police lorry. The police opened fire injuring 16 persons out of which a boy died later. Workers of the Carnatic Mills also joined the strike on January 23, 1921. After discussions between Purushottamadas Thakurdas, Annie Besant, Clement Simpson, A.P. Symonds and B.P. Wadia on January 24, 1921 both the parties came to terms and strike ended in the last week of January, 1921. Certain concessions were granted including the recognition of the right of workers to combine in a union.  

A strike took place in Carding Department of Carnatic Mills on May 20, 1921 over the question of wages. The mill management declared...
withholding of bonus and asked workers to return to work without expecting bonus\textsuperscript{58}. An appeal to the Madras Government by Madras Labour Union was in vain. On June 20, 1921 Buckingham Mill workers joined the strike in sympathy with the Caranatic Mill workers\textsuperscript{59}. The strike lasted for 5 months\textsuperscript{60}. There were frequent clashes in mill area between black legs and strikers\textsuperscript{61}. On August 29, 1921, police opened fire on workers and killed 4 men and one woman\textsuperscript{62}. Finally the workers had to resume work in September, 1921.

Still there was enthusiasm in workers for national cause. They had become fearless and were ready for any sacrifice. This they learnt from Non-Cooperation Movement losing all regard for British Government\textsuperscript{63}.

A strike broke out in the Kaleeswara Mills, Coimbatore on July 30, 1927 when the workers demanded a holiday on August 2, 1927 (Tamil Festival Day) and immediate payment of the annual bonus. Six ring leaders were dismissed. The workers took the stand and continued the strike. A settlement to the satisfaction of workers was ultimately reached. The ring leaders were reinstated. The strike though short lived (it ended on August 4, 1927) was a victory for the strikers\textsuperscript{64}.

A strike again occurred in the Kaleeswara Mills Coimbatore on August 17, 1927 in protest against the arrest of some workers alleged to have assaulted a staff member. About 2400 workers from different sections

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Krishna, C.S., op.cit., p.174.
\item \textsuperscript{59} The Hindu, June 20, 1921.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Krishna, C.S., op.cit. 175
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Local Government Fortnightly Report, Madras, September 3, 1921.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Krishna, C.S., op.cit. p. 177.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 77
\end{itemize}
of the mill took part in it. The trouble took a serious turn when subsequently some other workers were arrested. A long list of demands, separately for men and women workers, was put up before the mill authorities. The management accepted some demands which were to the satisfaction of workers. The strike ended on September 9 and 10, 1927.

In the previous chapter, we discussed in detail about the Ahmedabad Mill strike of 1918, in which the method of arbitration for settlement of dispute had been established. In 1919, there were eleven strikes involving 15 mills in Ahmedabad. There was also one strike of the folders which affected the whole country.

The mill owners were worried about the volley of strikes but they took no decision like that of 1918 to create a crisis. In four mills, there was increase in wages and in ten, increase in bonus. The folders got 6½% increase in wages against their demand of 7½%.

To oppose Rowlat Act Gandhi organised agitation in non-violent manner in a number of cities in the country. A protest meeting was also held in Ahmedabad on March 20, 1919 which was attended by 10,000 mill-workers. The Bill was passed on March 21, 1919. Big protest meetings were held at Ahmedabad on April 6 and 9, 1919. Ahmedabad Textile Workers Association resorted to militant activities inspite of Gandhi's appeal of non-violence. On April 10, 1919 a clash took place between the workers and

67. Ibid., February 22, 1919.
the police. A few Englishmen, policemen and a large number of workers were injured. Demonstrators could be dispersed by military. Next day, government buildings, post and telegraph offices and police stations were set on fire by the crowd in Ahmedabad. The slogans used by Ahmedabad crowd were more hostile than those used elsewhere in the country. For two days i.e. April 10 and 11, 1919, Ahmedabad was in possession of workers. A train from Bombay carrying British troops to Ahmedabad was derailed and telegraphic link between Bombay and Ahmedabad was disrupted. The troops could capture back half the city on the night between April 12-13, 1919. Since the workers were not properly organised, their demonstration was suppressed finally by the army. About 28 people were killed and 123 wounded. Gandhi arrived in Ahmedabad on April 13, 1919 and made an appeal to the people in a meeting to follow principle of Satyagraha and reproached the violent activities of workers. The strike spread to other towns of Gujarat. There was a general strike in Viramgam on April 12, 1919, where the crowd set on fire the railway station and the police station. Army crushed this strike also. At Nadiad the striking workers wrecked a train full of British Troops.⁷⁰

Though there were some strikes in two years that followed the weavers strike of 1918, but the formation of Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association was due to two external happenings, one was the nationalist agitation of 1919-1920 and the other the Bombay Textile strike of 1920.⁷¹ The Textile Labour Association also known as Majoor Mahajan was formed on February 25, 1920.⁷² The Ahmedabad Millowners' Association led by

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70. Balabushevich, V.V. and Dijakov A.M. (Eds.), A contemporary History of India, New Delhi, 1964, pp. 54-56 cited in Desai, A.R., Labour Movement in India Documents, 1918-20, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 52-53.
71. Parikh Manju, op.cit., p. 119.
72. Soman, R.J., Peaceful Industrial Relations, Their Science and Technique Ahmedabad, 1959, p. 228.
Ambalal Sarabhai sent congratulations on the formation of the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association and asked for the formation of a Conciliation Board to obviate the necessity of strikes. From the very beginning, Ambalal Sarabhai was in favour of recognising a union. He was of the opinion that through the union it would be possible to judge the intentions of the labouring class in advance and that it would be better to hold negotiations with organised body than with disorderly mob. No doubt the Textile Labour Association was formed on Ambalal Sarabhai's proposal, but some mill-owners led by Seth Mangalda refused to negotiate with it.

In the beginning of March, 1920, a list of demands was submitted by the Spinners of Ahmedabad Textile Mills to the mill owners. They wanted an increase in their wages, a ten hour day, clean drinking water, proper sanitation and lunch sheds. Active negotiations were going on over these demands between mill-owners and Trade union. Ambalal Sarabhai as President of Ahmedabad Millowner's Association was collaborating with the Spinner's Union but Seth Mangal Das with his group was against increasing the wages and providing any further concession. In reality, he favoured direct deal with workers and was against arbitration advocated by Gandhi.

The Times of India reported that the Spinners struck work on April 2, 1920 after their demands for increase in wages and ten-hour day

74. Soman, R.J., op. cit, p. 228.
75 Parikh, Manju, op. cit., p.123.
77 Parekh, Manju, op.cit., p. 120.
have been rejected and that there was a fear of general lock out. Quoting some other message, the newspaper wrote that labour troubles were growing in Ahmedabad and Gandhi demanded for acceptance of Spinners' wage increase to Rs. 30 per month with ten-hour working day failing which there was likelihood of a general strike under the leadership of Gandhi. 78

The Times of India published the history of negotiations obtained through its own correspondent. It stated that for the past three days there existed acute tension. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union submitted a petition claiming their demands. A Labour Settlement Committee appointed by mill-owners amicably settled some questions and future seemed promising. At one of the conferences Gandhi was also present. The demand of the Throstle Department was delayed due to the ailment of Seth Mangaldas and absence of Ambalal Sarabhai in the city. The workers threatened to go on strike. At this juncture, Seth Mangaldas and Ambalal Sarabhai returned to the city. In the meantime, Gandhi gave the ultimatum that in case the demands were not submitted to arbitration, there would be a strike. As a result, Seth Mangaldas and Gandhi were appointed as arbitrators and they were to submit their report within a month. On the other hand, the mill-owners appointed a committee to probe the demands of every section of labour and submit its report by April 15, 1920. A meeting was timed to take place which was expected to be presided over by Gandhi. Pestanshah met Gandhi and requested him to avert the strike. Gandhi agreed but he wanted an assurance in writing from mill-owners that they would act fairly. Pestanshah brought the reply from Seth Mangaldas which was considered

78. The Times of India, April 5, 1920, p.12, col. 5.
disappointing by Gandhi and a decision to down tools was taken in a meeting of the workers sparing those mills which favoured arbitration.\textsuperscript{79}

The strike started on May 9, 1920 Seth Mangaldas had to come back to arbitration board. After continued negotiations for ten days, Seth Mangaldas agreed with Gandhi to form a permanent arbitration board.\textsuperscript{80}

The agreement between Gandhi and Seth Mangaldas yielded in two clear and definite results. All workers in spinning department got 25 to 40\% increase in wages, ten-hour working day and some other facilities. Secondly, wages of spinners were standardized.\textsuperscript{81}

From the preceding account, it may be observed that Gandhi had influence both on labour and mill-owners. It was this influence that persuaded the mill-owners and the workers to agree to settle their disputes through arbitration.

Gujrat, where Gandhi had started his political career, wholeheartedly welcomed his Non-Cooperation Movement. This movement had involved thousands of countrymen who boycotted titles, courts, government institutions and legislative councils. The workers as well as mill-owners were equally affected though the workers participated in the movement very marginally, but it had some definite impact upon their own movements: It was observed that during the fag end of the Non-Cooperation Movement, there was a great spurt in strikes in Ahmedabad. Workers had become class-conscious. They started coming out with demands like permanent bonus, profit sharing etc.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} The Times of India, April 6, 1920, p.9, col. 4.
\textsuperscript{81} Patel Sujata, \textit{op.cit.}, p.51.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 51-52.
Adoption of aggressive attitude by mill-owners was justified against the aggressiveness of workers but the pressure of Non-Cooperation Movement subdued them and they could not dare to break the contract signed by Seth Mangaldas and Gandhi. There was yet another reason for their mild behaviour. The boycott of foreign goods, which was a part of Non-Cooperation Movement, had greatly benefitted them. Demand of Indian Textile had increased in the country. Some mill owners were taking active part in supporting the Swadeshi programme as well. 83

There were a number of strikes in Ahmedabad one after the other during the first phase of Non-Cooperation Movement. The Prajabanhdhu reported that on August 1, 1920, all the workers struck work and there was a total strike in Ahmedabad. 84 On September 17, 1920, the Times of India reported that workers in Ahmedabad went on strike due to wage dispute in two mills and labour union gave an ultimatum for a general strike. The mill-owners objected to the strike stating that it was against arbitration rules. The Union Secretary paid no heed to this objection and advised the workers to go on strike from the afternoon of September 15, 1920 which affected 29 mills. 85

At this stage Anusuyabehn Sarabhai threatened to resign from the presidentship of the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association and the general strike was averted 86

There were two other strikes in 1921 Mukadams and Oilmen from about a dozen mills struck work demanding a bonus equal to one

83 Patel, Sujata, op.cit., p.52
84 Prajabanhdhu, August 8, 1920.
85 The Times of India, September 17, 1920, p-9, Col. 3.
86 Patel Sujata, op.cit., p. 53.
month's pay. The mill owners immediately agreed to pay the bonus and thus the strike was successful and was called off the same day. The other was also on the issue of bonus equal to a month and a half-pay demanded by all workers. It took place a few days after the first bonus strike. 87

It was the time when Non-Cooperation Movement was at its peak. The demands of the workers had become radical. Their demands were bonus to be made permanent. Share of profit, automatic adjustment of wages to profits, adoption of a sliding scale of wages, and one and a half month's pay as bonus. 88 In October, 1921, 33373 workers out of a total of 42000 went on strike. 89

31 mills out of 47 were completely closed and 16 partially. Strike was called off when Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya was appointed Umpire. 90

Seth Mangaldas continued his belligerant attitude towards the union. As a result there was another confrontation between mill owners and textile workers. 91

Within one year (September, 1921 to September, 1922) mill owners had united themselves to face the growing militancy in working class. From October 1921 onwards there had been one strike per month in textile industry. 92

Gandhi during this period appeared to be double minded about the part to be played by workers in national movement. On one side, he

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87 Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p.96.
88 Prajabandu, November 6, 1921, p.6.
91 Parikh, Manju, op.cit., p. 126.
advised the mill-owners to agree to the demands of workers because the fight of the workers was a part of national movement. On the other side, he advised workers not to take part in national movement but to continue to fight for their economic demands.

On other side, the Ahmedabad mill-owners were placed in something of a dilemma during this period (1921-22). They did not like the participation of workers in national movement but at the same time they were unable to take any action against them because of the benefit they were getting from boycott of foreign goods.

The situation took a turn by the middle of 1922. Gandhi and other national leaders were in jail. Non-Cooperation Movement was withdrawn by Gandhi when some violent incidents took place. After that there was sudden reduction in profits due to imports from Japan. After the end of First World War, the restrictions on imports were over and protection due to increased import duty was no more. Moreover, Japanese cloth was cheaper than Indian made cloth. Japan flooded the Indian market by increasing the export of their yarn from 4,511,000 in 1920-21 to 12,363,000 in 1922-23 in the counts of 16-20s. So was the case in the counts of 31-40s. The Indian trader had to bring down their prices. At the same time, Indian export to China was reduced owing to uncertain political situation there. Price of raw material had gone up and stocks had begun to accumulate. The Indian manufacturers were faced with the problem of falling profits. All this led to another confrontation of the mill-owners with the workers in early 1923.

93. Majumdar, Paresh, _op.cit_, pp. 88-89; Patel, Sujata, _op.cit_, pp. 54-55; Soman, R.J., _op.cit_, pp. 254-55.
The causes of dispute between capital and labour were non-payment of bonus, victimization of workers' representatives and holiday without pay which became the source of so many strikes. The union had no control over the workers. The angry mill-owners decided a wage cut in 1922.95

The Ahmedabad Millowners Association resolved wage-cut of 20% in December, 1922.96 It appeared that some mill-owners still wanted to keep relations with trade union movement. There was a pressure from them on Ahmedabad Millowners Association that Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association be asked to send the proposal to arbitration board.97 The events that followed and letters which were exchanged showed that the understanding between Seth Mangaldas and Gandhi was over and false character of arbitration's machinery was disclosed98

Seth Mangaldas presented a data on Union membership before Ahmedabad Millowners Association and proved that Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association had only one third of the workers as its members. So there was consensus over the wage cut proposal. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association had no other alternative than to declare the strike. In April 1923, 45000 workers went on strike stopping the work of 54 mills. Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association was not fully prepared and asked the workers to go to their villages. 20000 out of 45000 had gone to their villages by the end of April, 1923.99

95. Patel, Sujata, op.cit., p.58.
97. Ibid., December 28, 1922
98. Patel, Sujata, op.cit., p.58.
Seth Mangaldas was adamant and refused to discuss any demand other than the wage cut. The workers were not able to maintain themselves. Gandhi was in Jail. 100

After the release of Shankar Lal Banker, the secretary of Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association from Jail, the arbitration machinery became active. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association accepted the final decision of arbitration of 15.6% wage cut. There was no mention of other demands of workers in the decision. The strike ended on June 4, 1923. 101

The strike of 1923 was a big defeat for Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association. The workers lost their annual bonus. Membership of Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association was substantially reduced. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association developed faith in negotiations through arbitration rather than indulging in confrontation or conflicts because of its success in reducing wage cut from 20% to 15.6%. This was the reason that Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association deliberately avoided confrontation with mill-owners for next several years.

Prior to 1921, there occurred several strikes in cotton mills in Central Provinces at Akola, Badnera, Pulgaon, Hinganghat, Nagpur, Jabalpore, Rajandgaon and also in the gun carriage factory in Jabalpore. There was one day strike in Savatram Mills in Akola in February, 1919 and workers got further advance in wages. In February, 1920, workers of Mid India Mills Akola struck work for eight days and resumed work only when bonus payment was promised. A month later workers of both the above mills again resorted to strike and got substantial increase of pay and reduction in working hours. There was a strike of 10 days at Burhanpur.

101. Ibid., pp. 61-62.
Mills in February 1920. The workers got substantial increase in pay and reduction of working hours. In March, 1920 there was an unsuccessful strike in Bandra of 10 days duration. In January, 1920 workers in one of the mills of Hinganghat went on strike and obtained the concessions demanded by them. In early February, 1920 a six day strike at Pulgaon was settled when the Deputy Commissioner intervened and the workers got 33% to 50% increase in the pay and reduction of daily working hours to ten. Another strike occurred in February, 1920 at Gokaldas Mills at Jabalpore. The workers got 25% increase in wages\textsuperscript{102}.

There was one strike in 1921 and three strikes in 1922 in the Central Provinces in textile mills one each at Akola, Nagpur, Burhampur and Hinganghat.\textsuperscript{103}

In 1922 strike in Rajnandgaon was longest. It lasted for 44 days. The workers got 8.33% increase in wages, reduction of working hours to ten and one month's bonus. The strike ended on April 6, 1922. At Empress Mills Nagpur, a strike took place in December 1922, due to, according to the management, delay in declaring the bonus which ended after eight days.\textsuperscript{104}

The wave of strike during the second decade of twentieth century also reached United Provinces. There was a strike in Woollen Mill of Kanpur from November 4 to December 2, 1919.\textsuperscript{105}

The 'Leader' dated November 27, 1919 reported that strike in woollen Mills and Elgin Mills continued and that the Woollen Mills

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{102} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.100-101.
\textsuperscript{104} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{105} Das, R.K., \textit{The Labour Movement in India}, Berlin, 1923, pp. 36-37.
\end{flushleft}
authorities issued a notice that strikers would forfeit their posts. But on this threat, many more struck work. The workers of Muir Mill and Victoria Mills also struck work. Kanpur had never seen such a widespread strike. More than 5000 men were reported to be idle. 106

The leader in its edition of December 3, 1919, reported that the workers of Ganges Flour Mills, Dwarka Das Jute Mills, M/s Cooper Allien and Company and the Empire Engineering Company also struck work. It reported the situation to be very serious. In a meeting, the strikers formulated their demands which included 9 hours working day, more festival holidays, double wages, weekly payments, modification of five rules, no fine for absence of piece meal workers, improvement of hygienic conditions. The strike was a purely economic question and all allegations of outside influence were quite baseless 107.

During this strike, the Congress leaders were engaged in implementing Gandhi's ideology of class harmony. Showing their concern for the working class, they developed contacts with the union (Mazdoor Sabha). In the beginning they acted as mediators to settle the strike. Then they tried to reorganise the union. Some of them like G.S. Vidyaarthi, Murli Lal and N.P. Negain became important office bearers of the Sabha. These were the leaders who were intimately connected with the Home Rule League, Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement. They stressed on harmony and goodwill between workers and employers and just like Gandhi they wanted full cooperation from the mill-owners. 108

106. The Leader, November 27, 1919, p.4, Col. 2.
107. Ibid., 3 December 1919, p.5, Col. 4
G.S. Vidyaarthy was of the opinion that mill-owners could be persuaded to change their hearts. He even called the strike which took place after 1919 settlement as unjustified as in his opinion the mill-owners were fair in dealings. This was the time when workers were protesting and resorting to strike against the non-fulfilment of the earlier settlement and promises. In such a situation the local Congress leaders were laying stress on arbitration and conciliation. To prevent violent strikes, they even demanded correction in the constitution of the Mazdoor Sabha by incorporating these principles in it.109

The Leader reported that the mill workers resumed work with the understanding that the Woollen Mills had revised the scale of wages from 16 to 100% and had also reduced the working hours to 9½ hours a day.110

In 1922, a four weeks' strike occurred in Victoria Mills at Kanpur on account of delay in payment of wages. The strike was peaceful and workers resumed work unconditionally. In 1922, there were two other strikes, one at Muir Mills, Kanpur lasting for 6 days involving 3000 men. The other was in cotton mills Agra of 6 days involving 1500 men over the issue of bonus.111

According to the statistics collected by Burnett, the author of Labour and Housing in Bombay the strikes that took place from 1916 to 1920 in city of Bombay were :-

110 The Leader, December 5, 1919, p.5, Col. 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Strikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>63</td>
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</tbody>
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There were four waves of industrial unrest. The first wave was from August, 1917. There were over thirty strikes in September and October, 1917 over the issue of increase in wages which were mostly successful and were confined to textile mills with the exception of one postal strike. The second wave of strikes from April to July, 1918 was also confined to textile mills. These strikes were for increase in bonus and were mostly successful. The third was the series of strikes in January and February, 1919. One of these in January, 1919 was a great mill strike and rest were in Railway workshops, Mint, Dockyards, Engineering Works etc. These were for higher wages and successful. The fourth wave of 1920 included a great mill strike on January 2, 1920. and several other strikes in Railway Workshops, Oil Installations, Dockyard, Engineering Works, Municipal Employees, Tramway Workers and even tailors and workers. These were also mostly successful.

On December 27, 1918 strike took place in Century Mills Bombay over the issue of payment of bonus which later on converted into an industry-wide general strike on January 9, 1919. The strike spread rapidly from one mill to another affecting 75 mills, out of 85 mills at Bombay.

workers were keen in securing a rise in wages and thought strike was the only way to get it.\textsuperscript{113}

The workers formulated their demands after the strike. The main demand was 40\% increase in wages and a month's bonus. They were ready for a settlement by arbitration. The mill-owners refused to consider the demands until the workers first resumed work.\textsuperscript{114}

The Times of India reported that "It is calculated that from 80,000 to 1,00,000 mill-hands have gone on strike..........A number of mill-hands waited on the Police Commissioner Vincent and interviewed him at the Head Police Office......... In the interest of Law and Order Vincent held an informal meeting with number of the members of the Bombay Mill owners Association.......... It has been generally agreed that before an understanding can be arrived at with the strikers they must first return to work."\textsuperscript{115}

Two clashes with Police took place, one on January 10, 1919 when a workers' procession was proceeding from Parel to Tardeo\textsuperscript{116} and the second on January 14, 1919, when police opened fire on workers who refused to disperse. In the first clash one constable died while the second clash resulted in death of two and injuries to several strikers.\textsuperscript{117}

Vincent, the Police Commissioner who was approached by the workers to act as intermediary, arranged a meeting between the worker's representatives and the Governor.\textsuperscript{118} The Governor persuaded the mill-

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., pp. 105-106.
\textsuperscript{115} The Times of India, January 10, 1919, p.9, Col. 5-6
\textsuperscript{116} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 106-107; The Times of India, January 16, 1919, p.7, Col. 6.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} The Times of India, January 20, 1919, p.9, Col. 6.
owners to agree to some of the demands of the workers and the agreement reached was announced to workers on January 21, 1919. Following concessions were granted:

a) An increase in the special allowances for higher price from 15% to 35%.

b) Bonus on the following scales:

For 12 months on the muster roll for last year and over Rs. 20, for 9 months and over Rs. 15, for 9 months and over Rs. 10.

This bonus will be given to all mill-hands, women and youths.\(^\text{119}\)

On January 25, 1919 all mills resumed work.

Another general strike in textile industry, Bombay took place on January 1, 1920. The strike started in Jacob and Sasson Mill over early payment of Bonus. The Assistant Manager took a high-handed attitude. After an inconclusive discussion with the Manager the next day, the dissatisfied workers moved to nearby Gokuldas Mill and induced its workers to go on strike. By evening, 25 mills were affected. The strike became city wide by January 4, 1920.\(^\text{120}\)

The Bombay Chronicle reported the strike in which 25 mills were closed on the first day, now spread to another 25 to 30 mills on the second day bringing the number of mills closed to over 50. The strike had proceeded in a very orderly manner. The military had been posted at several points in the mill districts. The police and the military had been kept ready to deal with all eventualities but nothing eventful took place. The men were not only peaceful and quiet but had shown a most reasonable frame of

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119. *The Times of India*, January 22, 1919, P-5, Col. 6 and p.10 Col. 1.
mind. On the third day of the strike also the strikers' behaviour was perfectly peaceful.\(^{121}\)

The Bombay Chronicle in its editorial throws light on the root cause of the Mill strike. It said "the strike which commenced on Friday morning with the closing of four or five mills and extended in the evening to about 25 mills has continued to spread during the last three days with the result that out of the 84 mills working in Bombay not a single one remained open yesterday......... The root cause of the strike is economic, the despair which seized men when they find it impossible to make both ends meet."\(^{122}\)

Not a single mill at Bombay worked during the strike and their two lakhs or more operatives were on strike.

When the strike assumed the form of a general strike, the workers began formulating their demands on January 5, 1920 which were finalised on January 11, 1920. The several organisations of the workers decided to work together and formed a new adhoc organisation called the Bombay Labour Settlement Committee on January 10, 1920. This Committee tried to persuade Bombay Mill-owners Association to consider their demands. It was only when the Governor intervened that the Association agreed to grant some demands. These were (i) Reduction of working hours from 12 to 10, (ii) an allowance of 55% instead of 35% to fixed Pay of workers and of 75% instead of 35% to piece-rated workers, (iii) compensation for employment injuries, (iv) medical aid during working hours, (v) payment of bonus on February 7, 1920, (vi) efforts to open shops for the sale of essential goods at reasonable prices. The wages during the strike were not granted.\(^{123}\)

\(^{121}\) The Bombay Chronicle, January 5, 1920, p.8, col. 5-6.
\(^{122}\) Ibid., January 6, 1920, p.9, col. 5.
\(^{123}\) Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p. 110.
After the declaration of these concessions, the workers were asked by the Labour Settlement Committee on January 24 to resume work but the workers who were still undecided took some days and then suddenly ended the strike on February 2, 1920. There was some violence during the strike. There was firing also in which one worker was killed. The strike was a success for workers in which they got increase in wages and reduction in working hours.

The textile workers had been getting bonus every year since 1917. On the plea of Economic depression due to which the mills were not making enough profits, the mill-owners decided in 1923 to stop payment of bonus. In January, 1924 when the workers did not get bonus, they protested and struck work in few mills in the beginning. By the end of January, the strike spread to all textile mills. The Bombay Chronicle reported that 100,000 workers were out on strike and called it 'almost a general strike' with 65 mills closed. The strike was greater in proportion than any other strike so far in which 7.75 million working days were lost.

A committee of enquiry was appointed by the Government of Bombay on February 22, 1924, under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice of Bombay High Court, Norman Maclead. The workers had no representative in the committee. In a meeting, the workers passed a resolution that the appointment of the committee was an ill-advised move on the part of the government as the committee was only a fact finding body and had no power of making any award. Some of the leaders, when interviewed by the

125. Ibid., pp. 142-143.
correspondent of the Bombay Chronicle condemned the action of the
government.\textsuperscript{128}

In its report on March 11, 1924, the committee rejected the claim
of bonus as the mills were not making sufficient profits. The strike collapsed
on March 25, 1924.\textsuperscript{129}

The Bombay Provincial Congress Committee met on March 26,
1924 and demanded Rs. 2000 towards relief fund of the strikers\textsuperscript{130} 1,16,000
workers took part in the strike causing loss of nearly 8 million working
hours\textsuperscript{131}

In 1925, the cotton mills industry was passing through a severe
crisis. So the mill-owners declared 20\% cut in the Dearness Allowance
being paid to the workers which amounted to a wage cut of 11\frac{1}{2}\% . The
main cause of depression, among others, was an excise duty of 3\frac{1}{2}\% on
cotton manufacturers. The workers opposed this reduction and 33249 workers
in 15 mills resorted to a tool down strike on September 15, 1925. The strike
spread to all mills involving 151986 workers.\textsuperscript{132}

The Bombay Chronicle reported under the heading 'Industrial
Crisis' that 70 out of 82 mills were closed, 1,35,000 workers were out on
strike and that an inquiry made by the newspaper at the offices of M/s Killick
Nixon and company, who ran steamers along the coast, revealed that there
was a considerable exodus of the operatives from Bombay to their
homelands.\textsuperscript{133}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} The Bombay Chronicle, February 23, 1924, p.9, col. 5-6.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Makhtar, Ahmed, op.cit., p. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{130} The Bombay Chronicle, March 27, 1924, p. 5, col.5.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Makhtar, Ahmad, op.cit., p.38.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 40.
\item \textsuperscript{133} The Bombay Chronicle, September 23, 1925, p.5, Col. 3-4.
\end{itemize}
The Bombay Chronicle again reported that peaceful exodus of the operatives to their village homes continued which gave incentive to criminals in the city to resort to their unlawful operations.134

A deputation of the workers met the Governor on October 12, 1925 who expressed his inability to intervene and told that he was not empowered to abolish the excise duty.135

Due to the pressure of the industrialists and whole-hearted support of the nationalist movement, the Government yielded and suspended the levy of the Excise Duty through an ordinance issued on December 1, 1925 by the Viceroy of India after which the mill owners restored the wage cut and workers joined their work in a month’s time.136 The strike involved a loss of 11 million working days.137

During the First World war and the period that followed i.e. by 1920, the hardships of Tata Iron and Steel Company workers at Jamshedpur viz. racial slurs and insults, compulsory overtime and high prices, had become untolerable.138 They had no leadership of their own. They were militant but untrained in matters of Trade Unionism. They had to depend on leaders from Indian educated middle class.139 Baba Thekkar from Congress party who was also entrusted with welfare-work on behalf of company, tried to organise the workers. He sympathised with the workers against the wishes of company. The company asked him to leave Jamshedpur.140 On February

136. Ibid., p. 148.
139. Ibid., p. 208.
140. Ibid., p. 212.
24, 1920, the Indian workers of Tata Iron and Steel company numbering 32,000 went on strike on the issue of wages and 19 other demands like sick leave, holidays, service rules, strike wages etc.\textsuperscript{141} Royal Commission on Labour reported that the immediate cause of the strike was economic.\textsuperscript{142}

The Bombay Chronicle wrote about the demands of the workers as reasonable and moderate. The strike, it stated, was of a magnitude undreamt of before in the history of Iron and Steel Company. The workers had resorted to strike after waiting for nearly five weeks for a reply from General Manager in respect of the demands for increment in wages submitted to him by them. The workers struck work between 8 and 9 a.m. on February 24, 1920 and went out quietly avoiding all sorts of demonstrations. Tutveler, the General Manager of the company was out of Jamshedpur and hence there were no negotiations with the strikers.\textsuperscript{143}

The workers laid down their tools without a prior notice to the company\textsuperscript{144}. On February 26, 1920 when the hooter was sounded, some workers gathered near the gates. The Deputy Commissioner who wanted to intervene was told to attend a mass meeting at Jujasalai where 15,000 men had gathered. The Deputy Commissioner asked the workers not to damage any property.\textsuperscript{145} According to Deputy Commissioner's report, the meeting was peaceful but he found the workers firm to continue their strike till their demands were met to some extent. The resolution passed in the meeting indicated deep discontentment of the workers as regards their living and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p.88.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} \textit{Report of Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931}, Vol. IV, Part-I, p. 122.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} \textit{The Bombay Chronicle}, March 1, 1920, p.7, col. 1, 2
  \item \textsuperscript{144} \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, February 20, 1920.
  \item \textsuperscript{145} Bahl, Vinay, \textit{op.cit.}, p.215.
\end{itemize}
working conditions.\textsuperscript{146} There was no experienced leader among them but they knew that legal knowledge was needed to deal with the management. They sent their representatives to Calcutta to find a leader.\textsuperscript{147}

S.M. Haldar, Bar at Law and some others came from Calcutta on the invitation of workers and a Union was formed 'The Jamshedpur Labour Association'\textsuperscript{148} The leaders who formed Jamshedpur Labour Association were Congress men from the Bengal branch of the Indian National Congress Party. The Tata Iron and Steel Company management did not recognise the Union and dealt with the Congress party leaders from Calcutta. S.M. Haldar, the President of Jamshedpur Labour Association sent a memorandum of demands to the General Manager of Tata Iron and Steel Company which included increase of wages and certain other concessions. The General Manager while addressing a meeting of the workers asked the strikers to resume work immediately after which their demands would be considered. The workers did not resume their work and had the hope to influence the management through Nationalist Leaders. On hearing that Gandhi and C.R. Das would be coming on March 2, 1920, quite a large number of strikers went to the Railway Station. They were disappointed when the leaders did not come. The Congress party leaders did not consider seriously the demands and determination of the workers. On March 3, 1920, Padmaraj Jain Aggarwal, Mahadev Sukul, and Bhola Nath Sen; leaders from Calcutta tried to bring a compromise on the terms offered by the General Manager but the strikers did not agree as they were not getting anything they were demanding. On this Padmaraj Jain Aggarwal was so much displeased that he

\textsuperscript{146} Amrita Bazar Patrika, March 9, 1920.
\textsuperscript{147} Bahl Viney, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{148} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 88.
told the Deputy Commissioner "If men now decline to behave let them go to hell." The leaders were only interested in resumption of work and not in fulfilment of the demands of the workers. The workers understood that Jamshedpur Labour Association leaders were not in their favour. The deadlock continued. The strikers started picketing the gates of the factory to check the workers who wanted to resume work. On March 15, 1920 some strikers put obstacles on Railway line to prevent entrance of workers into the plant. About 40 to 50 men were arrested which infuriated the strikers who were armed with lathies. The police was unable to control them and arrested workers rejoined the strikers. Ultimately the police resorted to firing killing five, ten were seriously injured and 24 got minor injuries.149

Demands of the workers to some extent were accepted by management but a large number of issues remained unsettled. The strike ended on March 20, 1920.150

There was a section of workers who had developed a militant behaviour. They devised their own manifesto based on grievances not settled in 1920 strike. They exerted pressure on Jamshedpur Labour Association who in turn tried to formulate a list of grievances and took the stand that their grievances had been under negotiation since quite a long time and that no further delay in their settlement could be tolerated. They wanted reinstatement of two workers, the management's cooperation for investigating complaints inside the works, provision of space for the Jamshedpur Labour Association in a central location and the revision of service rules. The company's attitude was adamant and wanted to shunt out

such men who would not allow them to work peacefully. The company was of the opinion that there were no genuine grievances.\footnote{Bahl, Vinay, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 252.}

So there was another strike in Tata Iron and Steel Company in 1922 when the company did not accept the demands submitted by the Union. The strike took place on September 19, 1922.\footnote{Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90.} The Amrita Bazar Patrika reported that the factory was deserted except for the Europeans. About 20,000 workers were on strike.\footnote{Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 21, 1922.} When S.M. Haldar, the Calcutta leader and a guide of strikers failed to negotiate with the company, about 10,000 workers went back to work in desperation along-with a large number of skilled workers.\footnote{The Statesman, October 6, 1922.} The Statesman reported that by the middle of October about 14,000 men and 3000 skilled workers had returned to work.\footnote{Ibid., October 13, 1922.}

As the negotiations were deadlocked, the strikers issued an appeal for public support.\footnote{Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 15, 1922.}

The company feeling that its position was strong, declared that it was ready to reinstate all workers on a 10\% reduced salary.\footnote{Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90.}

At this juncture, Jamshedpur Labour Association sought help from All India Trade Union Congress whose president at that time was Dewan Chaman Lal. He mediated and reached on a verbal settlement with the management without any authority from workers. So there was no binding on the management over this verbal agreement. The strike was

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Bahl, Vinay, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 252.}
\item \footnote{Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90.}
\item \footnote{Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 21, 1922.}
\item \footnote{The Statesman, October 6, 1922.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., October 13, 1922.}
\item \footnote{Amrita Bazar Patrika, October 15, 1922.}
\item \footnote{Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90.}
\end{itemize}
unconditionally called off on September 25, 1922. The workers were thus betrayed by the nationalist leaders.¹⁵⁸

The Railway Board in its statement to Royal Commission on labour informed that strikes in India were rare before the war. There was rapid growth of Trade Union Movement in the years that followed the war due to unstable economic condition that prevailed at that time and workers resorted to direct action. The economic as well as political conditions have influenced the workers making them more class-conscious. This effect was visible in different branches of Railways especially in workshops.¹⁵⁹ There were 48 strikes in Railways in the post-war period ending 1929. Out of these, 22 were settled within a fortnight, 13 were about one month long each and 6 were prolonged ones.¹⁶⁰ In Railways, there was discrimination between the pay grades of Europeans and Indian employees. Indians were appointed in the subordinate supervisory and skilled jobs as sub engineers of lower grades and as Sanitary Inspectors in the Engineering Department. Some of the major complaints of these men were regarding arbitrary methods of recruitment, insecurity of job, no promotions, irregular payment and continual harassment.¹⁶¹

The racialist policy of railway had the effect that Indian railwaymen began to wipe out the differences between them of grade and status. They also started fighting racialism by becoming activists in nationalist movements.¹⁶²

¹⁶². Ibid., p. 107.
On November 9, 1919, a fire broke out in Negapatam Workshop (of South Indian Railway). Some workmen who wanted to go inside to put out the fire were not allowed to do so by a foreman Giles who in the process assaulted a workman. The workman in retaliation assaulted the foreman. A committee of enquiry recorded evidence of some workmen regarding fire incident. Six workmen were dismissed for concocting false evidence by the agent of the South Indian Railway. The European and Anglo Indian employees were given an increase of pay but nothing was given to the Indian Employees. The discontent among the workers increased. A memorandum was sent to the Agent for reversing the dismissal order. One out of the six was reinstated by the Agent on November 12, 1919. The struggle of workers continued for reconsideration of order of the rest of the five dismissed workmen. On February 6, 1920, most of the coolies of workshop in a body presented a petition of demands to the Agent requesting restoration of the 5 men to their posts, increase in wages and several other demands. Later they submitted an ultimatum to locomotive superintendent that they would go on strike from March 20, 1920, if the concessions were not granted. The Agent cabled to the Home Board, London regarding the demands of the workers. So the workers decided to wait for a reply from the board and postponed their strike for 15 days. On April 4, 1920, the Locomotive Superintendent announced that the Board's reply had come according sanction of sufficient improvement in pay and condition of service. The workers were not satisfied with it and were very much discontented. There was no strike but workers applied pressure tactics only.

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163. The Hindu, November 12, 1919.
164. Home Department (Public), G.O. No. 660, October 9, 1920.
165. The Hindu, November 12, 1919.
166. Home Department (Public), G.O. No. 660, October 9, 1920.
In the case of strikes in 1920-21, the problems in regard to pay and other questions which caused the disputes were generally under consideration before the strikes started, so that the alleged effectiveness of the men's action was spurious. There were 32 strikes from 1920 onwards, out of which 21 took place in workshops, 3 in Railway coolies, 1 in Railway Press, 6 of line staff and 1 of gangmen. Number of strikes were 13 in 1920, 14 in 1921 and 5 in 1922.

All strikes except one in 1920, 4 in 1921 and one in 1922 were successful. Most of the strikes were for increase in wages, 2 were due to ill treatment by European Supervisory Staff and one was politically motivated. The politically motivated was the one which took place on April 6, 1921 in Locomotive workshop at Karachi on North Western Railway at the time of declaration of Non-Cooperation Movement. Outside instigation was found to be in a couple of cases.

A five day strike took place in May, 1920 in Locomotive workshop at Parel and in the carriage and wagon shop at Matunga on G.I.P. Railway due to delay in payment on revised scales.

Giving a detailed account of the strike, the Times of India reported that the strike in GIP Railway workshops took a serious turn on May 26, 1920. The workshops at Parel and Matunga were closed and a notice was put up informing workers that they would be admitted on certain conditions. Men at Parel left but at Matunga, a 5000 strong crowd of workers resorted to violence damaging the property. Trains were held up. A party of British troops summoned from Bombay was able to control the

168. Royal Commission on Labour Memo of Railway Board, Ch. XV, p. 170.
169. Karnik, V.B., op. cit., p. 76.
170. Ibid., p. 76.
situation without resorting to strong measures. On May 26, 1920 evening, a meeting of the GIP Railway workers' union was held at Parel and the demands made earlier were confirmed. These were: (1) The gratuity stopped since 1917, should be restored. (2) A uniform increase of 20% should be given to the men w.e.f. September, 1919.\textsuperscript{171}

A deputation of five representatives from the Parel and Matunga workshops met the Locomotive Superintendent on May 29, 1920 and as a result of negotiations, new scale of wages were announced which were accepted by the workers.\textsuperscript{172}

A strike took place on April 22, 1920 in the North Western Railway Workshops in Punjab. According to railway, the trouble started when seven men in gas and vacuum brake shop, Lahore were given orders of transfer on April 21 to work on light wagon repairs. These seven men refused to work and were dismissed. On April 22, 1920, 233 men of vacuum brake shop struck work and on April 23, 1920, all the men in that shop struck work. On April 24, 1920, all the 6000 men in the carriage shops struck work inspite of the offer of railway to take back the seven men on duty without any penalties except for the loss of pay for the time they did no work. The strike then spread to traffic staff which included pointsmen, the interlocking staff, the firemen and the drivers. Several passenger trains had stopped and only the mail trains were running. The number of strikers had risen to 15000 by now. A meeting of strikers was held in which a resolution was passed in which attitude of the Agent was condemned. A telegram was also issued to the Secretary of State, the Editor of the Daily

\textsuperscript{171} The Times of India, May 27, 1920, p.9, Col. 5 and p. 13, Col. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., May 31, 1920, p.10, col. l
Herald and the Editor, India, London by the General Secretary, North Western Railway Association requesting early and fair settlement through the Viceroy.\textsuperscript{173} Lala Lajpat Rai, a prominent leader of Congress in Punjab, in a letter to the press recognised the principle on which railwaymen were fighting, appealed to the Lt. Governor of Punjab to intervene and suggested appointment of a conciliation board representing both sides to settle the dispute\textsuperscript{174}. A meeting of the Indian Association was held on May 9, 1920 under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai and recommended to the Lt. Governor to appoint a committee. A mass meeting of the strikers was also held on the same day which was attended by prominent citizens of Lahore and some railway officials.\textsuperscript{175}

The North-Western railway strike spread to Karachi where about 1000 men were out on strike and held meetings.\textsuperscript{176}

A press note was issued by the Agent of the North-Western Railway giving details of strike situation at outstations. It stated that only 59 out of 200 men of the Locomotive Department of Wazirabad were on strike, work at Gujranwala was going on satisfactorily where only two Assistant Station Masters, Signallers, Booking Clerks and Menials had struck work. The position of Lahore was stated to be much the same. At Amritsar, a very small number of men went on strike, at Ferozepore about 39 went on strike and the rumour of strike at Kasur was reported to be false. A large number of strikers resumed work at Karachi.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{173} The Times of India, May 7, 1920, p.9, col. 4.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., May 10, 1920, p.11, col. 2.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., May 11, 1920, p.9, col. 4.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., May 19, 1920, p.10, col. 4.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., May 24, 1920, p.10, col. 2.
The North-Western Railway strike came to an end on June 9, 1920 after a month and 18 days. The railways claimed that the men were returning to work on the precise conditions laid down in the Agent's notification of May 26, 1920.178

A meeting of the Lahore Railwaymen who had returned to their duties was held on June 13, 1920 to consider the terms settled with the Agent. M.A. Khan, the General Secretary of the Association and M. Miller addressed the meeting and told the workers that the terms settled with Agent were in no way harmful to them as their demands had been accepted to a great extent.179

There was a short lived strike at Kharagpur on October 8, 1920 on Bengal Nagpur Railway when about 10,000 workers of Locomotive and Traffic Department struck work for higher wages and service issues. The company yielded to the unity of the workers which induced self-confidence in the workers.180

There was one day's strike in the Matunga workshop also on the issue of change in time office. The strike ended on widening of entrance by six inches. A strike took place in the workshop of Jhansi on October 15, 1920 on overtime issue. The strike was successful and ended on November 8, 1920.181

On North-Western Railway, a 13 days' strike took place in January, 1921 in Saharanpur District involving all categories of staff except the Europeans as the workers were not satisfied with the revised pay scales.

A European driver Miller took lead in the strike who was later dismissed from service but became a prominent figure in trade union movement. This 13 days' strike was unsuccessful as the workers could not get any concrete benefit.182

A lightening strike took place in 1921 on the Eastern Bengal Railway at the time when Non-Cooperation Movement was at its height. Dismissal of a first class apprentice became the immediate cause of strike. About 5800 workers at Kachrapar, a workshop near Calcutta, struck work on March 3, 1921. Then, about 2500 workers at Saidpur workshop went out in sympathetic strike on April 26, 1921. Demands submitted subsequently included- increase of pay, passes, casual leave, protection against racial discrimination and unfair discharge. When the Railway refused to entertain them, the strikers resumed work unconditionally. Political agitators were suspected to have engineered the strike.183

Three months after the previous strike, there was again a bigger strike on North-Western Railway. The strike began in a small way in Lahore on April 22, 1921 and soon spread over whole of North Western Railway from Rawalpindi to Karachi (now in Pakistan). The reliefs granted by Railway to workers to meet the price-rise of commodities were in-adequate. Demands of the workers were 50% increase in wages, compensation for injuries, reinstatement of Miller and other dismissed strikers and recognition of Union. No material gain could be achieved but there was a moral victory that Railway recognized the union. The strike ended on June 10, 1921.184

183. Ibid., p. 78.
184. Ibid., p. 77.
In May 1921, a strike on Assam Bengal Railway took place in sympathy with the plantation workers who were brutally attacked at Chandpur Railway Station. On May 24, 1921 the staff of Chandpur and Laksam Railway stations went on strike followed by call of sympathetic strike on May 25, 1921 by the Assam Bengal Railway Union at Chittagong to last till the repatriation of the plantation labourers was settled by the Government.185

The strike had the influence of Non-Cooperation Movement. Many leaders of Non-Cooperation Movement took active part in the conduct of strike.186

Several mass meetings were held at Chittagong on May 25 and 26, 1921 expressing sympathy to plantation workers. Collections were also made to help them. Ladies offered ornaments in a meeting held on May 28 at Chittagong to help the stranded plantation workers. The authorities made elaborate arrangements of Military to protect the Railway Workshop and also to make a show of strength. On May 27, 1921, workers of steamer service joined the sympathetic strike and hartal spread to the towns of Noakhali, Silchar, Dacca, Narayangunj and some other towns of East Bengal. Some leaders from Calcutta arrived to organise the strike.187

C.F. Andrews criticized the strike of Railway and steamermen. He called the strikes as most unwise and inopportune because they held up the movement of plantation workers to their homes.188 C.R. Das reaching Chandpur defended the Railway and steamer strikes as part of Non-Cooperation Movement.189

188. Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p. 86.
The Statesman which was a British mouth piece wrote in its edition of June 8, 1921. "The strike is in reality no strike, for it has nothing to do with wages or condition of work. It is merely a political hartal in which the poor wage earners are being victimised in the same way and for the same purpose as the tea-garden workers." While the nationalist press supported the strike.\(^{190}\)

The Assam-Bengal Railway Employees Union tried to settle the issue by submitting its terms to the Agent but he refused to discuss terms with J.M. Sengupta, the President of the Union and even refused to recognise the Union.\(^{191}\)

The situation was becoming grave. The moderate leaders were not in favour of continuation of strike. J.M. Sengupta in a circular issued on August 27, 1921 to all Railway-men intimated that he was short of money and that until money is received from Calcutta, he was unable to help the strikers.\(^{192}\)

Gandhi on his visit to Chittagong during the striking period asked the workers to continue the strike but he offered no monetary help.\(^{193}\) Gandhi met the representatives of the workers on August 31, 1921. He rebuked them for depending on non-cooperators for help. He advised the strikers to take to Charkha to support themselves if they wanted to continue the strike.\(^{194}\)

Ultimately both the strikes ended in a bitter defeat. This defeat left such a deep impression on the mind of workers that they did not think of a political strike for a long time.

\(^{190}\) The Statesman, June 8, 1921.
\(^{191}\) Saha, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 54.
\(^{192}\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^{193}\) The Statesman, September 29, 1921.
\(^{194}\) Kumar Kapil, (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p. 52.
Parel workshop on G.I.P. Railway was again a scene of strike from August 17, 1921 to October 12, 1921 due to introduction of new system in time office. Later on, the strikers demanded recognition of the union. They resorted to violence by raiding the work manager’s office and burning some office records. The Railway neither called it a strike nor a lock-out. They claimed that the workshop was under repairs and hence could not be opened. The strike ended when some changes were made in the time office.195

There were two strikes on East Indian Railway in 1921 and 1922. One was at Jhajha from December 19, 1921 to January 6, 1922 and the other was at Tundla from February 22, 1922 to second week of April, 1922. These two strikes involved 347 men in Punjab who lost 9826 days.196

The strike at Tundla affected the whole of East Indian Railway from Ambala to Howrah and that at Jhaja affected sections in Bihar and Bengal. Cause of both strikes was the indifferent and insulting attitude of European staff towards Indian staff and the discriminatory conditions of service enjoyed by them. Tundla strike continued for over two months.197

The strike on East Indian Railway spread to Asansol where Swami Darsana Nanda was the man responsible for instigating the men to go on strike. A company of native infantry was posted there in view of militant behaviour of the crowd. Efforts were on to commence strike in Iron Works at Kulti and in coal mines. A rumour had spread that there would be an immediate Swaraj if there occurs a combined strike of Asansol, Kulti and

196. Mukhtar, Ahmad, Factory Labour in Punjab, p. 221, Thesis on Micro-Film in NMML.
Coal areas. At Burdwan Railway Station, police opened fire on strikers on February 22, 1922 injuring three workers.\textsuperscript{198}

On March 10, 1922, lines of Gurkha Chawkidars at Asansol was burnt. Though there was no proof that it was done by workers, the Gurkhas attacked everyone near the place. There was no serious collision as the workers were away attending a meeting.\textsuperscript{199}

Efforts were made by the Railways to break the strike by bringing coolies from M/s Bird and Company to replace the Railway labourers.\textsuperscript{200} There appeared to be a hope of the end of the strike as the efforts to arrange sympathetic strike on other Railways Coolleries and factories failed.\textsuperscript{201} There was a loss of over a crore of Rupees. According to government, it was a political strike. It ended on April 16, 1922 without any gain to workers.\textsuperscript{202}

Another strike took place in 1924 at different centres of South Indian Railway. Mainly the Anglo-Indians took part in the strike. It was of short duration at all centres except at Salem and Podanur and was due to reduction of firemen from two to one on an engine. The strike commenced at Madura on May 29, 1924, at Trichinopoly on May 30, 1924, at Villupuram, on May 31, 1924, at Tanjore Negapatam, Tennevelly and Egmore on June 1, 1924 and at Salem, Podanur, Mettupalayam and Coonoor on June 2, 1924. It ended at Madura on May 31, 1924, at Trichinopoly and Tanjore on June 1, 1924, at Villupuram and Trinnevelly on June 2, 1924, at Egmore on

\textsuperscript{198} Report on the political situation in Bengal for the first half of February, Home Department (Political), File No. 18, 1922.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p. 79.
June 3, 1924 and at Coonoor and mettupalayam on June 5, 1924. The strike continued up to June 16, 1924 and June 22, 1924 at Podanur and Salem respectively.\textsuperscript{203}

The strikers at Salem were dismissed and the newly employed persons from elsewhere were transferred to fill their places.\textsuperscript{204} The workers at Podanur struck work on the night of June 1, 1924 when Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and Packuriswami from Nagapatam were not allowed to attend the meeting of the railway workmen at Podanur. The strike was total and completely non-violent which invited the sympathy of the public also. A settlement was reached due to efforts of Ramaswami Ayyangar to the satisfaction of employees. At Salem also, the strike ended on June 22, 1924 and dismissed employees were taken on duty.\textsuperscript{205}

Another important strike of this period occurred in the North-Western Railway. The strike was organised by the North-Western Railway Union, in which the principal figure were an ex-guard J.B. Miller and M.A. Khan and H.T. Hael. The strike originated in the North Western Railway workshops at Rawalpindi on March 15, 1925 and soon it spread throughout the entire North Western Railway. Though the strike sparked off on the issue of disciplinary action against a union activist, strikers had other demands too which included wage rise, light hour working day, stopping retrenchment of all men retrenched since 1920. 22,000 workers participated in this protracted strike. The Railway authorities resorted to brutal repression to smash the workers' struggle, in the face of which, the strike collapsed in early July of that year. But after the withdrawal, only

\textsuperscript{203} Home Department (Public), G.O. No. 485 (Confidential) July 10, 1924.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
14,000 workers out of a total 22,000 were allowed to join duties and the rest 8,000 were discharged from service.\textsuperscript{206}

Kharagpur was a junction on Bengal Nagpur Railway and there was a Railway workshop. The Labour consisted of a mixture of different castes and languages. These labourers of poor farmers' class were victims of exploitation of the railway authorities. The political and labour struggles of the period affected the labourers of Kharagpur also and severe disputes began to take place with the exploiting authorities.

The Bengal Nagpur Railway Strike in 1927 was a long strike in which 40,000 workers took part. The representatives of the workers had submitted a memorandum to the railway authorities for the redressal of the following grievances in November, 1926.

i) insecurity of services due to dismissal without any inquiry, ii) insufficiency of wages, iii) ill-treatment by subordinate officers many of whom were Anglo Indians, iv) lack of housing and other amenities.

Reply of agent of Railway received by union in January, 1927 did not satisfy the workers. There was exchange of correspondence for some time without any positive outcome. The workers then lost patience.\textsuperscript{207}

On February 11, 1927, a large number of workers, after attending a meeting, got out of control and tried to take possession of Kharagpur Railway Station. Next day, a general strike was declared over the whole line by the Kharagpur branch of the union. 21,000 workers were involved in this strike which included 10,000 from Nagpur Shops. This strike was called off on March 8, 1927.\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{206} Sen, Sukomal, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 214-215.  
\textsuperscript{207} Saha, P., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 74-77.  
\textsuperscript{208} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 155.
A report which appeared in Amrita Bazar Patrika stated that 11,000 workers of the Railway workshop, Kharagpur struck work at 7 a.m. on February 11, 1927 as a protest against the transfer orders of some employees issued by the Chief Mechanical Engineer. Workers from other departments also struck work at 11 a.m.\textsuperscript{209}

The Forward described the immediate and remote causes of the strike as economic struggle and discontent engendered by the indifference of the superiors to mal-administration of their subordinates.\textsuperscript{210}

The Railway Auxiliary force, which consisted mostly of Anglo-Indians, was summoned and a strong police force also arrived. On the night of February 11, 1927, the Railway Auxiliary Force opened fire on the workers and also on public injuring several workers seriously.\textsuperscript{211}

V.V. Jogish raised a motion in the Central Legislative Assembly on February 18, 1927 on this firing and condemned the conduct of the government. N.M. Joshi, Diwan Chamanlal and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya also condemned the firing.

An adjournment motion was tabled on February 23, 1927 in the Bengal Legislative Assembly by Bidhan Chandra Roy. The government spokesman replied that on the night of February 11, 1927, 500 to 1000 men attacked the Kharagpur Railway Station and resorted to stoning. He claimed that there was no proper bayonet charge but at the same time added that seven persons slightly and four seriously were injured pricked by bayonets. The non-official estimate was 40 injured in firing and in bayonet charge.\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{209} Amrita Bazar Patrika, February 12, 1927, p. 6, col. 7.
\textsuperscript{210} The Forward, February 27, 1927, p. 6, col. 7.
\textsuperscript{211} Saha, P., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 78-79.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., p. 79.
The firing at Kharagpur perturbed the whole country. Several newspapers supported the cause of workers condemning the government action. The Mohammadi considered the demands of the workers right.213

The Amrita Bazar Patrika supported the workers in its editorial writing "The strikers of Bengal Nagpur Railway company informed the Indian Government that they were ready to resume their duty if government gave them an assurance to appoint a committee to inquire into their grievances but this reasonable request was not complied with.214

The strike spread over whole of Bengal-Nagpur Railway. The Amrita Bazar Patrika reported that only a skeleton passenger service was running throughout the Bengal Nagpur Railway with the help of Europeans and Anglo Indian workers. Goods Trains were also limited in number.215

The young communist party supported the striking workers. The morale of the workers could not be broken by military display216

Though the strikers were mostly non-Bengalis, yet the top most leaders and intelligentsia of Bengal rendered them help. They held a public meeting in February, 1927 at Albert Hall, Calcutta with J.M. Sengupta, Mayor of Calcutta Corporation as President. Prominent leaders of Bengal like Pandit Shyam Sunder Chakraborty, Jogender Moitra, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Hamendralal Sen, Sundari Mohan Das, Swami Karunananda, Kishorilal Ghose, took part in the decision and a Relief Committee was set up to gather funds for the strikers.217

215. Ibid., March 6, 1927.
217. Ibid., pp. 82-83.
Various unions in the country, like the Bengal Trade Union Federation, GIP Railway Workers' Union, Madras Tramways Labour and Electric Supply Corporation Employees' Union, Jamshedpur labour Association held meetings in sympathy and support of the Bengal — Nagpur Railway workers.218

As the strike was progressing and strikers were determined, the Railways were compelled to negotiate with the union. A deputation of the union which met the agent was given some assurances. The union then decided to call off the strike on March 10, 1927. Thus ended the first phase of the movement of Bengal Nagpur Railway Workers.219

V.V. Giri, the president of the union said afterwards that the reason for the decision to call off the strike was to test the bonafides of the government which had given assurance to do justice.220

After a few months of the first strike, the workers had to go on strike again. The second strike went on for a longer period but was confined to the Kharagpur workshop only. It began in September 1927 and ended in December, 1927.221

The Railway authorities and the government had not passed the test of bonafides. About 500 workers of Kharagpur workshop who returned to duty late after calling off the strike, were not taken on duty by the management. This caused discontentment all around and led to the second phase of the strike in September222 Some 2000 men were found surplus and the Railway took a decision to retrench them. This was the main cause of the

221. Karnik, V.B., op.cit., p. 159.
strike. Besides, the Railway had started victimization of workers who had participated in the earlier strike. So there was great discontentment among the workers.\textsuperscript{223} Discharge notices were served on 1750 workers of Kharagpur workshop on September 8, 1927. As a protest, the workers stopped working but remained peaceful inside the workshop. It was a sit-in strike which angered the authorities. Consequently, a lock-out of workshop was declared by railway on September 12, 1927.\textsuperscript{224}

As per the news published in Amrita Bazar Patrika, about 10,000 workers held a meeting on September 12, 1927 in which V.V. Giri, Mukundlal and some other leaders condemned the lock-out and retrenchment.\textsuperscript{225}

In Central Legislative Assembly, an adjournment motion was moved by Acharya Chaman Lal on September 14, 1927 declaring that the retrenchment was only directed to shunt out large number of workers to provide work to private contractors and foreign manufacturers.\textsuperscript{226}

The adjournment motion was carried by 44 to 37 votes. This provided a moral support to the workers.\textsuperscript{227}

N.M. Joshi, Acharya Chaman Lal and Jogiah met the Railway Board and requested it to absorb the men in normal vacancies instead of retrenching them. Their request was turned down.\textsuperscript{228}

A special session of All India Railwaymen's Federation was held at Kharagpur on October 29 and 30, 1927 in which it was decided to give a call for a general strike in case minimum demands of Bengal Nagpur

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{223} Karnik, V.B., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 160.
\item \textsuperscript{224} Saha, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{225} Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 13, 1927.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Saha, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Indian Annual Register, Vol. II, 1927.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Amrita Bazar Patrika, September 29, 1927.
\end{itemize}
Railway workers were not accepted within a week. Political leaders and trade union leaders such as S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmad, Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, Sibnath Banerji, Dharani Goswami, Gopendra Chakraborti, Singaravelu Chettiyar etc. arrived at Kharagpur. V.V. Giri condemned the retrenchment and threatened to declare a general strike.229

A meeting of the All India Congress Committee was requisitioned and held its meetings on October 28, 1927 in Calcutta. The President S.Srinivasan Iyengar in his speech condemned the government for not taking any action. A resolution was moved by Tulsi Charan Goswami which was passed unanimously. It read, "The All India Congress Committee express deep sympathy with the Kharagpur strikers in their struggle against the grave injustice that had been done to a considerable section of the employees of the Bengal Nagpur Railway and ask the whole country to stand by them and help them to vindicate their rights."230

All India Trade Union Congress held its Eighth Session at Kanpur towards the fag end of November 1927 and passed a resolution supporting the cause of the Labour Union of Bengal-Nagpur Railway and offered its whole hearted cooperation.231 The All India Trade Union Congress Session at Kanpur also donated Rupees 8000 as relief to the strikers and made an appeal to its affiliated unions to help them.232

The Central Council of the Union in its meeting at Kharagpur in the early part of November, 1927 formulated the following minimum demands:-

a) Reinstatement of those retrenched men and women who have not accepted

231. Ibid.
232 Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 6, 1927.
the settlement pending the Government committee's decision, b) right for the payment of wages for the lock out period, c) the union representatives to be on the enquiry committee. 233

The workers were unhappy with the moderate leadership who kept the strike limited to Kharagpur. Their demand was to announce a general strike throughout the Bengal-Nagpur Railway. In the meantime, C.F. Andrews along with Gandhi held negotiations with the Railway authorities. The moderate leadership of the union did not permit Singaravelu Chettiyar, Mukundlal Sarkar and Lalit Mohan Ghosh to address a gathering of workers on December 4, 1927. They had the fear that they would instigate the workers for a general strike. 234

V.V. Giri and others also began their talks with the government on the basis of the minimum demands. An offer was made by them that the strike would be called off if wages for the lock-out period were paid. Ultimately, the government agreed to it and the strike was called off on December 8, 1927. The strike was a failure as regard the issue of retrenchment of 1700 workers was concerned. 235

There were two special features of the strike. Firstly, it began as a sit-down strike resembling the method of passive resistance adopted in national movement by Gandhi. Secondly, it was first railway strike in which communists connected themselves. The unprecedented solidarity, courage and determination of the workers was proved. Continuing the strike while expanding it and making more workers to join it was a symbol of class consciousness. The attachment of the entire labour class of India with this

struggle was an indication that the era of unorganised and strewn strike was over. The Indian Labour class had entered the phase of class consciousness and encouraged by the successful struggle of Kharagpur, the labourers of Lilloah workshop near Calcutta submitted a memorandum of demands for increase in wages, ample holidays and some other facilities.

Beginning of Plantation industry in India dates back to early nineteenth century. But towards the end of the eighteenth century, under the influence of European enterprises, production of indigo began to develop in India with its centre in Bengal. In 1831 there were 300 to 400 indigo factories in Bengal.236

Other plantation are coffee, rubber and tea. Tea is the principal plantation industry in India. Regular production of tea started since 1851 and by 1869, the industry got firmly established.

With the extension of the plantation, the number of labourers engaged in this industry recorded a considerable increase. In the coffee plantation in 1903, the number of workers were 82,000. In the tea plantation it was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>450,926</td>
<td>102,895</td>
<td>553,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>900,695</td>
<td>72,660</td>
<td>973,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>831,438</td>
<td>75,349</td>
<td>906,787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The plantation Industry mainly existed in Assam, Bengal and southern part of India. These plantations were entirely monopolized by British Capitalists and they extorted a fabulous fortune through brutal

exploitation of labourers. After the First world war, economic condition of the workers became miserable. The signs of unrest appeared on September 6, 1920 in Doom-Domma Company. Thus the tolerance of the labourers was coming to an end. In 1921, when the entire country was being flushed by the wave of Non-Cooperation, the plantation workers also decided to get out of this slavery and return home.

In May 1921, there was a general strike of Plantation workers in Assam who wanted to be repatriated to their homes as they had lost all hopes of improvement in their condition. The Government and the planters suspected Non-Cooperation movement responsible for the exodus of the workers but it was not true. The non-cooperators had only rendered help to the workers after the atrocities inflicted on them at Chandpur. Gandhi was convinced that it was purely labour trouble.

The Assam Tea Garden Coolie exodus and the Chandpur outrage were the glaring example of Non-Cooperation propaganda among the agrarian classes. The coolies were paid very low wages, tortured and treated inhumanly by the European planters. The Coolies believed Gandhi to be an Avatar. The extremely low paid coolies of Tea Gardens had developed the faith that Gandhi had come on earth to free people from the bondage. Their determination to follow the line of Gandhi was the outcome of their sufferings and hardships. They decided to go back to their homeland to spin charkhas and lead a pure and simple life. While on their way home, the 12000 strong crowd of men and women were shouting 'Gandhi Maharaj Ki

239. Karnik, V.B., *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82
240. Home Department (Political), File No. 185, 1925.
242. Ibid.
An article special to the Statesman describes the story thus, 'More than 50% of the coolies employed in the Gardens in the Chargola Valley, Sylhet have left and are making their way home. The number is between four and five thousand and their sufferings are described as appalling. Cholera has already broken out at Asansol and Naihati. Hopes were entertained up to yesterday that the exodus would be checked but latest advices are that another batch of about 400 coolies rushed the steamer at Chandpur. Cases of assault have been reported. Planters state definitely that the unrest is not due to inadequate wages but to a deliberate political propaganda.

A few political speeches could not have driven them out of the tea-gardens. There was sufficient evidence that the exodus was due to the hardships inflicted on the workers. Several hundreds of stranded coolies tried to board the steamers at Chandpur on the night between May 19 and 20, 1921 without tickets but were prevented to do so. The Agent of Tea-Gardens and Sub Divisional Officer ordered disconnection of the Gangway. While on their way home, the coolies came to a halt at Chandpur and found themselves stranded there. Armed Gurkhas specially called from Narayanganj were ordered on the night of May 20, 1921 to drive away the coolies who were at that time sleeping on the Railway Platform. They assaulted the men, women and children with bayonets and butt-ends of the rifles. Relief parties and camps were organised by Public for some 4000 coolies stranded there. Andrews and the local leaders under the leadership

246. The Statesman, May 21, 1921, p. 7 Col. 5.
247. Indian Annual Register, Vol. I, 1921-22, Micro Fiche, p. 144 (f) in NMML.
of Hardayal Nag collected funds from public and managed to send them to their homes.248

The British Government blamed Non-Cooperation as the cause of this large scale desertion by the coolies. By this, they tried to conceal the limitless exploitation and ill-treatment which exhausted the patience of the coolies. Dewan Chamanlal challenged this and asserted "The causes were not political.............................. the causes were purely economic, in a word, starvation and ill-treatment."249

In fact, the resistance of the coolies that had been developing so long against the inhuman treatment and exploitation, found favourable circumstances in the Non-Cooperation Movement and burst out in the form of strike.

The tramway workers provided a leading role in the trade union movement in Bengal. They had launched many struggles on economic and political issues. Many prominent leaders of Bengal were connected with their movements. The political climate of Calcutta, after the Congress adopted the non-violent, non-cooperation resolution in 1920 at its Calcutta Session, had influenced the tram-way workers.250

The tramway workers numbering 2500 and consisting of drivers and conductors submitted their demands for (i) increase in wages, (ii) Free Kit and (iii) Reinstatement of two dismissed Colleagues, to the management in September, 1920. On non-acceptance of the demands, they struck work on October 1, 1920. The company yielded to the unity of

248. Indian Annual Register, Vol. I, 1921-22, Micro Film, p. 144 (O) in NMML.
workers and had to agree to the substance of the three demands. The dismissed workers were reinstated. The strike ended on October 4, 1920. As a result of this strike the Calcutta Tramways Employees Union was formed with Syed Erfan Ali, a barrister as the president, N.C. Sen, a nationalist barrister, Mohsin Khan, a Khilafatist labour leader and H.W.B. Moreno, an Anglo Indian labour leader as Vice Presidents, Bholanath Barman a Non-Cooperator, as secretary and Mohammad Ali, Kailiswar Singh, and Ali Hossain, all tramway conductors, as Assistant Secretaries.\(^{251}\)

When the company did not implement the agreement reached in October, 1920, the Tramway workers again resorted to strike on January 26, 1921.\(^{252}\) The nationalists extended every possible help to the strikers. The police opened fire at the strikers at Kalighat killing one person. The nationalist press unequivocally condemned the firing and whole heartedly supported the workers.\(^{253}\)

The Hindustan Times wrote that the company was determined to punish the strikers and that the lives of the people of this country was cheap, as proved by Jalianwala Bagh and Kalighat incidents.\(^{254}\)

A settlement was reached on February 23, 1921 in which the company promised to investigate into grievances of workers and strike ended the same day.\(^{255}\)

Three strikes one after the other occurred in Madras Trammways in 1919. At the time of first strike, the issue was referred to the court of

254. \textit{The Hindustan Times}, February 12, 1921.
enquiry which recommended some increase in pay and some other concessions which the workers and the company accepted. Next year, workers again demanded increase in pay, gratuity and sick leave with pay. The court of enquiry was not accepted by workers and they resorted to strike which ended in failure 256

In Bombay drivers, conductors, workshopmen of Bombay Electric Supply and Tramways Company resorted to strike in 1920 who demanded a wage increase due to big increase in prices in that year. The strike began on October 7, 1920. Several strikes in other quarters also occurred simultaneously. Some workers were arrested for assaulting the non-strikers. It continued for 45 days but had to be called off unconditionally on November 21, 1920. Some concessions, however, were granted by the company afterwards. There was another 3 days' strike in Tramways Bombay which started on September 18, 1922 on the issue of recognition of union. The strike was unsuccessful and 1300 workers were dismissed 257

Congress was formed in the year 1885 and was primarily concerned with the focussing of attention of the government on issues relating to industrialisation and unemployment in the country. It mostly comprised of middle class people.

A change in the policy of Congress was observed under the leadership of Gandhi. It became an organisation of masses and dedicated itself to the protection of the interests of the people at large and organise them. During and after the First World War, industrial unrest grew and Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association was formed under Gandhi's

257. Ibid., pp. 117-118.
guidance. There were a few more labour associations. In 1919, the congress passed its first resolution on working class in its session, which was held at Amritsar.

The resolution dealt with only generalities such as promoting labour unions, improving the social, economic and political conditions of the labouring classes and securing for them a fair standard of living etc.258

It had no operative clause and nothing was done or meant to be done in consequence of it.

Next session of the Congress was held at Nagpur in which a resolution moved by C.R. Das was accepted. This resolution said, "This Congress expressed its fullest sympathy with the workers of India in their struggle for securing their legitimate rights through the organisation of trade unions and places on record its condemnation of the brutal policy of treating the lives in preserving law and order. This Congress is of the opinion that Indian Labour should be organised with a view to improve and promote their well-being and secure to them their just rights, and also to prevent the exploitation of Indian Labour of Indian resources by foreign agencies and that the All India Congress Committee should appoint a committee to take effective steps in that behalf.259

After adoption of above resolution by All India Congress Committee, the Congress working committee appointed two committees in April, 1920. The Committee formed in connection with the All India Congress Committee resolution was assigned the labour organisation work. This

committee consisted of C.R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Anasuya behn Sarabhai, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande and some others. The other committee formed by Congress working committee was to make efforts to enroll members from depressed and working class. But no effective steps were taken by the committees to fulfil the assigned tasks.

C.R. Das in his presidential address to the third All India Trade Union Congress in March 1923 commented — "It was my misfortune to force the labour resolution at the Nagpur Congress on unwilling delegates and I find that it has not been acted upon to this day"260 In 1922, C.R. Das in his presidential address in the Congress session stressed the need that Congress should take up the labour organisation work.

At C.R. Das's encouragement, a resolution was again adopted at Gaya. "Whereas this Congress is of the opinion that Indian Labour should be organised........ it is resolved that this Congress, while welcoming the move made by the All India Trade Union Congress and various kisan Sabhas in organising the workers of India, hereby appoints the following committee with a power to cooperate, to assist Executive Committee of the All India Trade Union Congress for the organisation of Indian Labour, both agricultural and industrial." A Committee was appointed consisting of C.F. Andrews, J.M. Sen Gupta, S.N. Haldar, Swami Dinanath, D.D. Sathaye, M.Singara Valu Chettier.261

This resolution, it may be observed, contained all that what Nagpur resolution contained except one new element. It was the first time that Congress showed its willingness to join hands with All India Trade Union Congress in labour organisation work. But the fact remains that

nothing was done in this direction. Contrarily, the resolution moved by Sardar Vallubh Bhai Patel and adopted by the All India Congress Committee in Bombay in May, 1927, clearly ruled out the question of collaboration between the Congress and the All India Trade Union Congress on labour issues.262

There was widespread awakening in the working class throughout the country in the post-war period. The workers had a desire to gain strength to fight their causes by uniting themselves. But they had no organisational experience and leadership to achieve this goal.

As we see, Congress took the initiative to promote trade union through their provincial committees and other affiliated bodies and directed its members to assume leadership of the working class movement. The Congress in its session at Amritsar in 1919 and again in Nagpur resolved to promote labour unions, inspire the social, economic and political conditions of working classes and organize them. The leaders of the Congress responded to the call and in 1920, All India Trade Union Congress was formed.

The need for immediate formation of All India Trade Union Congress was felt when the government nominated N.M. Joshi as representative from India in International Labour organisation conference under the plea that no organisation truly representative of workers existed. To meet the Government's argument, All India Trade Union Congress was established.263

The first session of All India Trade Union Congress was held on October 31, 1920 in Bombay. Lala Lajpat Rai was the president and

262 Chatterjee, Rakhahari, op. cit., p. 134
263 Raviri, Chaman Lal, Indian Trade Union Movement- An Outline History, New Delhi, p. 87.
other important personalities were — Annie Besant, Moti Lal Nehru, Sardar Vallubb Bhai Patel, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, B.P. Wadia, Joseph Baptista, Lalabhai Samaldas, Jamna Das, Dwarka Das, Diwan Chamanlal, S.A. Bilvi, L.R. Tairsee, N.M. Joshi, and J.C. Wedgewood.264

There is no historical record to show whether the All India Trade Union Congress was sponsored by Congress party itself or unofficially by party's leaders but the fact remains that it was initiated by political quarters. Congress party appointed a committee to assist All India Trade Union Congress and its first three presidents were the presidents of Congress also.

Gandhi neither attended its session nor he sent any message as he regarded the formation of All India Trade Union Congress hasty and premature.265 Gandhi's argument was this, "I know" he said, "how little we have been able to accomplish in the way of organisation at Ahmedabad where I have directed the Textile Labour Union for many years. Even then we are not yet ready to join an All India organisation and yet we are one of the advanced Trade Union in the country."266

Gandhi even prompted Rev. C.F. Andrews not to join All India Trade Union Congress. The fact had been disclosed by Rev. Andrews himself in an article published in the first issue of the BNW Railway Gazette. Andrews said, "When the All India Trade Union Congress began more than four years ago, I held aloof, though I had been deeply interested in trade

unions in all my life. Yet at that particular time, Mahatma Gandhi convinced me that the hour had not yet come for an All India Trade Union Congress. Therefore, when the movement began I did not go down to Bombay to take part in it". 267

On the request of All India Trade Union Congress to affiliate Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association with All India Trade Union Congress, Gandhi replied that he was making a unique experiment in trade union movement with Ahmedabad as its laboratory and he wanted to regulate the labour organisations of India after Ahmedabad model. 268

Not only this, Gandhi used his influence to persuade Lala Lajpat Rai to give in favour of Joshi nominated by government to attend International Labour organisation. Gandhi brought personal pressure and probably party discipline on Lala Lajpat Rai. 269

The link between the All India Trade Union Congress and the Congress was established beyond doubt since not only the first president Lala Lajpat Rai but also other Congress leaders like C.R. Das, Moti Lal Nehru, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Subhash Chander Bose had presided over the All India Trade Union Congress at one time or other. 270

Although no relations could be traced in the constitution and objectives of All India Trade Union Congress to any political ideology, it should be admitted that for a number of years the All India Trade Union Congress remained oriented towards the Indian National Congress. 271

269. Revri, Chaman Lal, op. cit., p. 86.
271. Ibid.
It was shown in the second session of All India Trade Union Congress in which a resolution regarding Swaraj and Swadeshi had passed. It was declared in this session that the time had arrived for the attainment of Swaraj. The resolution accepted by the session was symbolical of Gandhian thinking. Adoption of this resolution actually meant support of All India Trade Union Congress to the Charkha economy of Gandhi.

The second session of All India Trade Union Congress held in November, 1921 was chaired by Baptista. Excepting Gandhi, several Congress leaders like C.R. Das, Sarojini Naidu, Moti Lal Nehru, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Kanti Kunj Dawarka Das sent congratulatory messages. The venue of All India Trade Union Congress was decorated in Khadi and people wore Gandhi caps. The spirit of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movement of Swaraj was well reflected.

From the detailed study of facts from 1919-1927, it is clear that it was the policy of the Congress to discourage workers' strikes whether in foreign-owned industry or native-owned industry. The local Congress leaders, in spite of their wishes to involve the workers in national movement, were bound by the guidelines given by the party. Also Congress left no stone unturned to keep the workers' struggles non-violent. It never wanted that the struggles should take a militant turn.

Though there was no doubt that working class, in the post war period was emerging as a great force and its struggles were not purely of economic nature, yet no efforts were made by any of the nationalist leader of that time to mobilise the workers for national movements.

273. Maratha, December 4, 1921.
"............ when in 1920, the workers of Assam-Bengal Railway at Chandpur went on strike in sympathy with the tea plantation labourers of Assam who were fighting against the oppression of the British owned planters, reformist leaders like C.R. Das rushed to take charge of this strike to prevent it developing into a more class conscious militant struggle. Gandhi, C.F. Andrews and Hardyal Nag simply condemned the strike in the name of public inconvenience."

The strike failed for want of finance and support from outside. This strike could have brought the labour class into the national movement. In Kanpur the workers went on strike against nonfulfilment of the settlement and promises made by owners earlier. Though their demands were just, yet the Congressmen linked with national movement tried to bring about a settlement through arbitration. Their plea was that good will and harmony was to be kept between workers and employers which was nothing but Gandhian faith to help the mill-owners. Similar attitude could be observed when Congressmen from Calcutta were invited by the striking workers of Tata Iron and Steel Company Jamshedpur in 1920 for guidance during strike. The Tata Iron and Steel Company was a national industry and as such there was a soft corner for it in the hearts of Congressmen. Boymkesh Chakroverty and S.N. Haldar both members of the Congress came from Calcutta. One mill owner Padmaraj Jain Aggarwal, who was also a Congressman, assisted the leaders from Calcutta. These leaders immediately formed a union of workers and started negotiations with management. These leaders undermined the seriousness of the situation and on their own tried to compromise for lesser

274. Kumar, Kapil (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.16.
percentage of wage increase. Inspite of being inexperienced, the workers were very clear about their needs. They would not allow the leaders to compromise. Leaders did not bring anything to the workers of Tata Iron and Steel Company and in the end they had to join back the work. Soon after, Teja Singh a local leader of the workers who claimed to be in touch with Gandhi, informed them that Gandhi had sent a message asking the workers to suffer in silence for the national industry. This is an example of Gandhi's favour of the capitalists.

On several occasions, All India Trade Union Congress had shown its intentions to join hands with Congress in freedom struggle but Congress was not interested in it and did nothing except passing a few resolutions showing sympathy with the leaders of workers being arrested by the Government. If we look back at the resolutions of the Congress from 1919 to 1930, we find that the Congress, despite adopting a few resolutions regarding labour, did almost nothing to associate the working class with the independence movement.

Another example of Gandhi's disinterest in workers' strike is on record when during the strike by workers of Railway workshop at Jamalpur in December-January 1919-20. Gandhi was approached several times to come but he refused regretting his inability to come to their help. "Similarly when in December, 1918, troubles started at the Binny Mills in Madras and negotiations were dead-locked, Wadia wired Gandhi to come but Gandhi refused and sent C.F. Andrews instead."

It was a common scene throughout the country that the working class had started showing interest in Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements. At every stage of the Indian National movement, the working class had played its proper part, and the significance and the quantum of the participations of the class were increasing with every passing day. When the nationalist leaders were faltering and hesitating, the working class came forward with amazing maturity to play the leading part in the National Movement and thereby setting a brilliant example before the Indian Nation and the people.²⁷⁸

But the fact remains that the Congress and particularly Gandhi who was always against participation of workers in freedom movement, took no advantage of the situation otherwise freedom could have been achieved much earlier. That was the right political climate that the labour movement could grow and could be utilised for political gains.

Though there was no dearth of local leaders who taking the advantage of industrial unrest and political atmosphere, encouraged labour strikes. But there were limitations on them. Gandhi was deadly against use of workers' strike for political gains.

In fact, the mutual relationship between the Congress and the Indian working class seems to have been dictated by the necessity of harnessing both the forces of nationalism and labour movement, on the one hand, and the conspicuously weak political and social status of the Indian working class, on the other hand. Naturally the Indian working class, in the absence of organised public opinion coupled with the bitter opposition of the employers' class, leaned heavily on the Congress for moral and economic support.

²⁷⁸ Ghosh, Gopal, op. cit., pp. 81-82.
It was natural, therefore, that in almost all the strikes in which disputes reached a crisis, the workers approached the Congress leaders. In the meanwhile, local Congress leaders kept themselves busy collecting relief funds and offering all possible help to workers on strike.

We have seen that the alliance of the Indian working class with the Congress was necessitated by the fundamental weaknesses of the Indian working class, but the Congress supported the cause of the working class for entirely different reasons. Its motive was partly humanitarian and partly political. Its humanitarian motive is best manifested in the work of Gandhi and C.F. Andrews and some Non-Cooperators. Politically, local Congress leaders wanted to befriend the working class for clearing strengthening forces against British Government and also to have hold on the working class against the growing influence of the Communists in the working class.

The general inferences that could be drawn from the strikes of this period are summed up as under:

Mostly, the cause of the strikes was economic in nature. A few strikes took place due to contemptuous and oppressive behaviour of European supervisory officers. There was a sort of new awakening. Workers opposed the preferential conditions of service for Europeans and Anglo-Indians in some areas particularly in railways. Politically motivated strikes were practically negligible. This was due to the fact that top leaders like Gandhi did not favour participation of workers in politics. They thought that workers were not politically ripe enough. Most of the strikes started abruptly without any element of outside instigation and were generally unorganised. Workers had to form temporary bodies for negotiations with the employers. Outside help was also sought on such occasions. Political
leaders and prominent citizens intervened to bring about a settlement. Congress leaders especially were on the look out that workers do not take a violent turn. The mill-owners avoided considering the grievances till the workers resorted to strike. A number of strikes could have been avoided, had the employers paid some heed to their grievances. On many occasions, workers showed their desire to redress their demands through courts of enquiry, conciliation boards and government officers. Government in general adopted the policy of non-interference but whenever it intervened it was on the pretext of law and order and was more to the interests of employers than workers. The employers were not ready to part with the high profits, they were earning. They yielded to strikes only with the result that workers became class conscious. This led to bitterness between the workers and employers and became a source of conflict in the time to come.