CHAPTER-VI

PERSPECTIVES OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
LEADERS- A SURVEY

The scope of the thesis as we have specified in the introduction is to study the role of the Working Class in the anti-imperialist movement and hence it is essential to look into the ideological aspects of the struggle in detail. In other words, the two distinct streams of leadership in the Indian Trade Union Movement, namely the Communist and the Congress, or the Radical and the Reformist, or the Revolutionary and the Constitutionalist, that were at work in the Indian Trade Union Movement need to be studied in detail. The scope of this Chapter will be to attempt an analysis of this at a general or All-India Level and then relate this to the specific experiences at the Provincial Level, as has been seen in the previous three Chapters. The exercise will also attempt to justify the usage of binary opposites in which the terms Radical and Revolutionary are associated with the Communists and their opposites-Reformist and Constitutionalist-with the Congress.

This chapter will be divided into three sections wherein the ideological aspects of labour in the context of the national movement will be discussed with reference to the War. Section-I will discuss the Pre-War aspects such as the concept of United Front and the Provincial Ministry followed by Section-II which will deal with the changing response of the Communists and the Congress to the war and Section-III will study the conflict between the two major streams, hitherto apparent, emerging in clear terms with the formation of I.N.T.U.C.
At the outset, we may state that the unity achieved between the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) and the AITUC in the beginning of the period of study (1937-40) was only apparent. As we shall see later on, that with the formation of INTUC, the issues for the split or rift remained the same and they continued throughout the period, now active and now dormant; the ground reality as far as the industrial worker was concerned was that the unity achieved was only organisational and was not participatory. Let us look into this in detail in the following sections.

**Pre-War Period and the World of Labour**

It will be beyond the scope of this thesis to look into detail the origins of the Trade Union Movement in India. However, it is essential to schematically trace certain landmarks that guided its growth and hence, we shall begin in this section by a brief introduction, beginning with the detention of 32 Communists from all over India for a period of around four years. The detenus, primarily, constituted the principal leaders of the working class movement all over the country, at a period when the depression of 1929 and the unprecedented squeeze on the economy of the country was at work on the one hand and on the other, the Congress launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. “in the critical years of the national struggle.... the political role of the working class was weakened-as had been the intention of imperialism.”

The crisis in working class politics was compounded by the split in the AITUC too in 1929; the AITUC in its session at Nagpur had witnessed a fair amount of radicalisation, especially after the unprecedented strike wave in the two years preceding, when the working class had resisted retrenchments and wage cuts with their historic strike actions. While the actual split occurred when a majority of the

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Executive Council passed resolutions regarding the affiliation of the AITUC to World Federations and the League Against Imperialism, the roots of the split lay in the constitutionalist reaction to the rapid radicalisation of the Indian Working Class, manifest in their strike actions. As for instance, in the midst of the massive strike wave in 1928, B. Shiva Rao, the constitutionalist leader of the AITUC issued a statement which ran as follows:

_The time has come when the trade union movement in India should weed out of its organisation, mischief-makers. A warning is all the more necessary because there are certain individuals who go about preaching the gospel of strikes._

Thus in this overall background of two opposite positions in its leadership, one arguing for a constitutional remedy to the onslaughts of the imperialist Government opposed by a radical position to carry on a direct action, the AITUC split; the former section consisting of leaders like N.M. Joshi, V.V. Giri, B. Shiva Rao, Dewan Chamanlal, etc., forming the Indian Trade Union Federation in 1930 and in the following year the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF). The AITUC was further split in 1931 when the Communists broke away to form the Red Trade Union congress; this split was an outcome of the controversy over the “... independent political role of the working class.”

This series of splits in the Indian Working Class Movement caused a crisis of leadership and hence in one of the crucial phases in the history, the Indian Working Class was left to fend for itself by means of localised strikes and other actions. The details of this phase of ‘setback and

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2 Bombay Chronicle, Bombay, dated 18 April 1928.
3 Chamanlal Revri, Indian Trade Union Movement, New Delhi, R.P Dutt, op.cit.,
revival’ of the Indian Trade Union Movement, at the all-India level are beyond the scope of this thesis. As far as the Madras Presidency was concerned, the years of the economic depression had a deep impact on the trade union movement. Notwithstanding some of the militant struggle fought by the workers, the period in general was characterised by instances of defeat on the part of the working class. It will not be an exaggeration to state that most unions in the Presidency including the well established Madras Labour Union (founded in 1918) experienced great difficulty in getting workers to join and pay their subscriptions. This was a passing phase and with the revival of trade as well as the changes in the political climate at the national level was reflected in the province too. The period beginning from about 1934, witnessed the working class in the Madras Presidency, as their counterparts in the rest of the country beginning to assert themselves. This period of revival has been explained in detail in Chapters II and III. Suffice it to say here that by 1937 the industrial centres of Madras Presidency were preparing for a major battle between Capital and Labour.

Let us enter into a discussion on the aspects of trade union unity that was achieved in terms of its scope and content. Nevertheless, we may say that the period between 1929 and 1934, despite the absence of an All India leadership, the working class waged independent defensive strike actions, by which, it threw open concrete conditions for unity. As a matter of fact, “it was out of this mighty strike struggle that the move began, to re-unite the working class organisations. The Red Trade Union Congress and the All India Trade Union Congress came together in 1935...”

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the unity moves between the AITUC and the NTUF had begun at around the same period and the AITUC session in May 1936 held at Bombay called for unity at the level of the two organisations towards launching, “.... a nation-wide offensive of the working class...”\(^5\) This was followed by the constitution of the unity is worth discussing briefly, since, its importance lay not in the context of the present but in the future dilemmas of Indian Trade Union Movement in general.

The unity move was set rolling after the setting up of the Joint Labour Board and began taking concrete shape in a special joint session of the AITUC and the NTUF held at Nagpur on the 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) April 1938, “By affiliation.... of the latter body with the former... which closed the unhappy split which had divided the ranks of the Indian Labour Movement since 1929.”\(^6\) The gains thus made were substantial when the 17\(^{th}\) session of the AITUC held at Bombay in September 1940 decided for the merger of the NTUF with the parent body.

The terms of the unity were on the basis of the content of the resolutions passed in a special session of NTUF held on 28\(^{th}\) September 1940. The most important aspect of this, from the point of our concern was the requirement that the AITUC should amend its constitution to incorporate the condition that,  

\textit{All political questions as well as questions of strikes and affiliation with any foreign organisation be decided by three-fourths majority.}\(^7\)

It can be stated at this stage that the unity achieved was only apparent, since, the issues that led to the split in 1929, were not resolved completely and as the

\(^{5}\) Report of the General Secretary, 15\(^{th}\) Session of AITUC, AITUC Papers, Reel No. R.3382 Calcutta, 1936 (NMML)  
\(^{6}\) Report of General Secretary, 18\(^{th}\) Session of AITUC, , AITUC Papers, Reel No. R. 3382, Bombay 1940.  
\(^{7}\) Ibid.
events in the days to come could point out, the AITUC, the central organisation, could not decide or express by means of a position on issues of importance. The striking example in this connection was the expression of the working class with reference to the War. As for instance, we could see that when the Soviet Union entered the War and the Communists perceived a change in the character of the War from an imperialist war to peoples’ war and hence moved a resolution in the twentieth session of AITUC in 1942 calling for support to the war efforts as also another resolution moved by MrinalKanti Bose pointing to the change in the World situation and “as both these resolutions could not secure ¾ the majority which is necessary according to the Constitution of the AITUC, .... left the position of the AITUC towards war undefined.”

However, the situation did not lead to a split as in 1929, because,

*Recognising the fact that in a fundamental and tremendous issue like that of the present war, in order to maintain the solidarity of the movement, freedom of opinion was necessary, the AITUC granted to Affiliated Unions permission to publicly state their own view-point, though it was different from the main resolution of the AITUC.*

This safety valve, while on the one hand averted a split, on the other hand, it prevented the AITUC from taking a clear cut political position. As far as the Madras Presidency was concerned the period after the change in the character of the war witnessed a fall in the intensity of the strike wave as seen in chapter-IV. The reasons for this may be located on two major factors; (i) that the constitutionalist labour
leaders who were also Congressmen were mostly arrested initially for their participation in the individual Satyagraha movement launched by the end of 1940 and subsequently after the launching of the ‘Quit India Movement’. (ii) that the Communists, who were arrested and prosecuted for their anti-war activities prior to 1942, were the only leaders who operated in the trade union field after 1942. Their attitude of No strikes as far as possible led to a fall in the intensity of the strike wave. Hence, in Madras Presidency, as was the case in the country as a whole, the existing leadership was one that felt it necessary to avoid strikes as far as possible and this trend continued until the end of 1943.

Let us now discuss, the conditions in the context of the anti-imperialist movement that augmented the unity in the trade union movement since, the coming together of the AITUC and the NTUF was accompanied by the United National Front proposal by the Communists in 1935.

The Communists analysed the national situation prevailing in the country in the following terms:

There is no doubt whatever that India today stands at the crossroads. During the years of the crisis British Imperialism developed a desperate offensive against its colony, endeavouring to shift the burdens of its fresh difficulties on the back of India.10

This was true as is evident from the fact that the events that accompanied the Wall Street Crash in 1929 such as the Meerut Conspiracy Case. Immediately followed by a Government Notification on 23rd July 1934 by which, “... in exercise

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of the powers conferred by ... the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1932, the Governor General in Council... declared the (Communist Party of India), its Committees, sub-committees and branches to be unlawful associations...”

The ban affected the trade union movement directly with almost the entire leadership being arrested or detained. The crisis was further deepened with the ignominous end of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Government assessed the situation after the ban and its accompanying repressive measures in the following terms;

The action taken by the Government of India and by local Governments will, it is hoped, tend to hamper the work of Communist agitators, prevent the spread among the uneducated working classes... of the revolutionary Communist ideas and that by doing so the growth of bonafide labour organisations working for the good of workers.12

Despite all these repression, the Indian working class did not succumb and on the contrary, the radicalisation of the overall political situation was on the rise with the Communist Party placing before the working class a programme for a United Front with the understanding regarding the objective condition as one in which;

For the proletariat it meant passing over from independent consolidation as a class to unification of the entire people as a nation, relying on the strength of its own consolidation and finding

12 Ibid.
the ideological basis for it in the results of its own political experience of these classes themselves.\textsuperscript{13}

This understanding of building up an Anti-Imperialist Peoples Front in India was adopted by the AITUC in its 15\textsuperscript{th} session held at Bombay in May 1936 and during the period that followed,

...there was a close co-operation and joint working with the Congress organisations and leaders on most of the important issues of the day... It can be stated with least fear of contradiction that on every anti-imperialist issue taken up by the Congress, the Trade Unions affiliated to the AITUC lined themselves with the Congress and were always in the forefront of the struggle.\textsuperscript{14}

This process of radicalisation of the anti-imperialist struggle as well as the need for a united struggle against the ‘Slave Constitution’ and the British rule was acknowledged by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his Presidential Address to the Lucknow Session of the Congress in December 1935 and in the following year, at the Faizpur session, he stated the need for unity in clear terms as follows;

*The real object before us is to build up a powerful joint front of all the anti-imperialist forces in the country.... The active participation of organised workers and peasants in such a front would add to its strength and must be welcomed. Co-operation between them and the*

\textsuperscript{13} The New Age, Madras, dated January, 1938.

\textsuperscript{14} Report of the General Secretary, 16\textsuperscript{th} Session of AITUC, AITUC Papers, Reel No. R.3382, Delhi, 1938, (NMML).
Congress Organisation has been growing and has been a mass feature of the past year.15

It is to be noted here that the unity that was being achieved was not necessarily a complete one devoid of drawbacks. As a matter of fact, as in the case of the merger of NTUF with AITUC, as seen earlier, the relationship of AITUC with the Congress was also at a superficial level. It is this important aspect on the nature of unity that needs to be discussed in terms of its significance to the future events in the history.

The approach of the Communists towards the United National Front was of different nature from that of the Congressmen. They perceived the process in terms of,

The further development and strengthening of the struggle for the affiliation of the trade unions and other workers’ and also peasants’ and students’ organisations to the National Congress as collective members.16

The importance of this measure, aimed at a radicalisation of the Indian National Congress was resisted by the leadership and in this, the conservative trade unionists like V.V.Giri and others advocated for individual membership alone.

The elections to the Provincial Legislatures took place under these circumstances and the AITUC in general supported the Congress candidates. The events that followed the formation of the Provincial Ministries in general and in

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Madras Presidency in particular were however distinctly deviating from the Congress Party’s statements during the elections. The Rajaji Ministry from its inception had expressed its disapproval of the militant struggles of the workers in the Presidency in words as well as deeds. It began with the communiqué to the press in October 1937 stating their preference for ‘internal settlement’ of disputes and ended up in proposing a legislation providing for compulsory arbitration as and when found necessary. The Prime Minster, too often than any other Congressman perhaps, spoke with contempt on the Communist principle of class struggle and stated in clear terms his determination to curb their activities. The central purpose of the Governments’ policy towards labour was to prevent strikes at any cost. The motive force behind the ministry was distinctly not pro-labour. The repressive machinery of the state was freely used against labour in almost every incidence of trade dispute in the Presidency as has been dealt with in detail in Chapter III of this thesis. Suffice it to say here that this attitude of the Congress Ministries were detrimental to the unity that was aimed at and what followed was a sad story of the Congress participating in repressing the struggle of the working class. The attitude of the Congress towards the problems of the working class during the period immediately following the elections was one in which the Congress legislators were instructed to “.... work for .... eight hours day for industrial workers without reduction of pay, living wage and unemployment relief.”\textsuperscript{17} This however changed in a few days and the change was reflected in a statement to the press by Rajendra Prasad, where he stated that;

\textsuperscript{17} Congress Working Committee Resolution, February 1937, AICC Papers.
So long as the Congress is not in full power, it must adopt the line of ameliorative programme by way of bettering the condition of the masses. To embark on a radical programme till that power is achieved is hazardous. It will introduce class conflicts which would be harmful to the national movement...18

This expression of the harmful effect of class conflicts to the national movement was followed by the Congress Ministries and they went along to introduce Bills(in Bombay and Madras) which had effectively banned strikes and imposed conditions for recognition of trade unions.

One of the most distinct features of the proposed Legislation introduced by the Rajaji Ministry was the condition imposed for the recognition of Unions, i.e. Government will only grant recognition subject to certain conditions which they hoped would ensure a proper working of the trade unions concerned. This condition, we may conclude, from the events that preceded the initiation of the Bill during the various strikes in the Presidency, was a definite attempt to exclude the Communists from the activities of the Trade Union movement in the Presidency and through this, excluding the working class and their organisation from the national liberation struggle. This process of excluding the working class and their organisation from the mainstream national movement went on throughout the national movement. The experience of the Provincial Ministries proved to be “a serious attempt on the one hand to avoid bloody revolution and on the other hand to avoid mass civil disobedience movement on a scale hitherto un attempted.”19

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18 The Hindu, Madras, dated 27 August 1937.
19 Chamanlal Revri, op.cit., p.216.
Despite this attempt, by the Conservative right wing leadership of the Congress, to scuttle the radicalisation of the national movement, “Left-wing pressure whether in the labour and peasant movements or in the Congress itself continued to gather force…”20 It was in this situation of charge that the annual session of the Congress was held at Tripuri in March 1939. The Congress was meeting at a time when war was imminent at the international level. At the national level, the British were contemplating the implementation of the Federal part of the constitution, which the Congress had emphatically rejected in its two sessions earlier. Thus the crisis in the camp of the imperialist rulers had deepened and the Communists viewed it as an opportune moment for launching a mass movement. In the light of the above mentioned understanding, the Communist Members of the AICC proposed the following draft resolution to be placed before the Tripuri Session; the essential part of the draft ran as follows;

In view of the tremendous strength that the popular forces have attained, in view of the present international situation and in view of the continued defiance of the popular will by British Imperialism, the Congress feels that the time is ripe for passing on to the offensive. The imperialist policy of preparing the ground for Federation can be defeated only by uniting the entire National Forces-workers, Peasants, States’ People and all freedom loving Indians for a forward move for an all round attack on the slave Constitution as a whole.21

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20 Intelligence Bureau’s Review of Communism in India, F. No. 7/6/39, Home Political Department, dated. November 1939, (NAI).
21 “Communist Resolution of Tripuri-Unity and Struggle” in National Front, Bombay, dated. 12 March 1939.
The Communist attempt to utilise the most opportune time to launch the final offensive for freedom, from within the folds of the Congress, should not be seen altogether in isolation. The stage witnessed another important event in the history of the Congress too; the election of Subhash Chandra Bose to the Presidentship of the Congress for the second time. This victory of the left, however quite tragically, added fuel to the ensuing rift in the Congress and thus in the anti-imperialist movement in the days to come.

The irony that was witnessed in Tripuri, with the ignonimous statement of Gandhi on the defeat of his candidate and the resignation of the moderate or rightist section from the Working Committee amounting to a virtual non-cooperation with the President needs no elaboration here. Suffice it to say that Tripuri reflected the central weakness of the national movement. It met at a stage in history, when the national and international situations warranted a bold decision to go ahead with an all out offensive as envisaged in the programme of the leftists (whose resolution, when put to vote drew 135 votes in its favour and 218 against). In its stead, the Congress was plagued with its internal and organisational crisis. To sum it up, we may say, Tripuri was the last Congress before the war, turned out to be “... a session of lost opportunities for the left.” The session ended without a concrete course of action for the masses, with the breaking away of the left Nationalists headed by the Bose brothers to form the Forward Bloc. The Pre-War era thus ended in a discordant note, guided by the rightist elements, that predominated the Congress. The outbreak of the war and the Viceroy’s proclamation of 3rd September 1939, declaring India as

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22 ‘Tripuri- A Review’ Editorial in New Age, Madras, April 1937. It is to be noted that this was the highest number of votes that the left could never muster in its favour in the history of the Congress.

23 Ibid.
a belligerent nation, led to the shelving of the federal part of the Constitution, but this introduced new but vital issues into the Indian Trade Union Movement. Let us discuss these aspects in the following section.

**The War and the World of Labour**

The declaration of the war, in consequence led to the resignation of the Provincial Ministries controlled by the Congress and the National Congress as well as the AITUC coming out openly against any association with the war. The Congress had disassociated itself from the war, as has been seen earlier in Chapter IV with only certain qualifications, namely, asking the British to declare war aims. The events that followed, were one of the “Protracted and fruitless negotiations between Indian leadership and the British Government.”\(^\text{24}\) This attitude of the Congress at a time when war had broken out was a clear-cut instance of deviation from the resolution that was passed at the Haripura session, way back in February 1938. It is essential for us to look at the resolution, which stated that,

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\text{India can be no party to such an imperialist war and will not permit her manpower and resources to be exploited in the interest of British Imperialism. In the event of an attempt being made to involve India in a war this will be resisted.}^{\text{25}}
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It was an irony, that instead of resisting the war, which broke out exactly after 18 months since the resolution was passed, the Congress refused to move one step further in the direction, apart from the withdrawal from the Provincial Ministries. The Congress Policy can be stated as one of not resistance to imperialist

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\(^{\text{24}}\) Chamanlal Revri, op. cit., p.240.

\(^{\text{25}}\) Resolution of the Haripura Congress on war, AICC Papers.
war but withdrawal of support.\textsuperscript{26} This new formula went on unhindered until August 1942, but for the symbolic protest of individual satyagraha, by the volunteers, personally selected by Gandhi, since November.

The Congress Ministries out of office and the promulgation of the Defence of India Rules, effectively curtailed every bit of political activity in the country. On the other hand, the harmful effects of the war fell on the Indian Working Class leading to a dreadful deterioration of their living condition as has been elaborated earlier. This objective situation, thus provided a concrete basis for mass mobilisation against imperialism. The Communists who had advocated at Tripuri for launching upon an offensive, persisted with this policy and gave the slogan that The imperialist war shall be transformed into a war of National Liberation.\textsuperscript{27} In their analysis, they put forward their perspective in the following terms;

...... With the deepening of the war crisis, with the prolongation of war, the crisis of imperialism will grow. Political and economic effects of the war will inexorably intensify the ugliest features of imperialist rule-mass starvation, suppression of every right-bringing larger and larger sections of people into conflict with the Government, making them see in the Government their chief enemy...\textsuperscript{28}

It has been seen Chapter IV that the Communists took the anti-war programme in right earnest and there were numerous strikes that took place in the


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
Madras Presidency demanding wage hikes and defending trade union rights. The Mahaghai Conference organised in Bombay on the first of January, 1940, by the AITUC gave the overall directions to the movement and the demand for ‘Dearness Allowance’ was placed in the forefront of each and every industrial strike. It has been seen in Chapter IV earlier that of the 73 strikes recorded in the Madras Presidency between November 1939 and end of 1942, 43 were in demand of ‘Dearness Allowance’ and wage hikes. Similarly, in terms of the mandays lost, the strikes caused by these issues accounted for roughly more than 80 percent of the total during the period. Likewise, as in the case of the other parts of the country, in the Madras Presidency too, the major strikes during this period were led by the Communists.

Notwithstanding this strike wave, the Congress remained steadfast with its position of passive non-cooperation to the war and nothing more. This gave an excellent opportunity to the imperialist rulers, who struck with additional vigour. In the absence of a widespread mass movement against the imperialist rulers as envisaged in their programme, the Communists were left alone to organise the working class and this mad the task of repression easier for the Government. In the words of the Home Department’s appreciation of the political situation in India,

............ The rise in prices has caused some industrial unrest in towns and the Communists have not been slow to exploit such grievances as are found to exist in furtherance of their policy of interfering with war supplies.... their policy has been to aggravate labour disputes and encourage strikes in utility and transport services.... In
order to prevent extension of their activities the Central Government has recently 
found it necessary to round up and detain the most important of these leaders. 29

The brunt of this attack fell upon the largest single organisation of the Indian 
Working class, the AITUC and hence weakened the trade union movement to a large 
extent. This was reflected in the relative fall in the strikes that occurred in 1941 and 
the mandays lost in this year was only 50 percent of the previous year’s loss(See. 
Table in Introduction). In other words, “Repression under the Defence of India Act 
took away many active Trade Unionists from all over the country to jail to this 
extent that many of the affiliated unions had been obliged to even curtail their 
activities.” 30

The attempt by the Congress all these days to strike a bargain with the 
British were frustrated and after a phase of symbolic opposition to the war by means 
of Satyagraha, the passivity came to an end with the launching of the ‘Quit India’ 
Movement from 9th August 1942. The Government struck with its repressive 
measures at once and by the end of the year a majority of the Congress leadership 
was in jail. It is interesting to note here that even this belated act of the Congress, 
did not have any specific programme for the workers as a class.

Notwithstanding the fact that the above mentioned weakness of the Congress 
programme is essential to the scope of our discussion, far more important to our 
subject at this stage is the change in the character of the war with the Nazi invasion 
of Soviet Union in August 1941 and the consequent change in the approach of the

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29 Home Department Appreciation of the Political Situation in India prepared for the Dominions, F. No.11(24) P(Sec)/40 , Political Department., dated. 18 March 1940, (NAI)  
Indian Communists to British war efforts. Let us discuss, very briefly this aspect in terms of its relevance to the working class of India and the anti-imperialist struggle.

The initiation of the slogan of “Peoples’ War” as different from the “Imperialist War” was done in the midst of the continuing repression on the Communists. The beginning was through a note, circulated by the leadership detained in jail and thus, known as “Jail Document” or “A Note from Jail Comrades” by the end of 1941, leading to the announcement of the theory after a prolonged debate within the party. The document essentially called for a campaign to “win the people’s war” in the following lines;

The party of the proletariat in India…. must positively intervene in this war, declare it to be a people’s war and strain every nerve to win it and win it as quickly as possible... It must therefore initiate and lead a ‘win-the –peoples’ movement in India on the basis of immediate and effective aid to USSR in men money and materials, equipment and weapons...  

The document however hastened to add that this support to the war efforts, ..... does not mean that the party ceases to demand civil liberties, democratic rights, transfer of Defence to Indian hands, Indianisation of the Army, National Government at the Centre.  

In pursuance of this policy, the Communist trade unionists in Madras too, at various instances disassociated with some minor strikes in Madura in specific. The above-mentioned approach to the war, we may say was content to the ideology of

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31 A Note from Jail comrades-Task of the CommunistsF.No.44/32/42, Home Political Department,(N.A.I.).
32 Ibid.
‘proletarian internationalism’ and ever since the launching of the ‘Quit India’ movement in August 1942, it came into clash with the nationalist approach to the war. The Communist party had brought the question of ‘unhindered production’ as the central issue and in this context held the Government responsible in provoking the ‘Quit India’ Movement.

The party spelt out its approach to the changed situation by September 1942 in an enlarged plenum. Its resolution on the war essentially spelt out the need for increasing ‘National Production’ as part of the Pro-war Campaign and in this they accused the Government of hindering the national defence. The document said this in clear terms that,

The Government imposes unbearable economic burdens on the working class to satisfy the profiteers. It attempts to coerce the workers to accept them by using force and repression, by making repeated inroads on freedom of organisation and strikes. It attempts to run production through ordinances, prohibition of strikes, and free use of the police force. .... with the continuation of this policy, stoppages and strikes become more and more frequent and production gets disorganise.33

This formulation, however, should not be construed to mean that the Communists were advocating for industrial peace together. Notwithstanding the fact that they stressed the need to avoid strikes, the objective conditions that guided the labour movement in the country, such as the rise in prices and the frequent

resistance by the employers to recognises the trade unions of the workers, resulted in labour disputes. Hence, the number of strikes continued to register an increase from 1942 onwards as seen in the introduction and this applied to Madras Presidency too as seen in Chapter IV.

The party document pointed this out that “The interests of the working class cannot be surrendered to the capitalists in the name of war production... while on no account are we prepared to surrender the right to strike, yet it is our policy to minimise stoppages and strikes, consistently with the defence of the interests of the working class and the nation... Our policy then is to seek settlement of disputes through negotiations backed by the united strength of workers and resort to direct action only when we are compelled to do.”\(^{34}\) In order to resist the effects of the war while at the same time, support the war efforts, a change in the priority was demanded by the Communists and they placed the following demands as immediate demands for action;

(a) Full compensation to meet the intolerable rise in the cost of living; adequate dearness allowance;

(b) Immediate grant of bonus;

(c) 25% rise in basic wage;

(d) Recognition of trade unions; and

(e) Limitation of profit in the interest of the people.\(^{35}\)

The underlying current throughout the policy was to drive in the understanding that the workers were the most essential component in the production

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
process. It was aimed to “lead the workers to understand that their role as producers for the nation, for national resistance; must create a revolutionary consciousness towards their daily jobs.” The strike spell that followed, until the end of the war was essentially guided by this radical understanding of the anti-imperialist movement. Madras Presidency too witnessed a fir amount of strike actions, especially by the workers in the peripheral industries such as Food, Drinks and Tobacco, scavenging staff in the Municipalities, etc, and in most cases, the leadership was provided by the Communists.

The change in the attitude of the communists in respect to the war was followed by the lifting of the ban on the CPI and the Government of India issued the following press note in July 1942;

_The CPI in their announcements and circulars to party members have recently indicated a change of front and recognising this war as a peoples’ war in which the Indian people must in their own interest make common cause with the United Freedom-loving nations have decided, if permitted, to throw their energies into the task of co-operating with the existing war efforts.... in order therefore.... they may function legally as a party, the Government of India, have decided to remove the ban on the CPI and its organs...._ 37

This enabled the release of the leadership of the party and thus, they could function openly, for the first time after the initial spell of 1928-29, after which starting with the Meerut Conspiracy case and the ensuing ban in 1934, the entire

36 Ibid.
37 Press Note issued by Government of India, Home Department, G.O.No.2152(MS), Department of Public(Gen), dated.23.7.42.
period was one of underground and incognito functioning. Soon after the lifting of
the ban, the CPI held its first Congress in May 1943. The congress declared in
unequivocal terms that “.... the supreme task before our people today is the defence
of the motherland. The struggle for freedom of our country merges with this task,
which can be discharged only by achieving the all-in-unity of our people and in
closest co-operation with the peoples of the United Nations defending their
independence and freedom against the fascist axis.”

It is essential in this context, to cite the perception of the Communists to the
Quit India movement launched in August, 1942. Their assessment of the situation
went as follows;

*It is true that the AITUC Resolution of August 8 spoke in the
language of burning anti-fascism of Nehru, and demanded National
Provisional Government for the Defence of India... But this was
coupled with the negative policy of refusal to take initiative to unite
the people to defend the country. Nay, more, it was coupled with the
threat of ‘struggle’ of active mass non-cooperation with the war....
what followed was a spontaneous outburst of the patriotic masses,
angered and incensed by the arrest of their leaders and repression.*

The CPI, thus placed a critique of the nationalist leadership, but as is evident
from the statement mentioned above, the responsibility of the outburst was placed
on the Government and its repressive machinery. The party reaffirmed this view in
terms that the “Indiscriminate and widespread repression which came on top of this,

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38 “Forward to Unity in Action”, Resolution passed unanimously at the 1st Congress of CPI, dated.
May 1943, JNU Archives.
39 Ibid.
only added to disruption and anarchy and progressively destroyed the morale of the people."^40

However, it is essential to state at this stage of the discussion that, notwithstanding the criticism of the basis of the Quit India Movement, the CPI refused to disown the nationalist movement and its leadership. In other words, the same resolution while outlining the main slogans and campaign in the changed circumstance, spelt out that,

*The key slogan which we place in the forefront in the course of this campaign before all is END DEADLOCK. We want the release of national leaders, for making settlement possible, for their participation in the National Government of national defence...*^41

This policy of the Communists in 1942, came under heavy fire from the Congress Socialists as well as congressmen. The Government on the other hand perhaps assessed the Communist programme in its essence and this they did from time to time of the Congress in 1943; they noticed that “The party’s pro-war propaganda has almost invariably been heavily interladen with attacks on bureaucratic inefficiency...”^42 The analysis, in its conclusion, pointed out the essential factory behind this approach of the Communists in the following terms;

*It is clearly impossible to expect Communists to adopt a wholly loyalist attitude; as Communists and Nationalists they are fundamentally opposed to ‘Imperialist Domination’...*^43

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^40 Ibid.
^41 Ibid.
^42 Secret Letter from the Secretary, Government of India, to All Provincial Governments, F.No.7/23/43, Home Political Department, dated 28 September 1943. (NAI).
^43 Communist Survey for the Quarter., File No.7/23/43, Home Political Department, June 1943 (NAI).
Notwithstanding the fact that the Communists had taken a position regarding the war, which was against the popular opinion, a position that amounted to a volte-face to the anti-war propaganda, an year ago at a superficial level, the Communists registered substantial gains at the 20th session of the AITUC at Nagpur in May 1943.

It is to be noted that the Nagpur session of the AITUC was marked by the election of S.A. Dange to the presidency, the first Communist president of AITUC in ten years. “The party also secured two of the five Vice-presidentships. One of the two Assistant-General-Secretaryships, and over last year, increased its membership in the Working Committee from three to nine out of twenty one and in the General Council from twelve to thirty-two out of seventy-two members.”43 Apart from this advancement mad in capturing positions in the leadership, the Communists scored a qualitative victory in the session, when their resolution, pressing for a pro-war approach lost only by “....an arrow margin of 6 percent...”44 of the required two-thirds majority. More important than this, the session witnessed,

\[\text{...... the summary rejection of V.R. Kallapa’s resolution representing the Congress Camp.... that ‘sanctions’ (in the form of a general strike) should be imposed if the national demand was not met by the British Government.}^{45}\]

The success achieved, it should be noted, was only nominal in terms of the immediate context, but it was of significance in terms of the future developments of Trade Union movement in India. One of the major significant aspects of this lay in the fact that this spelt out the ideological rift in the midst of the apparent unity, that

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
was discussed in the previous section. The rift, however essentially guided the dynamics of the working class in the struggle against imperialism in the Post War phase which will be discussed in the following section.

It should be pertinent to cite some extracts from a note by the Government of India in the context, before we go over to the next section. The note circulated in September 1943 stated as follows;

*The activities of the Communist Party may be judged from two very different aspects, which we shall for present purposes call long-term and short-term views. The long-term view must be taken as embracing the probable course of events after the war and from this point of view the ... Communist Party is primarily a Nationalist Party working for Indian Independence... it stands for the overthrow of British rule.*

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Let us discuss in the following section the extent to which this analysis was valid in understanding the perspective and approach of the Indian Communists to the question of the National Liberation Movement in India and the Working Class.

**Post-War Period and the World of Labour**

The cessation of hostilities in Europe with the final defeat of the Nazi forces brought upon a changed situation in the world, and as far as India was concerned, it spelt out the weakening of the roots of British imperialism. The end of the War was followed by the release of the Congressmen arrested since the August rebellion of 1942 and the holding of elections to the Provincial legislatures and by

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46 Secret Note by Richard Totenham, Secretary to Govt. of India, F.No.7/23/1943, Home Political Department, dated. 20 September 1943., (NAI).
the middle of 1946, the British withdrawal from India had become imminent. This positive development however, witnessed some of the inherent contradictions in the anti-imperialist movement, which, in their magnitude were unprecedented in history. While we have seen in the previous chapter the vulgar manifestations of the attitude of the Nationalist leadership after the formation of the Prakasam Ministry in Madras Presidency and the accession of the Interim Government at the Centre, let us discuss certain general trends of this nature in the last phase of the anti-imperialist movement.

The anti-Communist trend within the Congress began manifesting itself well before the war came to an end. The roots of the rift lay deep in the consistent policy of the Congress leadership to refuse any kind of radicalisation of its structure; in its refusal to provide for collective membership to the workers and peasants through affiliating their organisations to the Congress- a demand placed by the Communists throughout the period. The rejection of the resolution to this effect in Tripuri, as had been seen earlier was a decisive aspect in this direction. The rift however began manifesting itself in open, and antagonistic forms with the different attitude towards the war taken by them since 1942.

The post war period thus brought to the fore, manifold attempts to gag the Communists by accusing them of betraying the national movement. The Congress high command, in this direction, considered steps to prohibit members of the Communist Party from holding any kind of deliberative for executive posts in the Congress organisation.47 Another important aspect to be mentioned, in passing, at this stage was the growing rift between the Congress and the Muslim League with

47 People’s Age, Bombay, dated. 7 October 1945.
the threat of a civil war by the league and the incidence of Hindu-Muslim clashes. In this situation, the Communist Party reiterated its unflinching commitment to its policy of all in unity against imperialist domination. In a statement, P.C. Joshi, the General Secretary of CPI, in October 1945 stated as follows;

As long as our country remains enslaved, the only path to our national independence lies through a National United Front of all popular forces.\(^48\)

The response from the Congress High Command, to this call was however not positive. The acts of repression by the Prakasam Ministry in Madras, as we have seen, had surpassed even the Rajaji Ministry in the Presidency. The various firings and the lamping down on the MPTUC has been seen in detail in Chapter V. A detailed statement on the intensity of repression and a list of the Communists detained in the Presidency is given as an Appendix (Appendix-3) to explain the intensity of the repression. The use of the repressive measures by the Provincial Governments, testified the fact that, what they were aiming at was a transfer of power, in letter and spirit and this could happen without any further pressure on imperialism. The Communists analysed the situation, in different terms and in this connection criticised that “... the existing anti-League and anti-Communist policy of the Congress High command was a direct encouragement to the forces of Civil War and class-war which will lead to the ruin of our country and not to its freedom.”\(^49\)

Thus in this changed situation, the Central Committee of the CPI, in December 1945, put forward its analysis of the post war period. It outlined in its report that,

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
The main characteristic of the period is that it is a new period in which our freedom movement can successfully make the final bid for power relying on the anti-British freedom urge of an unprecedented scale among the mass of our people, .... The main danger of the new period arises from the blind and fratricidal policies of the leaderships of the two main political organisations of our people.\textsuperscript{50}

The fact that the period was ripe enough for a mass movement was evident from the fact that the country witnessed a strike wave in the industrial front in an unprecedented manner. The growing strike-wave “.... brought in its compass mills, factories, workshops, printing presses, offices, banks, schools, waterworks, power houses, railways, buses and even Government departments.”\textsuperscript{51}

Apart from the physical spread, in terms of its intensity, between January and September 1946, the number of mandays lost reached as high a figure of about 90 lakhs; and in terms of the workers involved, the year accounted for an all time high of more than 17 lakhs, as is evident from the table given in the introduction. The situation in Madras Presidency too was in no way different as has been seen in Chapter V.

This unprecedented outburst should”... be traced to the problems created by war in the Indian economy. The demon of retrenchment hanging over the Indian worker like a sword of Democles... The scanty basic wages and inadequate dearness

\textsuperscript{50} “The New Situation and our Tasks” Resolution of the C.C. of the CPI passed in its meeting in December 1945.
allowance coupled with extremely deplorable housing conditions..."52 on the one hand and on the other hand the understanding of the Communist Party,

.... based upon the realisation that the war period of ‘no strikes’ is over and that the party must take the foremost lead in organising not only partial struggles of the workers and peasants but also anti-imperialist mass protest actions....53

The fact that the Communists could translate this programme with considerable amount of success, in terms of their intervention in the trade union movement, despite the unpopular position they had taken in the course of their ‘people’s war’ campaign is to be noted in this context. As for instance, in the elections to the Provincial and Central legislatures, held in early 1946, they could secure more than 5 lakhs of the 26 lakhs votes polled or about 19 per cent of the total votes.54 Let us look into the following table for further elaboration on this aspect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Total Votes Polled</th>
<th>Votes in favour of Congress</th>
<th>Votes in favour of Communists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>23,328</td>
<td>11,074</td>
<td>10,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamilnadu</td>
<td>50,567</td>
<td>23,583</td>
<td>26,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>4,29,743</td>
<td>2,80,342</td>
<td>1,21,917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Review of AITUC.

52 Ibid.
53 ‘The New Situation and Our Task’ op.cit.,
54 AITUC-Review of the Elections to the Legislatures, 1946, File No. 226, AITUC Papers(NMML).
55 Ibid.
It is evident from the data that the Communists had made definite advances in terms of their popularity among labour. It is to be noted, that Madras Presidency, was an area, in which, prior to the war, the Communist influence was extremely low in relation to Bombay and Calcutta. By securing about 46 and 51 percent of the votes in the two labour seats they contested in Andhra and Tamilnadu respectively (Guntur General Labour and the Railway Trade Union constituencies), two communists became members of the Legislative Council in Madras.

It is to be noted here that, K. AnandanNambiar, the Communist candidate and the General Secretary of the SIRLU, defeated the local President of the same union Audikesavalu(a conservative trade unionist) in the Railway Trade Union Constituency spreading over the lines of S.I. Railway and the Madras of South Mahrata Railway (M & SMR). This however was only a part of the process and more important in this context was the decisive radicalisation of the AITUC during this phase. A singular evidence to this was found in the declaration of the main objective of the AITUC in its session held at Calcutta in the beginning of 1947 which read as follows;

The AITUC reiterates its objective of Socialism and declares that the aim of the working class movements to work for a Socialist State....

At the same time the AITUC realises that the immediate objective before the country is that of national freedom from British rule. Recognising this immediate objective and the need for a constitution for the transitional period, the AITUC declares that a democratic constitution really embodying the will of the people can only be

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56 Ibid.
framed by a Constituent Assembly based on adult suffrage... The AITUC calls upon the working class to agitate for such a constitution and not to pin their faith in promises of British Imperialists or the vested interests.\textsuperscript{57}

This brought to the fore the contradiction that working class anti-imperialism had with the nationalist thought. The events that the Indian political process experienced leading to the ‘transfer of power’ or the ‘negotiated settlement’ by 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1947 are beyond the scope of our discussion, both in terms of the form and content of the Independence.

To sum up, the trade union movement in India, despite the apparent unity reached in 1936 (with the Joint Labour Board) and 1940 (with the merger of NTUF to the AITUC) carried with it, in the most crucial period of its history (the war) its inherent contradiction, which came to the fore in the post war period and thus disturbed the unity in struggle of the working class. The contradiction, was essentially one of the perceptions, guided by the opposite perspectives. This was reflected in the struggle of the working class to hegemonies the national liberation struggle, which met with an opposition from the National Bourgeois elements within the Congress. To put it in nutshell, the period between 1937 and 1947 in the history of the trade union movement witnessed a series of ruptures between the radical and revolutionary programme of the Communists on the one side and the conservative and constitutional programme of the Congress on the other. In the trade union field, this culminated in the formation of INTUC by the Congress.

\textsuperscript{57} Report of the General Secretary, 22\textsuperscript{nd} Session of AITUC, AITUC Papers, Reel No. R. 3382, Calcutta, 1947, (NMML).