CHAPTER X
INTRODUCTION

Trade unions in all countries are linked with politics, since there is a systemic or reciprocal relationship between the state and the trade unions. As the state can influence the functioning of trade unions, the trade unions also like to influence the state and its policies. In modern democratic states, political parties try to aggregate the interests of several interest groups. A trade union is one such functionally specific interest group, which formally organizes working class people and articulates their interests. In some countries like the UK and the USA, trade unions enjoy considerable autonomy. They are relatively less dependent on the state and political parties to perform their normal collective bargaining functions. However, in India, trade unions are closely linked with politics mainly due to the fact that historically the Indian trade unions have been associated with the nationalist movement and political parties. Besides, after independence the state has followed the policy of increasing intervention in the industrial relations. And the political parties have continued the policy of mobilizing workers for political objectives through their respective federations of trade unions such as: All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC),
National Labour Organization (NLO), and United Trade Union Congress (UTUC).

In numerous studies of the Indian trade union movement there is an overwhelming emphasis on the politicization of the movement and its consequences, such as: political affiliation of the national federations of trade unions and resultant splits in the movement, trade union rivalry, organizational and financial weaknesses of the unions, dominance of the outside leadership, unsatisfactory collective bargaining and so on (Sheth, 1977, Sheth and Patel, 1979).

Whether the politicization of the trade union movement has dysfunctional consequences for the Indian trade union movement is a moot issue. One view, supported by some empirical studies (e.g. Pandey, 1970), is that the political involvement of workers is detrimental to the union movement. However, there is a lack of consensus on this point. For instance, Jha (1970) argues that the working class movement is a reaction to and a protest against capitalism. Therefore, the workers' unions must have the backing of their respective political wings in order to fulfill their economic demands. Further, he contends that whenever the working class movement in India has failed to mobilize its industrial and political wings, it has faltered.

Bogaert (1970) has asserted that political involvement and political leadership are not necessarily harmful for unionism. In fact, he thinks that the political involvement fulfills two important functions: (i) it provides new ideological orientation and worldview to the workers and (ii) it also provides initial leadership to the movement. Moreover, Bogaert observes that political parties had
hardly 'used' the dock unions, studied by him, for purely political aims. On the contrary, whenever it was found advantageous, they politically disengaged themselves. Bogaert is of the opinion that political unionism is incorrectly blamed for the division of the labour movement in India. Because, he thinks, leadership and personality clashes, rather than political allegiances of the unions, are more responsible for the factionalism and inter-union rivalries.

Ramaswamy (1971, 1972, 1977) has provided supportive evidence indicating that political loyalties are not necessarily incompatible with sound unionism. He observes that the ideological commitments of unions do not necessarily prevent them from joining hands with one another, since inter-union relations are governed by a host of factors. Moreover, he finds that politicized workers are more secularized, loyal and committed members who constitute the core of the unions.

Thus, these studies suggest that political involvements of unions do not adversely affect the trade union movement in India.

Although politicization is an outstanding feature of the Indian trade union movement, as Sheth observes, it needs to be viewed as a consequence of the democratic polity within which unions function (1968). This has a bearing upon the relationship between the trade union movement and state. Sheth has elaborated on this dimension in his formulation, based on the conceptual framework developed by Almond and Coleman, highlighting the following functions of trade unions as an interest group: (i) interest articulation (ii) political socialization and recruitment, and (iii) political communication (1968:6).

Various aspects of the relationship between trade union and
Politics have been studied so far, but in most of the studies the emphasis is on the relationship between politics and the trade union movement at the national level. (Punekar: 1948, Giri: 1958, Ghosh: 1960, Kennedy: 1966, Crouch: 1966, Johri: 1967, Myers and Kannappan: 1970, Karnik: 1978). Very few attempts have been made to examine this relationship at the local level. The studies of Bogaert (1970), Pandey (1970) and Ramaswamy (1977) are some of the notable exceptions.

Concurring with Sheth (1977: 3) and Ramaswamy (1977: 7-8) it may be said that many of the limitations of the Indian trade union studies emanate, partly if not wholly, from the overwhelming dependence on macrodata. For instance, we still do not have much data about the influence of the national federations on the politicization of the local trade union movement and its participants. There have been a few attempts to examine the extent of political orientations and commitments of the trade union participants (Sheth and Jain: 1968a, Ramaswamy: 1969, 1977). However, the main concern of these studies is to search the relationship between the workers' general political consciousness and their trade union involvement. The influence of different federations and their leadership on the politicization of the participants at the local level is not much looked into. We, therefore, wish to focus our attention on the role of the national federations of trade unions and their leadership at the grass roots level.

The Issues

The national federations of trade unions in India are the labour fronts of different political parties (cf. Karnik: 1978). Each of these
federations is espoused to a specific political ideology. Technically these federations have been formed at the national level to affiliate local unions organizing workers at plant/industry level. Ramaswamy is of the opinion that the national federations are all "head and no body" (1977:7-8). Reiterating the same view further he states with Mrs. Ramaswamy (Ramaswamy and Ramaswamy 1981:102-103):

...The federations are only affiliating bodies and their functions rarely go beyond the laying down of broad policy. They have little control over the day-to-day conduct of their constituents. Their major power consists in the ability to expel a constituent unit which violates policy too flagrantly. But this is rarely a source of discomfiture, for it is quite easy to affiliate oneself to another federation, or stay independent.

It is true, as Ramaswamy's observe, the "building blocks" of the Indian labour movement are "the constituent unions" (Ramaswamy and Ramaswamy 1981:102-103). 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 return, 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. But does this mean that the national federations do not try to acquire roots at the local level? Do they not try to build a kind of permanent following among their constituent unions or their members?

Sheth (1968:10) observes that there is an inevitable interdependence between the central union federations and their affiliates at the local level. Even Ramaswamy has noted in his study of Coimbatore that the unions affiliated to the national federations such
as INTUC and IMS, among others, played a crucial role in the labour movement of the city. Not only that, he further observed that the union of the IMS, which he studied closely, was successful in creating a hard core of politically committed followers also (1977). Yet, data about the actual functioning of these federations and their political influence on the movement and its participants at the grass roots level are conspicuously scanty, if not totally absent.

As a matter of fact the national federations can pursue their political objectives mainly by mobilizing workers at the grass-roots level. But these political goals are much higher than the mundane Dal-Roti (bread and butter) problems of the workers. In this context a question which may arise is: how do these federations try to combine their larger political goals with the workers' real and immediate interests? In other words, how do they try to combine their long-term goals with the short-term goals of the workers?

Besides, each federation has its own ideology regarding the future image of the working class in the system of stratification. Some federations subscribe to the radical ideology aiming at the abolition of the capitalist system through class struggles. While some others aim at economic and political reforms within the capitalist framework. Each federation may like to spread its political ideology among its ranks and may also like to create an ideologically committed following.

According to one theoretical view, however, it is assumed that any trade union, without regard to its political ideology, has a radicalizing effect on its participants. It is in this context Karl
Marx considered trade unions as the schools of socialism and solidarity (Lozovsky 1972). Marx's political views were being formulated in the epoch when the trade unions were just in a formative stage. But the fact which seems to have impressed him immensely was that the so far scattered workers competing with each other, were spontaneously beginning to close their ranks. Although, he distinguished the economic movement from the political movement of the working class, he assumed that whatever economic activities the trade unions undertake, there are always political repercussions, whether they are intended or not (Lozovsky 1972). The conditions of one movement lead to the conditions of another movement. Therefore, as Lozowsky notes, Marx (and also Engles) has time and again reiterated the idea that the trade unions are schools of socialism and solidarity. Thus, according to Marx, participation in a trade union has a radicalizing effect on its participants. That is, they learn militant left-wing political orientations calling for drastic change in the capitalist system, without regard to the fact whether the union intends to do so or not.

According to another view, however, even the trade unions espoused to a radical ideology, challenging the existing social and political system, fail to radicalize the workers since they agree to function within the very system. This view is echoed by Crouch. He observes (1966:11-12):

...so long as the party (sic) is actually participating in the democratic system, whatever its long-term ideology may be, the party (sic) has some integrative function. The workers' demands are expressed in the labour courts, in strikes, by members of the legislature and so on, no matter what ideology has been adopted by the particular trade union actually leading the workers.
In so far as antidemocratic trade union leaders work within a democratic system, and give expression to workers' demands within that system, they help to condition the workers to accept the system. In so far as these unions actually bring benefits to the workers under the existing system, they weaken their own chances of spreading disaffection against the system....(emphasis added).

Apart from this polemical view, another important fact to be noted is that those federations who are opposed to the ideology of class conflict may on the other hand try to inculcate the values of industrial peace and class harmony among the workers. Besides, even the state may also like to influence the role of these different federations according to the value-preferences of the ruling elites. For instance, after independence the Indian Government and the ruling elites of the Congress Party were confronted with many pressing problems, including the one of rising unrest and increasing militancy of workers all over the country. To control this problem, as Myron Weiner (1962:4-7) has perceptively observed, the ruling Congress Party adopted three strategies at the national level. The first strategy was to form its own trade union federation, INTUC and to bring workers under its influence in order to avoid industrial conflict as far as possible. Weiner calls this the strategy of the management of protest. The second strategy was to suppress the radicals like the Communists in order to contain working class militancy. According to Weiner this is the strategy of restraint and coercion. The third strategy was to evolve a legal framework to avoid or to minimise the loss of production by discouraging industrial conflicts. As Weiner notes, there may not be much of fore-thought or deliberation on the part of Congress...
Party behind these policies. Yet, these measures were so widespread that they may be appropriately described as strategies. However, according to Weiner this kind of attitude of the state and the ruling elites has an alienating effect on the participants, that is, they do not feel integrated within the political system in which they function and are tempted to resort to undemocratic means (1962). In view of these different theoretical viewpoints, a question which arises here is: to what extent the federations succeed in spreading their larger political ideologies among their followers?

The response patterns of the participants, however, would also depend to some extent upon the way in which they are socialized in a political value system. This brings us to another, but related, aspect of our study, namely leadership. Because, just as in the family parents are the main socializing agents, in trade unions it is likely that the leaders may play that role. That is, they may try to educate their followers in the value system of the political philosophy of their respective federations and also about the desirable political system.

Leadership in any sphere of life is not a homogeneous category (Gibb 1954, Merton 1968:441-474). Trade union leadership is also multistratum. The recognition of two broad strata namely the 'outside' and 'inside' leaders in the Indian trade union movement is perhaps as old as the Indian Trade Union Act of 1926. According to the Trade Union Act of 1926, any person actively connected with trade unions, but not actively engaged in industry as an employee is an 'outsider'. As per this definition, a person who has worked in industry in past
but left his job to work as a full-time trade union leader is also an 'outsider'. An 'insider' is a person who is an employee of a plant/industry and also simultaneously takes up trade union leadership. However, the Act does not prevent the 'outsiders' from holding the important offices in the trade union executives.

There have been a few attempts, however, to formulate some other typologies of leadership also. For instance Vaid talks about 'big-name', 'professional', and 'rank and file leaders' (1962). Sheth and Jain (1968) have identified two categories of the rank and file leaders, whom they call 'worker leaders': (i) the formal leaders (those who hold official positions) and (ii) the informal leaders (those who never held any office but were closely associated with leadership role). Bogaert (1970:96-98) classifies the trade union leaders into the top leaders and the second rank leaders. These categories are further broken down into two each. Thus, he gives four categories of leaders: (i) big name top leaders (ii) professional top leaders (iii) second rank leaders fulfilling feed-back or transmission-belt functions and (iv) second rank leaders who are union executives and office staff. Ramaswamy (1974) analyzes the distinction between the role of outsiders from that of insiders, and the strains involved in each role. However, he also finds in his study that there are four tiers of leadership, one tier consisting of the outsiders and the other three of the insiders functioning at different levels (1973:1916). In a more recent publication Singh (1980) has developed different typologies of trade union leaders keeping different criteria as the base.
Our purpose here is not to list these leadership typologies. The point we wish to make is that, as illustrated in the above studies, the trade union leadership is multistratum. Even in the two broad categories of 'outside' and the 'inside' leadership we find different but interrelated strata, creating thereby a 'leadership structure' or, to use Merton's term, 'influence structure' (1968: 441-474). Leadership structure or influence structure means that there are two or more layers of leadership positions, or, again to use Merton's term, the 'influentials', who in some way or the other are functionally related with one another.

Since in the present study we are interested also in understanding, to some extent, the role of federation leaders in politically socializing the local participants, it would be useful to identify the influence structure comprising the so called outsiders, and also those workers who take up active leadership role in their respective unions and who are generally known as the worker-leaders or the insiders or the activists. The questions which may arise in this connection are: Who are the outsiders? Who are the insiders? Do we find any differentiation in each of these two categories as suggested by some of the studies of Indian trade union leadership above? If yes, what are the significant substrata of each of these two categories and what are some of the factors which create these differentiations?

However, we are not interested merely in formulating a taxonomy of trade union leadership, which of course has its own function, namely, to find an order in an ostensibly confusing reality. In
undertaking this exercise one of our main objectives is to under­stand some aspects of political socialization.

As Merton (1968:464) points out:

...we must look not only at the man who is influential but also at the people who are influenced by him. Otherwise put, we have much to learn by exploring the questions: who is influential for whom?

In the context of our study, the outsiders, in a sense are the influentials and the insiders are the influenced. Because the insiders generally work under the guidance of the outsiders. Besides, as they interact very closely with the outsiders they are likely to be influenced considerably by the latter. Therefore, we can consider the outsiders as the socializing agents and the insiders as the socialized, bearing in mind that though socialization does involve the process of influence, it is not always the vice versa. In other words, socialization is only one specific form of influence, all influences may not be necessarily socializing. In this connection we would try to answer the following questions: What is the milieu in which the political socialization occurs? How do these outsiders, perform the role of socializing agents? To what extent the insiders are politically socialized? And what factors influence their socialization?

It may be noted that the stratum of insiders is of considerable importance. Because, being the worker-leaders they are also influen­tials. Thus, they are influentials as well as the influenced and constitute a crucial link in the chain of influence. 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 in turn are influenced by them. As Merton has suggested, these persons in the adjacent strata of influence, who constitute a chain of influence, can be of critical significance for the flow of opinions, views etc. from top to bottom and also, at times, from bottom to top (1968:466).

The concept of influence structure, to be sure, is heuristic and suggests many theoretically and empirically relevant issues, insightfully formulated by Merton (1968:441-474), requiring a wealth of data beyond the scope of this study. We would therefore try to grapple with just a few basic questions raised above.

To sum up, in the present study we will attempt to examine the role of national federations of trade unions and their leadership in the local trade union movement of Baroda, keeping in view some influence of the larger environment in which they function. While doing so we will attempt to answer the following specific questions: What is the role of the national federations in the trade union movement at the local level? To what extent do they acquire roots at the local level? How do they try to combine their long-term political goals with the immediate and concrete interests of workers? What is the effect of the milieu in which they try to do so? Who are the outside leaders? What are the significant substrata of these outsiders? What roles do they perform? Who are the insiders or the worker-leaders? What are the significant substrata among them? What are some of the factors which create these sub-strata? To what extent are they politically socialized? And, what factors influence the extent of their political socialization?
This study is based on the data collected from Baroda, one of the major industrial centres of Gujarat. The data were obtained through various sources between 1972 to 1983. The major sources of data were observation, documents, indepth interviews of the outside leaders and an interview schedule used to elicit responses from the insiders. The details of sampling and other aspects of methodology are discussed in the relevant chapters. The chapter scheme is as follows: Chapter 2 presents a bird's eye-view of the contemporary trade union situation in Baroda with special reference to the following six federations which exist and organize the workers in the city: All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Shartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and National Labour Organization (NLO). This chapter examines the extent to which the national federations have acquired roots at the local level. Chapter 3 examines the efforts of different federations to acquire roots at the local level by transforming temporary agitations of workers for immediate benefits into permanent organizations having long-term goals. This process is analyzed in a politico-historical context and its effects on the role of the federations are being explored. Chapter 4, based on a case study of a strike situation, analyzes this process at the plant level with reference to the role played by the federations, leadership and the larger political environment.

Chapter 5, probes into the leadership structure with special reference to the outside, full-time trade union leaders of the
federations. Within this category of the outsiders, two strata namely the prominent and the non-prominent outsiders are demarcated. Their brief profiles are given and the distinguishing traits of the two have been specified. Their status and roles are elucidated and ideological pursuits have been evaluated. Chapter 6 is based on the data collected from a cross-section of the inside trade union leaders of different federations. It is attempted to identify two strata of these insiders, namely the office-holding and non-office-holding executive members. The objective here is to identify the differentiating features of the two strata of the insiders on a spectrum of variables. Chapter 7 examines the extent of the political socialization of these insiders in terms of their political commitments and ideological orientations. Their ideological orientations are analyzed to find the association between the extent of their radicalization and their status in leadership hierarchy on the one hand, and the political ideology of their federations on the other. This is done to see to what extent the larger political ideologies of the federations percolate to the level of the insiders. While doing so it is attempted to examine the Marxian assumption that any trade union is a school of solidarity and socialism, whether it intends or not. Finally Chapter 8 outlines the major conclusions of the study.

At the end, it may be noted that in the following discussion the real names of the unions, plants, and outside leaders are used. In the case of Alembic strike, described in Chapter 4, however, the names of the persons connected with the factory, in past or present, except those of the outside leaders, are concealed. Secondly, except the places where a specific reference of the source is the material is taken from the field notes/interviews.