CHAPTER VIII
RESUME

In the preceding chapters the interaction of trade union, politics and leadership is examined with special reference to the role played by the national federations of the trade unions at local level. It is beyond doubt that the federations of trade unions have played a very significant role at the national level. Technically, they have been formed at the national level to pursue the goals and values which are higher than the mundane 
Dal-Roti problems of the workers. However, their functioning at the grass roots level has not been much explored. Ramaswamy is of the opinion that federations are "all head and no body" (1977:7-9), and that they are only affiliating bodies and their functions rarely go beyond the laying down of broad policy (Ramaswamy and Ramaswamy 1981:102-103).

But this would not be a true description of the situation. It is evident from Baroda that the role of federations cannot just be dismissed as affiliating bodies only, whose functions are confined to laying down of the broad policy of the labour movement led by them. It is true, as Ramaswamy observe, the "building blocks" of the labour movement are "the constituent unions". Because, the individual unions have a distinct legal identity since they are registered under the Trade Union Act of 1926. Besides, it is these individual unions which
can file annual returns, failing which they may lose their legal existence; and it is these unions which enrol members, submit the charter of demands, and negotiate with the managements (Ramaswamy and Ramaswamy 1981:102-103). But, as we find in Baroda, the national federations play an active role in organizing the unions and leading their battles at the local level. These federations not only articulate the demands of the workers at the local level but also consolidate the trade union movement and link it with the national mainstream. Therefore, concurring with Sheth it can be said that there is an inevitable interdependence between the central union federations and their affiliates at the local level (Sheth 1967:210).

All these federations have both short-term goals and the long-term goals. The short-term goals are common to all which refer to the wage-and-work-related problems of the workers. It requires articulation of workers' demands and solving their individual as well as collective issues. Since workers are primarily interested in the immediate problems concerning their wage-and-work-conditions, the federations need to fulfill these short-term objectives.

The long-term goals, which refer to the future image of the working class in the system of stratification differ from federation to federation. They are reflected in their working class ideologies and political allegiances. These ideologies range from Marxist (AITUC-CITU)-to-Socialist(IMS)-to-Gandhian (INTUC-NLO)-to-Nationalist (BMS). But they can be classified into two broad categories: (i) the radicals or the leftists and (ii) the reformists or the rightists. AITUC, CITU, and BMS follow the radical ideology and aim at revolutionary
changes in the social system through class conflict. While BMS, INTUC, and MLO, who pursue the reformist ideology, seek reforms within the existing societal framework for amelioration of the condition of working class, without resorting to class conflict.

But, workers in general appear to be guided by their own experiential considerations. The competing federations are successful in attracting workers mainly on mundane bread and butter issues. Monetary and real gains win and retain members, not the abstract, long-term, ideological issues. Even success in winning concrete benefits for workers does not necessarily guarantee that they would pay their membership dues regularly.

The behaviour of the workers apparently seems to be like that of the share-holders who invest in a company, depending upon its capacity to give returns. If the workers feel that a trade union affiliated to a particular federation is not good enough, they withdraw their membership and join another federation's union. Such shifts are generally based on their assessments of the other federation's effectiveness in delivering the goods for one reason (such as, the federation's association with the ruling party) or the other (such as, its acceptability to the management). Or, just as the share-holders find it profitable to invest simultaneously in two or more companies producing similar goods, the workers also, some times, become members of more than one union simultaneously, where multiple unions exist, without regard to their ideological orientations.

On the other hand, the role of the federations appears to resemble with that of the managing agency system, which was the predominant
feature of the Indian economy until recently. This agency was a firm, which for a fixed fee, or usually a percentage in profits or sales, operated the business of one or more firms on behalf of the owners. In reality the managing agents dominated the firms they managed (Myers and Kannappan 1970:47-57). Similarly, the trade union federations run the affairs of several unions by charging affiliation fees, or establishment expenses, or percentage in the cash benefits won by the workers.

And, just as the managing agencies were run by a small group, mainly consisting of family members, the trade union federations also are run at the local level by a small caucus of leaders of the federation and form a well-knit team as ideologically committed comrades, if not as family members. These federation leaders generally dominate the unions affiliated with them. Therefore, as observers like Munson note, for many workers the leader is the union (1970:6).

The origin of the managing agency is attributed to the lack of venture capital, managerial ability, industrial leadership and business confidence among the individual entrepreneurs, required for effectively managing the affairs of their companies or firms. Likewise, the trade union federations also seem to perform the function of providing initial help (both in terms of managerial ability and material as well as human resources) and leadership to the individual unions.

Perhaps, the only difference between the two is that the managing agency was started with the explicit motive of profit while a trade union federation is explicitly committed to the service motive.
However, these analogies are nothing more than caricatures. As caricatures they help to describe some outstanding features of the reality, as it appears to be existing, but they do not truly depict the reality.

It is true that these federations are weak as organizations. Because, as organizations they lack necessary disciplinary power over the members. They do not seem to have been able to impose an elementary discipline on all workers of paying union dues regularly, which is merely a rupee a month. The foregoing discussion also supports Ramaswamy's impression (1981:102-103) that though the federations' major power lies in their ability to expel a constituent union which seriously violates their policies, it is not an effective sanction because it is quite easy to defect to another federation or stay independent.

Besides, most of the unions formed by these federations are small plantwide unions. Strong industrial or craft unions are almost non-existent. And the so called 'general unions' are loose structures, characterised by the lack of a common and unifying bond among the associates. It is not uncommon to find some of the federations chronically plagued by the paucity of funds and personnel.

All the same, it would rather be an overstatement to say that the federations have 'little control' over the day-to-day conduct of their local affiliates. Because, so long as a union is affiliated to a federation, the federation leaders usually play an important role in managing its affairs. Some times their influence is so much that they are accused to be 'autocratic', and this, at times, is the reason
Moreover, it is true that the loyalties of the unions to their federations are not permanent, but at the same time they do not change their affiliations too frequently, barring a few exceptions. Most of the unions stay with their federations for quite a long time. Otherwise, it would have created a chaotic situation making it impossible for any federation to survive or function in such a fluid situation.

Thus, it can be said that these federations have emerged as viable organizations and they have acquired firm roots at the local level. The very fact that they have survived for such a long period and kept themselves actively engaged in their activities, despite many crises faced by each one of them, is the testimony of their viability. True, they may not be very strong organizations yet the fact to be noted is that they have been able to accumulate some permanent assets such as office premises, vehicles, office-staff and above all some veteran full-time leaders.

These federations, which are associated with one or the other political parties, to be sure, are not business firms. They are committed to some long-term political goals and have been responsible for politicizing the local trade union movement. In Naroda, for instance, the Gandhians and the Communists were pitted against each other right from the beginning of the movement. Later on the other federations joined the fray. Thus, at present we have six federations competing with each other: AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, INTUC and Majoor Mahajan (NLO). This obviously leads to the inter-federation rivalry and multiplicity of unions.
Some federations (AITUC, CITU and BMS) base their movement on the leftist ideology in opposition to some rightist federations (BMS, INTUC and Majoor Mahajan-NLO). Although, all these federations are each other's rivals, the leftist federations unite more often than the rightists, who have never united with each other due to the irreconcilable political differences between the parties with which they are respectively identified. However, these alliances are no more than coalitions based on political exigencies and they change as the political equations change at the state or national level. Nonetheless, the inter-federation competition and cooperation do play an important role in politicizing the movement.

Apart from this, there is a systemic link between the trade unions and the state which also has played an important role in politicizing the movement at the local level. For instance in Baroda, the feudal state of the Gaekwads, at the outset, was not favourably oriented to the trade unions. Therefore, for quite some time the industrial workers of Baroda could not get legal protection. Not only that, the efforts to organize the Baroda workers were also not made until the Majoor Mahajan (TLA) leaders of Ahmedabad came and started organizing them. It was only after the determined efforts of the Mahajan (TLA) leaders, the trade union movement was legally institutionalized in the Baroda state. However, when the Communists started organizing the workers, the state threw its weight against them in favour of the Majoor Mahajan (TLA). This was mainly because of the ideological difference between the two, as the former believed in the Marxian philosophy of class-conflict while the latter followed the Gandhian ideology of peace, non-violence, and class collaboration. Besides, the Majoor
Mahajan (TLA) enjoyed greater prestige and respectability due to its Congress connection. Therefore, the state preferred to support Majoor Mahajan (TLA) against the Red Flag Unions of the Communists. This policy continued to some extent even after the merger of Baroda state into the Indian union following independence. This was because the Congress Party which came to power immediately after independence was confronted with many problems. One of them was rising unrest and increasing militancy of workers all over the country. In order to control the situation initially the Indian National Congress seems to have adopted the following three strategies at the national level. The first strategy was to form its own trade union federation, i.e. INTUC, and to bring workers under its influence in order to avoid industrial conflict as far as possible. The second strategy was to suppress the militants like the Communists in order to contain working class militancy. The third strategy was to evolve a legal framework to avoid or to minimise the loss of production by discouraging industrial conflicts (1966:4-7).

As a result of the first strategy, Majoor Mahajan (TLA), which joined INTUC, continued to enjoy state support for a long period in the post-independence era. The BIR Act helped Mahajan (INTUC) to acquire complete control over the textile workers. Likewise, in the non-textile industry it could get preferential treatment from the ruling Congress Party in the state, regarding the references of its disputes for adjudication and other such matters. Nevertheless, this gain was not without cost, since many a time it was put in an awkward
position by opposing any agitation launched by its opponents in support of workers' demands. This indeed eroded its credibility in the working class.

The second strategy of suppressing the militant Communists paid some dividends to the ruling party, though they were temporary. The Communists, for instance, were successfully eliminated from the trade union field in 1948-49 when many of them were arrested under the Defence of India Act. However, they were immediately replaced by the Socialists who were also not committed to a policy of industrial harmony. Again, in the 1960s the Communist Party faced another threat after the Chinese War. Yet, the indomitable Communists did manage to survive and spread their influence in the trade union movement to the extent that now AITUC is the strongest federation in the non-textile industries in Baroda.

The third strategy of formulating a legal framework to avoid industrial conflicts has been successful only to a limited extent. It has been more successful in the textile industry, where due to B.I.R. Act competition between different federations has been eliminated and Major Mahajan (NLO) has acquired monopoly over the workers. Nevertheless, in the non-textile industries, on the contrary, the conflict has increased and workers have become more militant.

We have examined this process of the politicization of the movement in a historical perspective and corroborated it with an in-depth study of a strike situation. The historical analysis reveals that it is difficult to organize the workers at the outset, but once they are unionized they tend to be more and more conscious of the
value of unity and usefulness of the struggles. As a result unionism spreads among the traditionally unorganized sections of the working class and their ever expanding aspirations make them more and more militant, a process facilitated by inter-federation competition. This process in turn coalesces, the working class by eroding their parochial/occupational divisions. They do not even hesitate in substituting a non-militant union with a militant one, if they find that their aspirations are strangled by the former. The situation of Baroda, by and large represents that of Gujarat. For instance, as Sheth has observed, the Majoor Mahajan (INTUC-NLO), because of its policies, is fast losing its credibility and working class militancy is on the increase all over the state (1981). Even in other parts of the country we find the parallels (Weiner 1962:79-104, Reindrop 1971:29, Ramaswamy : 1977, Pendse 1984:344).

The case study of the Alembic strike further demonstrates these tendencies and illustrates the process of radicalization of the participants. It shows how workers learn certain values, beliefs, and ideas regarding unity and struggle from their participation both in trade union and agitation. It also throws light on the influence structure and the leadership role of the outsiders and the insiders.

In the last three chapters we have attempted to examine this leadership structure vis-a-vis the role of leaders and that of trade union federations in socializing the activists in their respective ideologies.

While examining the stratum of the outside leaders it is found that they are not a homogeneous group, as some among them are more
prominent than the others. The prominent outsiders, who are the heads of their respective federations are relatively more educated and most of them are politically also more prominent than their non-prominent colleagues. Although, both the promonents and the non-prominents perform all activities, a clearly discernible division of work is found among them, which is not explicit but generally followed by them. However, the significant fact is that most of the non-prominents were former worker-leaders and they were coopted in the full-time trade union leadership. Some of these non-prominents in the due course also emerge as prominent trade union and/or political leaders. This fact indicates that though ostensibly all the outsiders, in most of the federations, are bogged down with routine trade union work and therefore appear to do very little to spread their ideology, a cadre of worker-leaders is created by them out of whom some are recruited as full-timers. The co-option of the insiders to full-time leadership, as we saw is not just random but it is based on the consideration of the ideological commitment of these inside activists. The federations and their leaders are so careful about the ideological commitment that even while retaining a lawyer, as far as possible, they prefer to have one who shares their ideological perspectives. Thus, the ideologies of the federations are not mere legitimation devices of the federations to justify their independent existence. Each of the federations tries to spread its ideology. And, it is in this context the cadre of the worker-leaders is significant.

These activists are of critical significance because they constitute an important link in the chain of influence as they are influential
as well as the influenced. On the one hand they are adjacent to the outside full-timers, who are above their own stratum and who influence them, and on the other to the workers who are below their stratum, and who are in turn influenced by them.

We, however, assumed that just as the outsiders are not a homogeneous category the activist insiders also are differentiated. To test this assumption the activists were divided into two strata: the office-bearers and the non-office-bearers. It was found that the office-holding activists differ from the non-office-holding activists on certain criteria. For instance, the office-bearers are economically better off, more educated and have greater proficiency in English language as compared to the non-office-bearers. They are also more actively involved in various trade union activities including agitations. They perform more important leadership role of negotiating with the management. And, they are found to be more modern and less alienated in comparison to the non-office-bearers.

Thus, it is from this stratum of the office-holding activists, the full-time non-prominents are likely to be recruited.

Therefore, the political and ideological commitments of the activists were examined. It was found that though the activists, as a whole, show a high degree of commitment to their respective federations nothing can be said with confidence about the distinction between the office-bearers and the non-office-bearers. The activists also display a very high level of allegiance to the political parties, with which their federations are closely associated. In this case also it is not possible to distinguish the office-
bearers from the non-office-bearers. However, the office-bearers show more awareness about the political and long-term objectives of the trade union organizations than the non-office-bearers.

Finally, in this context we attempted to see the ideological orientations of these activists. Several factors are related to the development of a feeling among individuals that they belong to a class with distinct interests, identity, and destiny as opposed to another class. But, few scholars have paid any attention to the role of the trade union and ideology in creating this kind of awareness (Kluegel and Smith 1981). Since radicalism, in the Marxian sense, is a linking concept between trade unions and politics we tried to explore the effect of trade union participation and that of ideological affiliation on the development of class consciousness. Class consciousness was defined as politically expressed class interests. The concept was operationalized on the basis of three dimensions: (i) class solidarity (ii) class militancy and (iii) economic radicalism. Each of these dimensions was converted into an index and these indices were then converted into a general index of overall class consciousness, so that the degree of class consciousness of the activists can be measured and related with their trade union participation and ideological affiliation.

Since the office-bearers are more active in trade union participation than the non-office-bearers it was assumed that if, as Marx conceived, the trade union is a school of class consciousness, the former should develop more class consciousness than the latter. Secondly, it was also assumed that those activists who are affiliated
with the leftist federations are likely to develop more class consciousness than those affiliated with the rightist federations, since the former are espoused to the Marxist ideology of class conflict. The initial analysis of data supported both the assumptions. But when ideological affiliation was controlled, the relationship between the status of the activists (i.e., office-holder or non-office-holder) and class consciousness weakened. While the relationship between the ideological affiliation and the class consciousness remained strong even when the status of the respondent was controlled. Thus, between the status of a respondent and his ideological affiliation, the latter turned out to be strongly related with class consciousness.

In order to see whether the leftist and rightist respondents differ on other counts they were examined with reference to a number of variables, just as it was done in the case of the office-bearers and the non-office-bearers. It was found that the leftists differ from the rightists on certain criteria. For instance, the former have lower per capita income than the latter and that it is reflected in their subjective perception also. That is, a larger proportion of the leftists than the rightists perceive that their income is insufficient. The leftists are also low in overall activism and in general satisfaction with life. However, they are significantly high on agitational participation.

Now, therefore, a question may arise whether the association between the leftist activists and their high class consciousness is caused only by their ideological affiliation or is it the effect of other background variables? In order to answer this question a linear
step-wise multiple regression was performed. The results indicated that, more than any other variable, agitational participation contributes to a great extent to a respondent's class consciousness. This is quite logical because the leftist federations not only believe in the ideology of class conflict but they also do not hesitate to put it in the practice. And, it is this agitational participation which is more important than the status of a respondent or his participation in the routine trade union activities. This is reflected in another step-wise multiple regression performed, taking status, instead of ideological affiliation (as it was done in the former case), as an independent variable along with the thirteen other independent variables. The results of this test show that the agitational participation again turns out to be the best predictive variable. Thus, the findings confirm the assumption that the trade union is a school of class solidarity and socialism, with a qualification that this is so only provided that it adopts the course of agitation. Since the leftist federations agitate more frequently they succeed in contributing to the class consciousness of their activists to a greater extent than the rightist federations. It must be admitted, however, that this generalization, based on our limited data, may have been biased by the limitations in our sample and also the tools used for data collection. Nonetheless, the overall analysis does suggest that these federations try to combine their short-term goals with the long-term goals and that they try to spread their respective ideologies, directly or indirectly. The belief that the radical federations lose their revolutionary appeal since they agree to function within a democratic polity is not true. Similarly, at the other extreme, the Marxist assumption that
any trade union has a radicalizing impact is also not very true.
In reality, just as the leftist federations try to spread radicalism among the workers, the rightist federations also try to spread the status quoist ideology.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be said that each of the national federations of trade unions try to consolidate the two aspects of trade unions specified by Allan Flanders, namely the movement and the organization. A movement implies the pursuit of a common goal by a collectivity of participants, who in some measure share the same sentiments and ideas, while an organization binds the members together through operative sanctions (Flanders 1970:38-47). If the movement is not transformed into organization it cannot flourish. And if the fervour of the movement is not kept alive the organization cannot retain its vitality. In the words of Flanders (1970:23-24):

Trade unions cannot be run simply as business. Many members may join who wish to play no active part in union affairs, who see their contribution, perhaps as nothing more than payment for a service. Even so, every union must have at least a core of active members who feel some deeper loyalty. A trade union that had none of the characteristics of the movement which was thrown back entirely on the bonds of organization, would be in a sorry state. To sum up, trade unions need organization for their power and movement for their vitality, but they need both power and vitality to advance their social purpose (emphasis added).

In this sense, the national federations of trade unions in India try to enhance their social purpose, as defined in their political ideologies, at the local level, by combining both the aspects of trade unions namely the movement and the organization, of course,
with varying degree of success.

Therefore, the national federations of trade unions need not be dismissed as apex bodies, having no roots at the local level. Instead, they link the local movement with the national mainstream by mobilizing support for their larger political goals at the grass roots level. The struggles fought by these federations regarding the wage-and-work-conditions of the local workers are not trivial and insignificant as they seem to be. The economic struggles, at times become ideological conflicts. The issue of wage rise does not remain merely an economic issue. It becomes a political issue and generates emotionally loaded political values and attitudes, having a bearing on the larger social, economic and political system. In this context the role of national federations is more important than it appears to be.