CHAPTER IV  : CASTE Vs CLASS CONFLICT

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CASTE VS CLASS CONFLICT.

The Bolshevik Revolution and Indian Reaction.

The October Revolution of 1917 in the U.S.S.R. brought about a momentary spasm of excitement in India, but afterwards the people went on their own way, leaving socialism and communism to develop as a system of philosophy for academic discussion. The kernel of new socialism was that 'workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but chains', that the idea of class consciousness must be kept vividly before the minds of the masses, and that ultimately by the working of inevitable forces the system of capitalistic production bases on private property must breakdown. The capitalist classes sputtered at such a teaching, but as long as the leaders confined themselves to predicting an economic collapse by the action of natural causes, they were not really threatened. The Communist leader M. Singaravelu in his presidential address to the Self-Respect Samadharma (Socialist) Party, held at Mannargudi on 4 March 1934 said, "The revolution in the means of production, uprooted a number of people from the countryside, led to a competition among those seeking employment in the factories. This in turn led to a lowering of wages in the midst of appalling working conditions. But alongside of this the need for unity and organisation grew among the workers leading to the formation of Trade Unions. But capitalists' gains grew with the growth in the number of the workers they employed. Capitalist production enabled the capitalists to sell their goods cheaply in other countries and get the raw materials from these countries at a low price. Trade led to conquest of other countries and the flag followed the trade. Imperialist powers grew and that is the present state today with super millionaires and millions of workers and backward people being
exploited by them.\textsuperscript{1/}

Nevertheless, an immeasurable number of labour unions sprang up in all directions, mostly ill organised, and with a plethora of self appointed leaders, who expended much eloquence at union meetings on arguments derived from spiritualism, communalism, casteism, nationalism and communism. While a cross section of the majority of labour leaders were petty bourgeois intellectuals, with no definite ideas about labour unions and yet preaching reactionary, religious and theological ideals, only a few were ultra-radicals with ideas about Bolshevism and classwar.\textsuperscript{2/} Some believed in revolution by methods of mass violence; some believed in evolution by constitutional and parliamentary methods; some welcomed strikes as a desirable process to prepare the workers for the revolution. Some others resorted to strike only as an ultimate weapon and a regrettable, though sometimes unavoidable necessity.

**Class Struggle and Collaboration, and Communal antagonism.**

Differences in regional and national politics introduced further complications. The discord was further

\textsuperscript{1/} Cited in MURUCESAN, K and SUBRAMANYAM, C.S. - op. cit., pp.224-225; See APPENDIX No. I - for excerpts from the original text of the Speech in Tamil of M. Singaravelu.

\textsuperscript{2/} Some of these leaders out of their ignorance attempted to equate the Indian caste system with 'trade unionism' and western guild system. For instance, Mr. RAI SAHIB CHANDRIKA PRASAD, in his presidential address, to the VII session of the AITUC, held at Delhi, on 12 March 1927, observed: "Trade Unionism has been in vogue in India from the ancient times. The four-fold classification of Manu, the great lawgiver of India, was the basis of our labour. The numerous castes which grew subsequently were so many labour guilds". (PREM SAGAR GUPTA, (Ed) - op. cit.,) pp.84-5.

Also See HAWKINS, Miss F.E. - "Trade Union Leadership", The Indian Textile Journal, (Bombay, May 1934) pp.270-2.
fomented by the British electoral policy, which gave the sharpest possible stimulus to communal antagonism.\(^1\) Periyar E.V.R. provided further evidence of how Trade Union became a power in the hands of Communalists\(^2\). All the disruptive forces swore to defend the labour's right, in the legislatures - all that the labour to do was to simply cast the votes in their favour during elections. Labour became the cynosure of all eyes; but none except a few leaders bothered to educate the labour on a class basis for obvious reasons. Also the formation of bogus trade unions had been an easy method by which the Indian professional classes could win their political spurs.

The Gandhite Congress denounced class struggle as dangerous to society, and piously preached class collaboration, which meant substituting the foreign bureaucracy by its native prototype.

\(^{1}\) "The political parties in Madras were divided according to caste or community and that the political cleavage was generally communal; but viewed sociologically the division was quite easily explained; for a small minority caste of Brahmin had, in the past, denied social and religious freedom to the non-Brahmins who constituted the bulk of the population in the Presidency".

(NISRA, B.B. - The Indian Political Parties, op.cit., p.232.

\(^{2}\) Periyar wrote: "நூறு மார்க்சியர்கள் தமிழகத்தில் நாட்டுக்கிழக்கில் ராசியர்கள் என்றுப் பெரியர் பொறுப்பாகத்தையிட்டுள்ளது, அதற்கு வரைக் கொண்டும் செய்துகளும் துரையையும் உடையராகக் கொண்டு இருக்கிறார், முழுந்து பிறந்து ஓர் ஆழ்க இருக்கிறார், அதற்கு ஒழுங்கம் கொண்டுள்ள விளய்க்கு என்று பலர் பெரியர் என்று சொல்லுவர். எனினும் காரணமும் உள்ளது, விளய்க்குச் சொல்லும் பதிலின், அதனைச் சொல்லும், விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதில் விளய்க்கு என்று பதிலின் உள்ளது, பலர் என்று சொல்லும், விளய்க்கு என்று சொல்லும் பதில் விளய்க்கு என்று சொல்லின் உள்ளது, இதனைச் சொல்லித் தொலையென்று சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு என்று சொல்லும் பதில் விளய்க்கு என்று சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லும் பதிலின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்ளது, விளய்க்கு சொல்லின் உள்..."

ANAIMUTHU, V. (Ed) - Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R. - Speeches and writings of Periyar E.V. Ramasami. op.cit., Vol.III p.1721
ultimately leading to perpetuating the domination of the propertied classes. Mahatma Gandhi used to consider the industry as the salient outcome of the joint co-operation of the industry's capital and labour. The one is necessary for the balanced life of the other. Sometimes Gandhi had indulged in socialistically sounding sallies of a rapturous nature, that capital itself was nothing but the right of Labour and Labour's power of the arm itself was a valued privilege of Capital and that the two existed in name only and not in reality. But this did not mark him out as a personality of class war or even class struggle, for that smacked of violence which was expunged from his economic dictionary. Class collaboration being, therefore, the watchword of the Congress creed, the Congress Ministries immediately after capturing power in 1937, set about their work of uplifting the working masses by appointing Committees of Inquiry into the then existing state of affairs both as relating to industry and to labour shades of bureaucracy.  

The Communist emphasis on the class character of the labour movement gave rise to some conflicts in the labour movement. On 28 November 1929, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) at its Tenth Session, held at Nagpur, split over the question of adopting communism as its creed; the right wing which included V.V.Giri, B.Shiva Rao, W.V.R.Naidu, S.Guruswami and Mani S.Kotiswara Mudaliar from Madras, formed a separate union, namely, the Indian Trades Union Federation (ITUF) on 1 December 1929. On 6 July 1931, a further split occurred in the AITUC resulting in the emergence of the Red Trade Union Congress (RTUC) led by S.V.Deshpande, S.G.Sardesai and B.T.Ranadive; this body later dissolved itself and again merged with the AITUC on 20 April 1935. The Indian Trades

Union Federation held its first Session in Madras for two days from 16 July 1932 under the Presidentship of V.V. Giri, who in his presidential address condemned class struggle as mere 'disruptive theoretical discussion that did not immediately concern the workers'. On 19 April 1933 the Indian Trades Union Federation amalgamated with another organisation namely, the National Federation of Labour in order to form a new organisation called the National Trades Union Federation, (NTUF). After nine long years of disunity and separation both the AITUC and NTUF agreed to unite, on the basis of V.V. Giri's proposals for structural unity, at a special joint session of the two organisations held at Nagpur on 17 April 1938; the unity was at last achieved, when on 28 September 1940, the NTUF dissolved itself, and merged with the AITUC; all unions affiliated to the NTUF were transferred to the AITUC. Advocating class collaboration during the 'People's War' period, as was stated in the preceding Chapter, the communists had developed a science of tactics of entering organisations not under their control and had built up communist cells in them with the object of ultimately capturing them. This resulted in a split in 1947, when Congressmen decided to quit the AITUC to form the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) thus leaving the AITUC to the communists; and the conference held for this purpose, at Delhi on 3-4 May 1947, under the presidency of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was attended among others by O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, the then Chief Minister of Madras. The INTUC ruled out class struggle; its policy was based upon the altruism underlying Mr. Gandhi's theory of class collaboration; and it soon became an appendage of the State and a labour front in the service of the bourgeoisie.  

1/ Cited in PREM SAGAR GUPTA - (Ed) - op.cit., p.217.

Enraged at this, the Socialists left the INTUC in December 1948, and formed the Hind Mazoor Panchayat (HMP), later known as Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS). Here in Madras, S.C.C. Anthoni Pillai, who was by now the president of the Madras labour union, affiliated his union with the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat. The decision of Mr. Anthoni Pillai was a sequel to the crackdown perpetrated on his union by the Madras Government headed by O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar during the hundred days' strike, starting from 11 March 1947, when for refusing to submit to the process of compulsory adjudication all the thirty-six members of the managing committee of the union, including Mr. Anthoni Pillai were kept in detention, under the Defence of India Rules; Mr. Anthoni Pillai was singled out and deported to Ceylon; the union was declared illegal; all the workers were forcibly put in police lorries, taken to the mills and kept there the whole day; unable to combat this new device in the history of strike breaking, the workers conceded to return to work on 18 June 1947.\(^1\) The AITUC was completely paralysed during 1948-50, by a reign of terror let loose on it by the Government.\(^2\)

Thus immediately after Independence, there were three central trade union organisations, namely the AITUC, HMS and UTUC which stood for a socialist state and believed in class struggle. But in Madras due to the work of Dravidian parties

1/ Madras Labour Union, Golden Jubilee Souvenir, The, op.cit.pp. 74-
3/ UTUC refers to the split away United Trades Union Congress of the HMS which was formed by Professor K.T. Shah and Mrinal Kanti Bose on 27 December 1948.
as analysed in the previous chapter, the class analysis was preempted by the Brahmin and non-Brahmin interpretation of conflict.¹/ That economic exploitation persisted even among the so-called communists when they happened to be Brahmins was the cardinal theme of Periyar E.V.R. Economic equality was nullified by social inequality was the theme when Periyar E.V.R.²/expounded in such a manner that none else could do in India. According to him in Western writings class war dominated because caste was unknown in those countries. In India without eliminating caste domination the attack on class domination is purposeless. Professor V. Anantaraman observes: "It is always convenient to explain industrial relations in Marxist terms of the haves and have-nots. Though the psychological implications of this conflict of interest are very much present in our society, it is not without significance that in Madras State the Communist movement could not take deep roots in the minds of the underdog who constitute the majority of the population. The explanation lies elsewhere: caste prejudices add an important emotional dimension to social and industrial strife in Tamil Nadu. This is not to deny the importance of economic interpretation of the conflict but to emphasise the significance of social deprivations emanating from the invidious distinction between man and man in the caste structure of the society".³/ Professor Anantaraman further

¹/ MARGUERITE ROSS BARNETT - op.cit., p.97;
²/ See APPENDIX No.II for Periyar's Concept of Caste and Class
³/ ANANTARAMAN, Professor V - "The Unmentioned Dimension in Management Motivation And Industrial Relations", Working Paper No.IX presented at the Second All India Scholars' Conference on Dialectics of Indian Democracy, (Bombay, 1970), p.16

Mr. NIHAL SINGH, S, the Editor-in-chief of 'The Indian Express', in a leading article published in his paper, dated 21 April 1981, considers that the prospect of the communist millennium in India has receded further because of the growing conflict of castes.
observes: "It is indeed ingenious on the part of those who made the caste structure rigid in the unknown past to have evolved a make-believe system in which each caste felt it was superior because it had some caste below it. It is of interest to note that the social protest gained its strength not as much from the members of the forward non-Brahmin's castes who were closer to the Brahmans in the status structure of the society as it did from the so-called backward non-Brahmins in the lower rungs of this ladder".1/

Thus the idea of universal class war such as Soviets preached was foreign to the Indian mind, for the caste system precluded the passionate envy and hatred often provoked amongst the masses by the concentration of wealth in relatively few hands.2/ The presence of religious and caste differences and strife greatly influenced the condition of the working class. It penetrated into the ranks of the workers together with new comers from the peasantry and the craftsmen who replenished the proletariat. The peculiarity of the situation was that in capitalist industry too, the conditions favoured the preservation of religious and caste differences. Partly spontaneously and partly as a result of the deliberate policy of the British administration and the mill owners, religious and caste divisions were combined.

1/ ANANTARAMAN, Professor V. - op.cit.,
2/ "While a caste is a hereditary group, a class is not. In a class there is at least an approach to equality of income; in a caste there is not. Social class is not associated with ideas of purity and pollution; but these ideas are the very essence of caste". (SCHUSTER, Sir George and GUY Wint - India and Democracy, (Macmillan & Co.Ltd., London, 1941), p.37

"While class struggle was the peculiar outcome of the materialist civilisation of the West, Indian society was never divided into classes but castes, and therefore, class struggle was never to be the principal factor in the process of social adjustment in India". (REVRI, Chamanlal - The Indian Trade Union Movement: An Outline History 1886-1947. (Orient Longmans, Bombay, 1972), p.3
with natural occupational division. Workers from one caste and often even from one area were recruited in particular branches of industry in particular mills and departments. In these conditions the religious and caste divisions were substantially consolidated and turned from the characteristic features of the country's social life in general into a specific feature of the condition of the working class as well. Moreover the caste-Hindus monopolised the relatively better paid jobs: that meant that the lower the pay for the job, the bigger the proportion of the Adi-Dravidas engaged in it. The high Caste Hindus, who had advanced to a certain extent, looked upon the Adi-Dravidas with abhorrence and antipathy and with feelings of superiority:

The Adi-Dravidas, shunned of contact, intermarriage and commensality with the upper castes, spent their life like common herds in the slums, street lanes and market places without the sanctity and privacy of home. Naturally they had little interactions with the world outside. Nevertheless the Adi-Dravidas had torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound them to their natural superiors and rallied round their own class of leaders in all matters including trade union affairs. Whether caste Hindus or Adi-Dravidas, they had to maintain horizontal ties with their own caste members in the village. They had to conduct elaborate and often far reaching searches for marriage.

1/ "These villagers, uprooted from their ordinary surroundings, broken into little groups by differences of dialect, caste or religion, are never likely to be a very hopeful field for the conscientious trade union organiser". (GARRAT, G.T. - "The Indian Industrial Worker", The Economic Journal, London, September, 1932.) pp.399-406.

2/ The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916-18 in their Report revealed that the industrial school set up by a Christian missionary at Nazareth, in the Tinnevelly District of Madras Presidency, turned out from among the Adi-Dravidas, a new class of artisans, namely, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers and tailors; that such persons could not be absorbed into the existing cottage industries owing to the caste system; and that they were finally employed in the European concerns. (REPORT OF THE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION, 1916-18, op.cit.,) P.110.
partners which extended kinship through an increasingly broad region.1/ Insensible rigid rules had surrounded marriage and commensality. This had led to the feeling that one stratum, rather a vertical slice of society, was different from another.

Engels points out the existence of a system of consanguinity prevailing among the Tamils.2/ The system can be explained thus: The Tamilian calls not only his own children, sons and daughters, but those of his brothers:

1/ Under such device the joint stock families were retained intact even after the family members sought work in the factories. Thus under the joint family system, prevalent in South India, families consisted of three generations and included co-parceners of even second degree.

(Royal Commission on Labour in India - op.cit., - p.305.
Evidence of Mr.C.Sundarsana Kaju).

Professor Gilbert Slater writes: "what the 'family' means in India may be judged from the following dialogue. I noticed that a friend referred to a fellow caste man, Mr.A.B., as his uncle, but hesitated a little in using word. So I asked 'How is he your uncle, is he an uncle by blood, or by marriage'? He replied, 'He is not exactly my uncle. He is related to me this way. My mother's brother was C.D. C.D.'s uncle's son on his father's side was E.F. E.F's daughter married A.B.'s sister's son'. I commented that is not a very close relationship. He replied, 'there is another way in which he is related to me. He married a girl whose sister, G.H., had been married to K.L. G.H. died, and K.L. married subsequently the daughter of the sister of my father's sister's husband. When such meanings as these are attached to the word, 'uncle', the meaning of 'nepotism' in India may be guessed.'

and they call him father. On the other hand, he calls his sisters' children his nephews and nieces; and they call him uncle. Inversely the Tamil woman calls her sisters' children her sons and daughters along with her; and they call her mother. On the other hand, she addresses her brothers' children as her nephews and nieces; and she is called their aunt. In the same way, the children of brothers call one another brothers and sisters, and so do the children of sisters. Contrariwise, the children of a woman and those of her brother call each other cousins.
And these are no mere empty terms, but expressions of ideas actually in force concerning nearness and collateralness, equality and inequality of blood relationship; and these ideas serve as the foundation of a completely worked out system of consanguinity, capable of expressing some hundreds of different relationships of a single individual. In view of the decisive role which kinship plays in the social order of all peoples in the stage of savagery and barbarism, the significance of so widespread a system cannot be explained away by mere phrases. The terms father, child, brother and sister are no mere honorific titles, but carry with them absolutely definite and very serious mutual obligations, the totality of which forms an essential part of the social constitution of these peoples.

The founding of the first Trade Union in India at Madras, and its struggle for survival.

The sapling of fraternity, grown out of the seeds sown by Thiru Vi.Ka. at the time of his theistic Saiva discourses delivered during 1916-'18 under the auspices of the religious body, Sri Venkatesha Gunamrita Varshani Sabha, Madras to his hearers largely comprising the city mill labourers and coolies, was later in April 1918 transplanted to grow into the Madras Labour Union, the
oldest Trade Union in India. Thiru Vi.Ka. had the assistance of the above Sabha\(^1\) the Theosophical Society, Adyar and also of Gooty P.Kesava Pillai, the then President of the Congress-sponsored-non-Brahmin organisation, the Madras Presidency Association, in the founding of the Madras Labour Union. Three factors hastened the founding of the Union: (a) The extremely short recess for the mid-day meal of 30 minutes; (b) the frequency of assault on the workers by the European assistants in the Buckingham Mill; and (c) inadequate wages in the face of rapidly rising prices.\(^2\)

The Madras Labour Union was formally inaugurated on 27 April 1918, with duly elected office-bearers, all of

\(^1\) The names and the actual profession of the office-bearers of the Sri Venkatesa Gunamrita Varshani Sabha, which was involved in the founding of the first organised Trade Union in India are quite interesting to note:-

1) G.Ramanujulu Naidu - Rice Merchant - Director of the Sabha
2) Manavaia Mudaliar - Rice Merchant - Director of the Sabha
3) Balu Mudaliar - Paddy Merchant - Director of the Sabha
4) Murugesu Mudaliar - Rice Merchant - Director of the Sabha
5) Sambasiva Mudaliar - Rice Merchant - Director of the Sabha
6) Narayanaswami Naidu - A clerk with a pawn broker - Director of the Sabha
7) M.Rajaratna Mudaliar - Paddy Merchant - Cashier of the Sabha
8) Bhaktavachalam Pillai - Merchant - President of the Sabha
9) G.Chelvapathi Chettiar - Bangle Merchant - Secretary of the Sabha

- TNA - Confidential - G.O.No.342, dated 18 April 1918
Ordinary Series, Public (1918) Department - Labour Movement.

\(^2\) ROYAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR IN INDIA, op.cit., p.178 - Supplementary Memorandum of the Madras Labour Union, p.178.
The choice for the presidency of the union fell on Mr. B. P. Wadia, an assistant editor of Mrs. Besant's 'New India'. Mr. Wadia, who was a theosophist, Home Ruler and politician, came into prominence only the previous year because of his internment along with Mrs. Besant. There were seven Vice-Presidents, two Secretaries and one Treasurer for the Union. The following were the Vice-Presidents:

1. Dewan Bahadur Gooty P. Kesava Pillai (also President of the Madras Presidency Association);
2. Thiru Vi. Ka., Editor of the Desabaktam (and also Vice-President of the Madras Presidency Association);
3. Dewan Bahadur Salla Guruswami Chettiar, High Court Vakil, Madras (and also Vice-President of the Madras Presidency Association);
4. P. S. Guruswami Naidu, High Court Vakil, Madras (and also Secretary of the Madras Presidency Association);
5. Dr. G. S. Arundale, an assistant editor of 'New India';
6. M. Subraya Kamath, a sub-editor of 'New India'; and
7. A. Ranganatha Mudaliar, a Retd. Deputy Collector, Madras, (also a Congressman and Theosophist).

The Secretaries of the Union, namely, G. Chelvapathy Chettiar and G. Ramanjulu Naidu, and also the Treasurer of the Union, M. Rajaratna Mudaliar were already office-bearers of the Sri Venkatesa Gunamrita Varshani Sabha, Madras. Nevertheless, the Union became certainly the first systematic attempt at

1/The Justice Party's Telugu Biweekly, Andhra Prakasika, Madras, in its issue dated 9 May 1918 wrote: "We regret to hear that the Home Rulers are trying to create commotion by suggesting to innocent labourers ideas of passive resistance. The object of the Home Rulers in helping the starting of labour unions in this country is to show in a big way that they have a big following" - (TNA - Confidential Native Newspaper Report No. 20 of 1918 dated 18 May 1918. p. 769.
2/The Madras Mail, Madras dated 5 February 1920 p. 3; THIRU VI. KA. VAZHIVARDIK KURIPPUKAL, op. cit., p. 260.
3/The Madras Mail, ibid.
trade-union organisation, with regular membership and dues, of the mass of Indian workers in an Industrial Centre.

The limitations of the outlook of the Union's President, B.P. Wadia, were revealed, when the labourers having joined the union and having presented their demands to the Binny & Co., received no reply and demanded a strike. Wadia opposed any strike on grounds of devotion to the cause of British imperialism in a speech on 3 July 1918: "If by going on strike you were affecting the pockets of Messrs. Binny and Co., I would not mind, for they are making plenty of money; but by such a step you will injure the cause of the Allies. Our soldiers, who have to be clothed, will be put to inconvenience and we have no right to trouble those who are fighting our King's battle, because a few Europeans connected with the mills and this Government are acting in a bad manner. Therefore we must have no strikes." He was successful in preventing strikes; but Messrs. Binny & Co., despite Wadia's 'patriotic' arguments declared a lock-out on 28 October 1918 on account of the objection of the labourers to obey the rule of being present at the Mills at 6 a.m. Wadia in his address to the union on 29 October 1918 said: "We have had no strike; a lockout is forced upon us for no fault of yours. For this lock-out the employers of the mills and they alone are wholly responsible... Let us suffer, let us be strong, and prove to the Government that in war-time we have looked loyally to its requirements, and that if there is any one to be found out...

1/ Royal Commission on Labour in India, op.cit., p.179.

But the Anglo-Indian press, from the beginning had been crying to halt the politicians' interference in labour. For instance, the Cochin Argus, an English Weekly edited by one Anglo-Indian Mr. C. Hamilton Pereira from Cochin wrote on 14 September 1918: "The most significant circumstance in connection with all the recent strikes is that the men have been misled by political agitators, with extravagant promises, whose hollowness they saw through only after they had plunged into a course". It observed further that the political agitators had only one aim and that was 'to create mistrust and bitter relations between European capital and Indian labour in this country'. (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.38 of 1918, Madras, 21 September 1918 ) p.1399
for a charge of disloyalty - they must look elsewhere, in other direction than in the direction of the Labour Union. This is my advice to you, and I hope that you will follow it the first thing to-morrow morning". 1/ Following Mr. Wadia's advice the workmen went to the mills at 6 a.m. on 31 October 1918 and resumed work.

But in the following month on the morning of 27, the Binny & Co. ordered a lock-out on the ground that the manager of the Buckingham Mill and the weaving master of the Carnatic Mill were assaulted in separate incidents at obscure places by few individuals. The bulk of the workmen were disgusted with such acts and several of them in fact came forward to trace the assailants. 2/ But the Binny & Co. decided to penalise the vast majority of innocent workmen for the guilt of few individuals. The company put up a notice on 5 December 1918, that the mills, with the exception of the weaving department would run; the weaving shed would continue to remain closed, except to those who were willing to express regret for the recent misconduct. Upon this, the union passed the following resolution next day: "This meeting of

1/ Royal Commission on Labour in India - op.cit., p.179.
2/ The Madras Labour Union at its meeting on 28 November 1918, passed the following resolutions:

"(1) That this meeting of the Madras Labour Union records with extreme regret the reported assaults on the European officers of the two Mills and appeals to all its members to put the principles of the Union into force by helping the police to trace the culprits.

(2) That this meeting of the Madras Labour Union regrets the action of the mill authorities in ordering a lock-out of the two mills, thereby causing intense suffering to labourers in these hard times of economic distress, and hereby urges the mill authorities to resume work". (Royal Commission on Labour in India, ibid.,) p.180.

The Justice Party's Andhra Prakasika, Madras on 28 November 1918, in its leader attributed the riotous behaviour of the labourers of The Buckingham and Carnatic Mills to the preaching to them by political agitators belonging to the Congress and Mrs.Besant's Home Rule League. The paper asked the Government to interfere and put a stop to the mischievous preachings'. (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report, No.49 of 1918 dated 7 December 1918) p.1748.
Madras Labour Union views with great regret the notice issued by the managers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills yesterday, as the plan suggested to the labourers therein will tend to divide their unity. This meeting reaffirms its regret at the action of some who committed the assault and are sorry that the culprits have not been caught, and hereby appoints 18 men as a special committee to negotiate with the authorities and bring about an amicable settlement.\(^1\) In the meanwhile on the basis of a decision taken at the Labour Union meeting, Wadia wired Mahatma Gandhi to come down to Madras to lead the strike.\(^2\) But Gandhi instead deputed Mr. C. F. Andrews for the purpose. Mr. Andrews arrived in Madras on 10 December 1918, and led the negotiations with the management.\(^3\)

But the same day the Binny and Co., issued a statement in the 'Madras Mail' narrating the circumstances under which the Madras Labour Union was started. They also stated: "Messrs. Binny & Co., quite appreciate the fact that labour unions have come to stay and would cordially meet more than half way a properly constituted union of their work people, but a union such as the present one, with representatives who know absolutely nothing of labour conditions in Madras or over the rest of India, and whose primary object is politics,"


\(^2\) TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.49 of 1918, Week ending 7 December 1918 p.1748. The Andhra Patrika dated 30 November 1918. The Andhra Prakasika, Madras on 2 December 1918 warned the political agitators against supporting the labourers in their act of insubordination to the mill authorities. (Ibid.)

Another Justice party organ Dravidan, Madras on 13 December 1918 stated: "It can never be a desirable thing for those dabbling in politics to try to accomplish their object by interfering in industrial matters and labourers' associations. It is a pitiable thing that labourers should listen to these and make their position irksome". (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.51 of 1918 week ending 21 Dec.1918).

\(^3\) Mr. C. F. Andrews considered that the Binny & Co. Mills were 'one of the best managed mills in India, where the company had done a great deal to help the men'. (Andrews, C. F., "The Life of an Indian Mill Labourer", The Modern Review, Calcutta, Vol. XXXVI. August 1919, pp. 137-140.)
can serve no useful purpose as regards either employees or employers, and as has been proved already, is causing untold mischief, misunderstanding, and needless suffering". Thus the Company's intentions to disband the labour union were made clear in such statements. But on Mr. Andrews intervention on behalf of the Union, the mills were re-opened on 17 December 1918, the conditions of the settlement being, that the management would pay seven days' wages for the lockout period as an act of grace and not as a legal right, that the management refused to refer to arbitration the points on which they were at variance with the Union and that they declined to take back the men dismissed during the lockout. Later, when Mahatma Gandhi came to Madras to enlist support for his proposed Satyagraha Movement, he addressed the Madras Labour Union on 19 and 22 March 1919, and spoke approvingly of their last strike and expressed his sympathy with their

1/ The Madras Mail, Madras, 10 December 1918.

Wadia retorted: "Are not labour leaders politicians in Great Britain? Home Rulers are blamed by Anglo Indians, officials and non-officials, for being regardless of the masses; when a Home Ruler endeavours to work for a proportion of the masses he is objected to for his 'primary object is politics' .... If the Union is making our members politically vociferous or troublesome let the Government look after that; why should Messrs. Binny & Co. get nervous? It is for the labourers to say who should be their leaders, and what shall be the constitution of their union; it is not for Binny & Co., to dictate". (B.P. WADIA - Labour in Madras (S. Ganesan & Co., Madras, 1921), pp.101-105.

Thiru Vi.Ka. also justified the work of the Home Rulers in labour organisations (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report - No.51 of 1918, dated 21 December 1918 p.1809 - Desabhaktan dated 11 December 1918).
Growth of Labour Movement in Madras - First Phase:
The Tramway Men's Union.

In August 1918 some of the labourers of the Madras Tramway Company sought the support of P. Kesava Pillai and subsequently on his advice, that of B.P. Wadia, for the fulfilment of their demands, which included rise in wages, increase in number of shifts from two to three and proper conduct on the part of the European Traffic Superintendent. Wadia assured them of his help, but restrained them against any strike. About 50 tramway men held consultations with Wadia at the Theosophical Society's Headquarters, Adyar, on 14 August 1918. Thereafter Mr. B.L. Aliyar, a High Court Vakil and a friend of Mr. Wadia, was entrusted with the affairs of the Tramway men. The men met at Mr. Aliyar's house often and on 25 August 1918 drew up a statement of their demands and resolved to strike if they were not granted within twenty four hours. The ultimatum, though said to have been despatched on 26 August 1918, did not actually reach its destination.

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No. 1007 - W - I dated 2 April 1919.

Referring to this strike, Dr. Radha Kamal Mukerjee wrote: "I found that though the mill operatives pulled on together their capacity for indebtedness to the local shopkeepers could not help them beyond three weeks ... their daughters and wives, who do not work and earn, continually finding fault with them complaining to me that they are shirking work for sheer idleness. But the strength of caste ties and of social sympathies puzzles the western mill owners". (MUKERJEE, Dr. Radha Kamal - "Indian Labour under the Industrial Mill-stone: With a plea for international Action Before the Coming Labour Conference" - The Modern Review, Calcutta, Vol. XXVI, October 1919.) pp. 399-404.

until 9.41 a.m. on 28 August, 1918, a few hours after the strike had actually commenced.\textsuperscript{1/} The Tramway Company issued a notice warning that if the strikers did not return to duty on 6 September 1918, they would only be re-entertained, if at all, as new hands on the lowest grade of pay. Though E.L.Aiyar and other Home Rulers advised the men to hold firm, the strike collapsed because of the notice and the men returned to work as required.\textsuperscript{2/}

A separate union, namely the Madras Tramway Men's Union for the Tramway labourers was established on 5 December 1918 owing to the efforts of E.L.Aiyar and Thiru Vi.Ka. Mr.Kumaraswami Chettiar, one of the partners of the 'British India Press', which was in charge of printing Thiru Vi.Ka's newspaper Desabaktran was made the President of the Union. On 9 December 1918 Thiru Vi.Ka. addressed the Union. He said that there were two classes of people in the world: capitalists and labourers; that the capitalists could not do without the labourers and the labourers could not do without the capitalists: a struggle between two classes exists; that the labourers should not do anything injurious to the capitalists; and that they should strengthen the union to redress their grievances in a legal, peaceful manner.\textsuperscript{3/}

There were series of meetings of the Union in January and February 1919 addressed by V.O.C. and his friend Subramaniam Siva. In their speeches both of them dealt with the methods of conducting strikes in a successful manner.\textsuperscript{4/}

\textsuperscript{1/} TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Letters to Government of India - No.2988 - W-1 dated 31 August 1918.

\textsuperscript{2/} TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Letters to Government of India - No.3161 - W-1 dated 18 September 1918.

\textsuperscript{3/} TNA - Confidential - G.O.388 Public (1919) Department, dated 3 July 1919.

\textsuperscript{4/} TNA - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No.414 W-1 dated 18 February 1919.
On 11 March 1919 the men struck work and the demands were almost the same as put during their earlier collapsed strike.1/

During the strike, the union conducted meetings atleast twice daily, at which V.O.C., Subramania Siva, Thiru Vi.Ka. and B.P.Wadia exhorted the men to carry on the fight since the company had declined to concede to their demands. On 21 March 1919 Mahatma Gandhi addressed the men but was careful to qualify his support of the strike by prefatory remarks that he had not been able himself to examine the merits of the dispute and advised continuance on the assumption that the demands put forward were just.2/

At a public meeting on 23 March 1919 held at Gokhale Hall, Madras, with Mrs. Besant in the Chair, Mr. Wadia said: "In this fight between capital and labour there must be taken into account the factor that labourers are human beings. The labourer has begun to stand up; he knows the strength of his feet and he will no more go down on the ground and merely entreat. If you do not organise them, the expression of the spirit of the mob would be more a danger to the country, and such an expression none of us wants to see in India. Those who deride these organisations, as mischievous or political in character, talk in a manner which only betrays their ignorance. The danger to the country, to industries, to the trades, would lie in a disorganised mob full of the new spirit. I think that Government intervention is necessary at the present stage. Capital and Labour have at present no connecting link between them. The capitalists, Indian as well as European, have their own interests, and those interests naturally clash with the interests of the labourers. It is necessary that some organization with a certain amount of authority should step in and give a helping hand in the creation

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No. 796 W-1 dated 20 March 1919.
2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No. 1007 W-1 dated 3 April 1919.
of machinery which is going to produce harmonious relationships between capital and labour. After his speech, the Government of Madras was requested by a resolution, to bring about the termination of the strike and to appoint arbitration boards for the settlement of all outstanding differences.

In the meanwhile the Tramway Company came forward to discuss the issues in dispute, but objected to the presence of outsiders in the Union. Accordingly Mr. Kumarasamy Chetty, resigned from the presidency of the Union and in his place Mr. Venkataramanjulu Naidu who was a personal assistant to the joint manager of the company was made President. Meanwhile the Government of Madras brought the strike to an end on 5 April 1919 by constituting an Arbitration Board consisting of 1) Mr. J. C. Holony, I. C. S., 2) President of the Madras City Corporation and 3) Dewan Bahadur T. Rangachari to go into the whole question of the strike.

In January 1920 the Tramway men became restless again, due to the increase in cost of living. On 26 January 1920 the Union leaders met the Director of the company and demanded among other things 25% increase in wages, and grant of one month's pay as bonus. As no positive reply came from the company, the union leaders came out and immediately sent word from the central shed to stop all the trams. At 12:30 p.m. all the trams were stopped wherever they were running and the men abandoned the trams in the streets. By the evening the management had succeeded in collecting all the trams in the street near the sheds, but were unable to get them into the sheds and they were left there guarded day and night by a small force of police. Only on 30 January 1920 the management

1/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India - op. cit., p. 182.
2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No. 1007 W-1 dated 2 April 1919.
3/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No. 190-1 W-1 dated 21 April 1919.
4/ Ibid. On 15 April 1919 the arbitrators announced their awards, which came into effect on 1 May, 1919.
was able to clear the block of empty trams with the help of
new hands chiefly Anglo-Indians. The next day a skeleton
service of about 15 trams was commenced under police protection.
It was reported by the Government that the striking men did
not resort to any violence and none of the new drivers were
molested. By this time the Governor of Madras intervened and
asked the company to hold negotiations with the striking
men.¹

The strike came to an end on 4 February 1920 on the
acceptance of the following terms by the company.²

1) an immediate increase of wages, 20% for men drawing
8 annas a day, 15% for men drawing upto Rs.1 and 10% for
those drawing more than Rs.1;

2) distribution of rice at 4 measures a rupee limited
to Rs.5 per month, or a rice allowance of 2 annas a head till
price comes down to 4 measures; and

3) opening of non-contributory provident fund at 5%.

In June 1920, Mr. Venkataraman Julu Naidu had to
resign owing to some internal bickerings in the Union.
In January 1921, the Union gave an ultimatum to the employers
asking for the appointment of an enquiry officer to look
into all cases of removals of men from service and demanding
a reply within 12 hours. In view of the visit of the Duke
of Connaught on 10 January 1921, the Labour Commissioner
intervened and attended the Union’s midnight meeting and
advised them not to strike. But the men did not heed to
his advice and went on strike. Though the strike lasted for
almost fifty days, the termination of the Buckingham Mills
strike on 27 January 1921 was a signal that this strike would

¹ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of
India No. 426-W-I, dated 4 February 1920; DORAI SWAMI, S.V.,
"Some Aspects of the Labour Problem in India", Business,
May, 1920 pp. 30-36.
² TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of
India No. 669 - W-I dated 19 February 1920.
also either collapse or come to an end soon. With no possibility of any settlement at sight the men surrendered on 26 February 1921, but the management refused to take all men in. With the collapse of the strike and the starting of motor bus services in the city, the union practically ceased to exist. In 1923 E.L.Aiyar tried his best to revive the Union. In March 1924, the management refused to recognize the Union objecting to the presence of the outsiders. E.L. Aiyar was thereupon removed and an employee of the company was elected in his place. Since the newly elected president was already under notice of dismissal at the time when he was elected, the Union was unable to do anything. In July 1925 the Union was again revived under the presidency of Mr.E.L.Aiyar. In the following month E.L.Aiyar became the patron. Mr.S.P.Y.Surendranath Voegeli Arya a former extremist who left the Congress after the controversial Conjeervaram conference and who was also by now a popular Justice Party leader, was made the President of the Union. Mr.Arya supported his own party nominee Mr.Vasu Naidu in the Corporation election against the candidature of Mr.E.L.Aiyar in one of the Corporation divisions. This created a sensation among the workers, who severely condemned Mr.Arya and the Secretary, Mr.Sriramulu, and at a meeting in September 1925 deposed them and elected Mr.E.L.Aiyar and Mr.R.Subbarayalu as president and secretary respectively.

The Constellation of Unions in Madras: Policemen's Union, Rickshaw pullers' Union, Electric Supply Workers' Union, Kerosene Oil Workers' Union, M & S.M.R.Union.

The policemen like any other section of the population were hard hit by the rise in prices.¹/ Exploiting this

¹/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No.991-M.I., dated 18 March 1920.
opportunity Thiru Vi.Ka., Kasturi Ranga Aiyangar and Adinarayana Chetty organised a union for the Policemen in the city in March 1920. Kasturi Ranga Aiyangar was made President of the Policemen's Union. The leaders announced by the end of March 1920 that 800 policemen had joined the union. In the union meetings the leaders exhorted them to demand higher wages, stating that their wages were very poorly contrasted with that secured by the London Police.

E.L.Aiyar organised the Rickshawalla's union in early 1918 and became its Honorary Secretary. The Madras Corporation Workshop Employees' Union was established on 27 December 1918 by Thiru Vi.Ka. and others. On 19 March 1919, the Union struck work owing to suspension of some mistresses. Wadia and others addressed the union meeting to boost their morale. The Union ended the strike on 27 March 1919 when the suspended men were reinstated.

The Madras Electricity Supply Corporation Workers Union was established in early 1919 by Chakkara Chetty, Thiru Vi.Ka. and others. M.Subaraya Kamath was made its President. When the Union struck work in June 1920, the company kept its power station working with the aid of 'Military coolies'. The labour leaders strongly protested against such tactics to break the strike and issued threats... contd.

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India - No.1209-M-1, dated 3 April 1920. Thiru Vi.Ka. writes: "The General Strike has been suspended by order of the Commissioner of Police, but the strike has not been terminated. The strike is now on again. The police have been asked to go on strike..." Thiru Vi.Ka.,Vazhukkaik Kurippukkal(Tamil) Op.cit., pp.460-1.

2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt.of India - No.1675 - 2 dated 20 April 1920.

3/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt.of India - No.2998-M-1, dated 31 August 1918.

4/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India - No.65-M-1 dated 17 January 1919.

5/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt.of India - No.1671-M-1 dated 2 April 1919.

6/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt.of India - No.1190-M-1 dated 21 April 1919.
of a general strike. Middle Chakkaraai Chetty strongly criticised the British labour policy in India and warned that he would bring 'this scandal' to the notice of the Labour Party in England. On 13 April 1919 about 100 workmen belonging to various printing presses in the city met and formed the Madras Printing Pressmen's Union with G. Hari Sarvothama Rao and K. M. Subramania Aiyar as its President and Vice-President respectively. Mahatma Gandhi was elected as the Union's Honorary President. G. Hari Sarvothama Rao was also authorised to form a separate union for the workers of the Government Printing Press. The Union so formed for the Government Printing Press workers demanded in December 1919 an increase in pay commensurate with the cost of living. Months passed but there was no reply. The workmen stayed out for a week and resumed work on 14 April 1920 after the publication of a notice to the effect that further absence without leave would entail forfeiture of their past service for pension.

The Kerosene Oil workers' Union, Madras was formed on 27 March 1920 as the combined union for all the workers in the three oil companies, viz., the Asiatic Petroleum Company, the Burmah Oil Company and the Standard Oil Company. V. Chakkaraai Chuttiar was elected as the President of the Union. During the strike of April–May 1920, in Burmah Oil Company, a gang of Pathans from Bombay were brought to act as strikebreakers. But these men had a rough time both from the

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No.2508-1 dated 1 July 1920.

2/ TNA - Confidential - Govt. Public Department - Ordinary Series - G.O.No.562 dated 7 September 1920. Strikos, lockouts, picketing and conflicts with the military or the police had been the features of the strikes during the twenties. (PARAMESWARAN, K.N. - "Labour unrest in India", The Modern Review, Calcutta, June, 1920) pp.632-4.

3/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No.1418-M-1 dated 4 May, 1919.

4/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No.1575-2 dated 20 April 1920.
strikers and others. On 17 May 1920, an altercation between the Pathans and the local coolies resulted in a riot which was quelled by the armed police. One Pathan was killed and there were minor casualties on both sides. On another occasion three Pathans were mistaken by fishermen for kidnappers of children and were attacked and rescued only after receiving injuries.\(^1\)

In 1919 Mahatma Gandhi launched the nationwide Satyagraha Movement against the Rowlatt Bills which, he said, "are unjust, subversive of the principles of liberty and justice and destructive of the elementary rights of an individual on which the safety of India as a whole and the State itself is based; we solemnly affirm that in the event of these Bills becoming Law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as the committee, hereafter to be appointed, may think fit, and we further affirm that in the struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property".\(^2\) The 6 April 1919 was fixed to be 'a day of hartal, a day of fasting and penance' all over India. The announcement of Satyagraha changed the course of events in labour movement in Madras. The Theosophist labour leaders parted company with the Congress Labour leaders, because the Congressmen decided to involve all the labour unions in the observance of Satyagraha Day. On 5 April 1919 labour union meetings were held throughout the City to mobilize labour for the day. B.P. Wadia appealed to labour not to take part in the observance of the Satyagraha Day.\(^3\)

\(^1\) TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No. 2171-I dated 1 July 1920.

\(^2\) Cited in Sitaramayya, Dr. S. Pattabhi - op. cit., p.161.

\(^3\) TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India, No. 1190-M-1, dated 21 April 1919.
On 2 May 1919 about 50 employees of the Madras and Southern Maharashtra Railway Workshops at Perambur met and formed a union. Ranganatham Maidu, the then treasurer of the Madras branch of the All-India Home Rule League, was elected as President. V.O.C. and N.Dhandapani Pillai were elected as Vice-President and Secretary respectively of the union.\(^1\)

Theosophist group made all-out efforts to oust V.O.C. and Dhandapani Pillai from the union, and this they achieved on 10 February 1920, when Dr. G.S. Arundale was made its President.

Towards this time V.O.C. had claimed to have had a mandate from the Congress to organise labour unions and to affiliate them to the Provincial Congress Committee.\(^2\)

He along with Chakkarai Chetty, N.Dhandapani Pillai and Satyamurthi Aiyar tried to capture labour unions controlled by Mrs. Besant's henchmen and also took efforts to start rival unions wherever this was not successful. The New India resented this and published articles insisting on the necessity of keeping labour questions apart from politics; also tried to win over Thiru V. I., K. and G. Hari Sarvathama Rao to its side.\(^3\)

After a few months, both the unions were amalgamated and the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Employees' Union was formed with Arundale as the elected President. During the six months' caste conflict in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in 1921, the Adi-Dravidas who were earlier members of the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Employees' Union also seceded from the Union.\(^4\)

V. Chakkarai Chetty and others of the Non-Cooperation Movement carried on a vigorous propaganda to enlist support for the Khaddar and Charka Movement of Gandhi. These efforts drew

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1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No. 1564-N-1 dated 19 May 1919.

2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No. 669-N-1 dated 19 February 1920.

3/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No. 426-N-1 dated 4 February 1920.

4/ Royal Commission on Labour in India - op. cit., p. 44 - Evidence of Mr. J. Gray, Commissioner of Labour.
blank with the remaining members of the union who were mostly caste Hindus. In July 1924 the union was reorganised with a new set of office bearers drawn from the employees of the railway, apparently in order to get the union recognised by the Agent. However the agent refused to oblige and laid down several conditions for recognition.

The Madras Labour Union: Confrontation with Management.

In October 1920 victimization of the leading members of the Executive Committee of the Madras Labour Union led to the outbreak of trouble. In the Buckingham Mills Mr. Natasa Mudaliar, who was a weaver with excellent qualifications, was not considered for promotion to a side jobber’s place, because, as Mr. Bentley, the weaving master told him, he was one of the ring-leaders who sent a petition against the brother of the manager, and that he put up notices of the Labour Union. Another active member of the Labour Union Committee, Varadarajulu Naicker, who was a head jobber and in the service of the Mill for 35 years, was dismissed for refusing to look after the duties of the vacant jobber’s place. Vedantha Mudaliar, another member of the Executive Committee of the Labour Union, who had been in the service of the mill for 29 years and had risen to the position of head jobber, was reduced to the position of a side-jobber. The labourers began to practise passive resistance in the mill. The management started a campaign of dismissals and about fifty men were dismissed in a few days. This fight between the employers and labourers culminated in a disturbance in the weaving shed on 20 October 1920.

The management stated that a section of the weavers refused to work the ‘dobby looms’ prescribed for them and to attend to its repairs; they refused as well to work the ordinary looms and demanded that they must be paid their
allowance of 4 annas a day, which the management refused. Thereupon when the weaving master Mr. Bentley went inside his office room, a number of weavers went and sat at the doorway of his office-room and would not allow him to go out. When, after waiting for a long time, he attempted to get out, the weavers assaulted him and threw spindles at him, and when he took out a revolver he had in his pocket, they rushed at him, snatched the revolver from him and assaulted him and chased him to the manager's office.\(^1\) The labour version was that when the weavers went to the weaving master's room and explained matters to him he got wild, took out the revolver and pointed it at them to shoot them when they managed to snatch it away from him. Anyway, the revolver was taken by the labourers at once to Wadia. The mill worked that day and the next morning, 21 October 1920 the management declared a lockout 'in view of the assault on the weaving master and the general turbulent attitude of the work people'.\(^2\)

After about a fortnight the management put up a notice giving the numbers of the labourers dismissed in the various departments - about 150 in number and specifying the conditions under which the rest might return to work. But the men were stubborn and did not take any notice of that or the subsequent notice the management put up. The union held meetings every day, appointed a 'lockout committee' with Mr. Wadia as President and set about working in right earnest to defeat the employers. Money was collected in Bombay, subscriptions were raised from the Carnatic Mill employees and relief money distributed to the lockout men. A number of labourers were sent away to work in the Nellore mica mines, but these were mostly Mohammadans who were unable to earn any money, through their women folk.\(^3\)

\(^1\) The Royal Commission on Labour in India, op.cit., p.40 - Written Evidence of Mr.J.Gray, Commissioner of Labour.

\(^2\) TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt.of India No.4115-1-Public dated 2 November 1920.

\(^3\) TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports, sent to Govt.of India. No.181-1-Public dated 24 January 1921.
Declaration of "Trade Union" as "illegal conspiracy" and
democratic steps towards The Trade Union Act of 1926.

About a month after the lockout Messrs. Binny and Co.,
filed a suit against Mr. Wadia, Thiru Vi. Ka., G. Ramanjulu Naidu
and the other members of the lock-out committee for interfering
with the labourers and dissuading them from working and thereby
causing serious loss to the company, and claimed damages to
the extent of Rs. 75,000. They also applied for an interim
"injunction" against the defendants, which was first granted
temporarily and then made permanent until the disposal of
the suit. Thiru Vi. Ka. warned that while the labourers
elsewhere throughout the world had the privilege of
unions and strike work for safeguarding their rights, the
capitalists in India were trying to cut at the root of the
very fundamental right of the labourers. The Swadesamitran,
remarked that the injunction order passed against Mr. Wadia
and others in the matter of the latter addressing the
labourers of the Buckingham Mills against the interests of
the Mill authorities practically denied to the labourers
in India a natural right available to the people all over
the world. The paper wrote: "according to the decision of
the High Court, law was able to prevent any one advising
the labourers in their interests having anything to do with
them. It is very necessary to rectify this state of affairs.
It may be argued that the labourers themselves can conduct
their movement and that they need not take in non-labourers
with them. But these labourers know only that they are

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of
India. No. 4439-1 - Public dated 16 November 1920.

2/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report - 47 of 1920
week ending 20 November 1920 p. 1345, Desabhaaktan
dated 12 November 1920.
suffering and are unaware of the proper method of relieving it. The majority of them are illiterate on account of the negligence of the Government and they are not in a position to understand the procedure adopted by labourers in other countries under similar circumstances. So until the Government covert them all into scholars, the help of the others is indispensable.1/

The lock-out however continued, and on 9 December 1920 there was collision between the workers and the police who were escorting the mill lorries engaged in transporting the strike breakers to the mills.2/ The police opened fire on the striking labourers injuring 16 persons of whom the two, Babu Rao and Murugan died on the spot.3/ Referring to the incident the Andhrapatrika lamented: "there cannot be more harmless people throughout the world than the Madrasis. It is very easy to subdue them... How are we to prevent the lives of the Indians being treated as so trivial.4/ The Hindu asked whether the Government were thinking that every slight disturbance called for a bath of blood or that every brick-bat must inevitably be answered by a bullet. It observed: "This readiness to fire upon unarmed crowds which the official communique seeks to condone and justify is in our opinion one of the most disquieting features of the present industrial situation. They suggest that the authorities are on the side of the capitalists.5/ Wadia complained that his telegram to George Lansbury on the police excesses was stopped by the

1/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.2 of 1921 week ending 8 January 1921, Swadesamitran, Madras, dated 25 December 1920.
3/ MURUGESAN, K and SUBRIMANYAM, C.S. - op.cit., p.36
Chief Secretary to Madras Government. The Madras Provincial Congress Committee in a public meeting on 15 December 1920 expressed horror and indignation at the shooting of the rioters: and appointed a non-official committee of six persons to inquire and report on the incident. The South Indian Non-Brahmin Confederation also condemned the incident and passed a resolution sympathising with the labour.

After a prolonged dispute, it ended upon the mediation of Mrs. Bosant and Sir Purushottam Das Thakurdas; Wadia agreed to sever his connections with the union; the right of the company to appoint, promote, dismiss men at their discretion was upheld. The men returned to work on 27 January 1921. Meanwhile the Madras High Court pronounced a judgment declaring trade unions as an 'illegal conspiracy'.

This was quite a sensation at the time and the Parliamentary Committee of the British Trade Union Congress waited on 22 March 1921 on the Secretary of State for India, Mr. E. Montague. After hearing the deputation, Mr. Montague said; "you cannot have the industrialisation of a great Empire like India without the assistance of organised labour. Therefore not only ought we to welcome the new Trade Union Movements in India, but we ought to recognise them as one of the essentials of Indian development". He also promised


2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India No.61-1-Public dated 6 January 1921.

3/ TNA - Confidential - Public (1921) Department G.O.No.83 dated 17 February 1921.

4/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No.482-1, Public dated 2 February 1921.

5/ PREM SAGAR GUPTA - op. cit., p.11.
that Lord Reading, who was just then arriving in India, would at the earliest possible moment devote his attention to Trade Unionism in India.\(^1\) Accordingly N.M. Joshi moved a resolution in the Assembly in March 1921, but the actual legislative enactment came only in 1926.

**Caste disrupting labour solidarity.**

In May 1921 there was some unrest in the Carding Department of the Carnatic Mill owing to some anomalies in wage fixation for workers there. The management instead of looking into the grievances of the workers, dismissed two Adi-Dravid workers belonging to the Carding Department. Immediately on 20 May 1921 the men in the Carding Department struck work without even informing the Labour Union. The sectional strike led to the lock-out on 24 May 1921 of the entire mill by the management.\(^2\) Thiru V. K. A. who became the President of the Union after Wadia's exist in the last strike, intervened and made the workers to return to work. But the management had swiftly penalised the workers with the forfeiture of the accumulated gratuities of all the labourers in the Mill and stated in a notice that the Mill would be open only when they accept this without demur.\(^3\)

The labour union condemned this unwarranted action of the management, refused to yield to the capitalist design and appealed to the Labour Commissioner Mr. T. E. Moir and the Industries Member in Governor's Council Mr. K. Srinivasa Aiyangar to interfere. Both of them pleaded that they had neither power nor any law in their hand to interfere in the Mill's affairs.


\(^2\) TNA - Confidential - *Fortnightly Reports* sent to Govt. of India No.273-O-1, dated 2 June 1921.

On 3 June 1921 the labourers of the Buckingham Mills met in a strong meeting and resolved to give a ten-day's ultimatum to the management to solve the crisis in the Carnatic Mills. As there was no response to this, they met again on 14 June 1921 and decided to go on a sympathetic strike from 20 June 1921. On the evening of 19 June 1921, there was again a largely crowded meeting of the labourers, which was addressed among others by Thiru Vi. Ka., K. Singaravelu, V. Chakkarai Chetty and E. L. Aiyar who exhorted them to be fearless in their great war against the capitalist.¹/

But when the labourers struck work as proposed on the next day they were not united in their struggle against the capitalist; it seemed that the capitalists and the imperialists had already machined a caste war in the labour movement. The Assistant Labour Commissioner Mr. S. K. Sundara Charlu, a Brahmin in conjunction with the Adi-Dravida leader Mr. N. C. Raja convened a meeting of the Adi-Dravida labourers of the Buckingham Mill and advised them to go back to work.²/ Though only 200 Adi-Dravida labourers readily accepted to go back to work on the first day, their numbers swelled to 800 on 27 June 1921³/ in view of enthusiastic police protection.⁴/


²/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Reports - No. 27 of 1921 - Week ending 2 July 1921, p. 772. Desabaktan dated 21 June 1921; TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report sent to Government of India No. 845-C dated 2 July 1921.


⁴/ (The Police) "seem to think that it is their special mission to break the strike. Black-legs of course are entitled to protection but we question the necessity of encouraging them tacitly or openly to regard themselves as privileged. To be a black leg is sufficient provocation in itself without his flaunting his character in the face of sullen strikers. That such incidents have taken place we have no doubt and we regard them as incitements to disorder countenanced or at least not discouraged by the police." (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 27 of 1921 Week ending 2 July 1921 p. 763. Hindu, dated 1 July 1921.)
This succession of the Adi-Dravidas from the rest of the labourers infuriated the feelings of the others.  

The disturbances commenced on 29 June 1921. On the morning of that day there was a petty affray in the street between the Adi-Dravidas on their way to work and strikers who wished to prevent them from going to work. There followed in the next few days a series of fires, which broke out in a number of nearby slums, where mostly the huts belonging to the Adi-Dravida workers were destroyed. The Adi-Dravidas, probably having been instilled into their minds by their leaders that they were the favourites of the Government and the capitalists that they could transgress the law with impunity, went about arming themselves with knives and sticks in groups of five and six on several occasions and went on wreaking vengeance even on innocent persons quite unconnected with the strikes.  

1/ Thiru Vi.Ka's paper, 'Navasakthi', Madras, in its issue dated 24 June 1921 condemned the Government's ill-conceived effort at creating 'casteism' in labour movement and asked the labour to continue their struggle. The Andhrapatrika, Madras dated 25 June 1921 also condemned all those responsible for creating caste differences in the labour camps. (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 27 of 1921 Week ending 2 July 1921, p. 773.)

Later, on 7 September 1921 in the wakeof renewed disturbances the Justice Party's official organ, the Justice wrote: "... the present deplorable state of affairs has been brought about at all events by the undue pampering of the Adi-Dravidas by the officials of the Labour Department and partly by the, perhaps, unconscious encouragement given to them by a few police officers." (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 37 of 1921, week ending 10 September 1921, p. 1055.)

2/ "... the merry round of attacks and counter attacks goes on while the police look helplessly on. As an example of how not to do things, we cannot imagine any police force conscious of its duty to permit the possession of the amount of lethal weapons that are being freely displayed. Swords, knives and lathis are things not easy to hide and it would have been fairly easy to disarm the prospective combatants of them. The suspicion has been voiced that the police allowed the Adi-Dravidas to arm themselves, no doubt for self-protection. To an excited man, the border line between self protection and aggression is very thin indeed." (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 28 of 1921 Week ending 9 July 1921, p. 798, The Hindu, Madras dated 5 July 1921).
huts were destroyed by the several fires; of these 269 belonged to the Adi-Dravidas and 149 to others. Over and above the contributions made by philanthropic persons, a sum of 20,000 rupees of Government money was spent on feeding and sheltering the Adi-Dravida occupants of the 269 huts; whereas the occupants of the other 149 huts received attention to the extent of Rs.100.1/

The Governor Lord Wellingtoni himself visited only the quarters of the Adi-Dravidas and spoke words of sympathy to them only. He also announced of his personal contribution of Rs.750/- to their relief fund. He went to the mills and spoke with its owners, but did not condescend to look at the Madras Labour Union premises which he had to pass although just then a meeting of the labourers was being held there.2/

On 4 July 1921 the Governor who sent for the labour leaders, Thiru Vi.Ka., Chakkarrai Chetty and E.L.Niyar, 'as usual started with a preliminary bluster' and warned them that they would be extermed if disturbances continued, that the punitive police force would be used to bring peace in the locality and that the cabinet had come to the unanimous conclusion that they and the union alone were responsible for the disturbonces. Thus it was made plain that the imperialists along with the capitalists were determined to crush the labour union.3/

Dr.P.Varadarajulu Naidu condemned the action of the Governor and wrote: "The panchamas seem to be the staunch supporters of the British in their last days. A drowning man catches a straw and even so the Government seem to be

1/ TNA - Govt. Public Department G.O.No.671 dated 7 October 1921 - Madras Disturbances, July 1921.
2/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.30 of 1921, Week ending 23 July 1921, p.862, Lokopakari, Madras 7, July 1921.
3/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No.28 of 1921, Week ending 9 July 1921, p.799. The Hindu, dated 6 July 1921. Also at this time the police broke open the lock of the premises of the Madras Labour Union and took possession of all the records and documents kept there. (Ibid. Desalaktan, Madras dated 2 July 1921).
seeking the aid of the Panchamas to win the war of Swaraj. It is clear from his (Lord Wellingdon's) speech that he has not the same interest in the poor labourers as he has in the well being of the white merchants. The Indians will no longer be afraid of vain threats. The Government of Madras should understand that, if they touch the labour leader Mr. Thiru V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar the Tamil land will get enraged and excited. The Hindu and the Swadesamitran also condemned the Governor in similar tones. While the Christian Outlook, Madras, in its issue dated 9 July 1921 stated: "We must not overlook the fact that whatever the labour leaders may say on the subject, the political element in the situation plays an insidious part in the labour movement. The shouts of 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai' raised by the strikers when going about their dastardly work of incendiarism and intimidation are very significant. They are evidently under the sway of the non-cooperators. The President of the Labour Union is a non-co-operator.

1/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Reports No. 31 of 1921 Week ending 30 July 1921, p. 889 - 'Tamil Nadu', Salem, Cated 17 July 1921.


3/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Reports No. 32 of 1921 Week ending 6 August 1921.

The Hindu, in its issue dated 1 September 1921 condemned the attempts to link the troubles to Non-cooperators as hysterical and wrote: "It was natural for him (the Governor) to find the front and origin of all the troubles under the sun in the non-cooperator and his insidious' propaganda, but he really strains the public credulity too far when he asks it to believe that the disturbances originating in the Mill dispute were the direct result of the non-co-operation propaganda. None the less that theory is so convenient and is so useful in covering a multitude of official short-comings in the handling of the trouble, that there is nothing surprising in the avidity with which he embraces it." (TNA - Confidential- Native Newspaper Report No. 36 of 1921, Week ending 3 September 1921).
On 30 July 1921 the Government of Madras appointed a Committee consisting of W.B. Ayliffe, T.M. Narasimhacharlu and R. Venkataratnam to inquire and report on the disturbances which took place in the Mill area on and after 29 June 1921, and the measures taken to restore order. But the inquiry did not extend to the merits of the dispute between the management of the mills and the labourers. Thiru V.Ka. refused to involve the Madras Labour Union in the inquiry on the basis that the inquiry into the disturbances was a matter of concern to the general public and not to the members of the Labour Union. The report published later was a wishy washy document perfectly satisfied with the manner in which the situation had been handled by the police.

On 29 August 1921, there was again a reign of terror in certain parts of the city. The running amok of bands of armed hooligans carrying sudden death over peaceful quarters of the city, the indiscriminate and murderous assaults upon people going upon their lawful occasions, the attempts at arson, had all given rise to a feeling of insecurity and panic which was spreading all over the city and was seriously

1/ TNA - G.O. No. 671 dated 7 October 1921 op. cit.; TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 34 of 1921 Week ending 20 August 1921, Navasakathi, Madras, 12 August 1921.

2/ The Committee in its report tried in vain to vindicate the conduct of police during the disturbances. The Hindu on 15 October 1921 wrote: "The portentous document... on the Mill disturbances is not a report at all; it is a joke. There were three members on the committee and each has thought it necessary to add a note of his own. These notes in two cases at least directly repudiate the more important conclusions of the report, while the third is a kind of reply to the other two and a defence of the report. We are thus led to the extraordinary conclusion that the report represents the views of Sir William Ayliffe alone... it is perfectly clear that Sir William Ayliffe was in a minority of one and yet was allowed to thrust his views down his colleagues' throats, leaving them the satisfaction of a belated and timorous bleat of protest. In the circumstances the public may be excused if it refuses to take the report seriously". (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 43 of 1921, Week ending 22 October 1921).
dislocating the normal life of the city. The police introduced martial law and shot down at least seven labourers including one woman. The whole city was stunned by the acts of the police. The bodies of the dead were taken in a huge procession evoking sympathy for the labour.

"The Justice Party was particularly angered at Government condonment of these acts of violence against the caste Hindus. Specifically, it resented the way the government dismissed a report on the situation by Sir P. Theagaraya Chetty, Muhammad Usman, Ramaswami Mudaliar, and Natesa Mudaliar." The Government viewed this non-Brahmin report as no more than "the reproduction of fears and anxieties expressed to the signatories by the members of the caste community in the Mill area... The Government can hardly accept these apprehensions as proof that the responsibility for the disturbances rests on one side only. The history of these troubles is sufficient to rebut any such assumption and the Government are well aware that feelings of anxiety and terror are wide-spread in the Adi-Dravida community of the city."

1/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report - No. 36 of 1921 Week ending 3 September 1921: The Hindu, Madras dated 1 September 1921.

2/ But on 2 September 1921, the Desabaktan reported:

"It appears that the Pariah workmen in the cremation grounds not only refuse to bury the corpses of the Hindus who lost their lives in these disturbances, but also beat and drive away the persons who go there. No attention has been paid to it either by the Govt. and Corporation or by wealtly persons." TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 37 of 1921, Week ending 10 September 1921) p.1063.


Thereafter the Justice party successfully brought out a resolution in the Madras Corporation censuring the Government for their continued apathy and indiscretion in dealing promptly with the strike situation. But even this was ignored by the Government.
Sir P Theagaroya Chetty, the leader of the Justice Party according to M.C. Raja, wrote a most unwise letter to Government taking the side of caste Hindu labourers against the Adi-Dravida labourers, and made most un-warrantable statements, ill founded on facts, and suggested to Government to deport Adi-Dravida labourers out of Madras. 1/ The Madras Legislative Council discussed the issue on 12 October 1921 during an adjournment motion moved by C. Thanikachalal Chetty of Justice party. 2/ The Justice Party took strong exception


"The leaders of the Justice Party who were all caste-Hindus and who were dependent to a considerable extent on the caste-Hindu labourers for their election to the Council intervened and made the absurd proposal to his excellency that the Adi Dravida labourers should be deported to a place about ten miles from the city" (ibid. Memorandum by E. Periyarayakam) p. 14

But even the Congress newspapers like Desabakten and Navasakthi supported the stand taken by Sir P. Theagaroya Chetty. Desabakten reported on 7 September 1921, : "the Government have cast to the winds the reasonable suggestions of Mr. Chettiar".

(TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 38 of 1921. Week ending 7 September 1921, ) pp. 1107-08.

While Thiru Vi. Ka. wrote in the Navasakthi, on 9 September 1921: "O' Sir Theagaroya! Lord Wellinndon has not cared for your letter and it is for you to see now whether it is pertinacity or popular responsibility that is found in the reformed administration. You have had enough with the wheel of bureaucracy. Here is the Tamil land, which is ready to follow you. Come and join the nationalist party. This is the opportunity". (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report, No. 39 of 1921, Week ending 24 September 1921) p. 1131.

2/ In "The Hindu" dated 18 November 1921, M. Singaravelu wrote: "Dame rumour has it that Lord Wellington's Government allowed the motion of Thanikachalam Chetty on the malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance of the Madras Government in its connection with the great strike and its subsequent developments, on the understanding that the motion was not to be pressed to the vote. Whatever the truth there may be in this rumour, there is one thing which we cannot understand, that is, why Mr. Thanikachalam Chetty has chosen to reply during those precious few minutes that remained before the President played his 'deus ex machina' and dispersed the august Assembly".
to the Government's handling of the situation. K.Srinivasa Aiyangar, the Law Member and Sir Lionel Davidson, the Home Member, defended the Government's position and the actions of T.E. Moir, the Labour Commissioner. Sir Lionel Davidson put the blame for the violence squarely on the caste Hindus. He said, "It is no longer merely a labour dispute confined to strikers and non-strikers, but a faction fight inflamed by caste prejudices".\footnote{Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol. III, 12 October 1921, p.1028.}

When M.C. Rajah, the Adi-Dravida Leader supported the Government's policy, attacked the non-Brahmin leaders vehemently and espoused the hollowness of the non-Brahmin party's altruistic pretensions!\footnote{Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee 1924 - Written Evidence by E.Periyanayakam. op.cit., p.14.}

Yet, there was no solution in sight to the six months' old labour strike in the mills. As stated already the mills were working with the help of Adi Dravida labourers and newly recruited coolies. In October 1921, Sir P.Theagaroya Chetty himself addressed a meeting of all labourers and advised them to return to work lest they should lose their jobs permanently.\footnote{Madras Labour Union Golden Jubilee Souvenir. op.cit., p.42.}

The workers returned to work accordingly, but 3000 labourers did not get back their jobs. Further the gratuities of all the labourers...
who were on strike were also forfeited. The labourers had to meekly submit to these kinds of trials and tribulations. The conflict that passed by could be considered as one of the most important of the conflicts which ever had broken out between labour and capital in India's Trade Union history. It has demonstrated unequivocally that class solidification of labour in India is a mere illusion, which vanishes before caste consolidation. The labour instead of waging a class war with the capitalist split into caste groups whenever caste prejudices and considerations intervene. These findings thus prove that class consciousness goes into oblivion in the presence of caste consciousness, and that caste fissures tend to act as the overt barn to trade union development.

Mr. E. Periyarayakam, almost three years after these incidents, in his evidence to the Reform Enquiry Committee of 1924 stated: "The Justice Party took their revenge soon after. One of the Budget motions in the next session was to omit the allotment of salaries to Assistant Commissioners of Labour who were recently appointed to safeguard the interests of the depressed classes in the Districts and the motion was carried despite the frantic appeals of the members of Government, both Indian and European. The abolished officers

1/ Ibid.
2/ The Justice enraged at the Labour Commissioner's involvement in the Mill disturbances, wrote vehemently on 13 October 1921, "One result clearly emerges from all this din and strife and that is that the Labour Department must go. A protector of the Depressed classes may exist if these classes think it will serve them much good in the long run, but labour and capital both exclaim "save us from our friend, the Labour Commissioner". (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report - No. 42 of 1921, Week ending 15 October 1921.) p. 1205.

The Government soon amply rewarded Mr. S. K. Sundararachlu, the Assistant Labour Commissioner who assumed the command of Adi Dravidas in the caste warfare during the mill siege by the labour union, by appointing him to the post of India's International Representative of Labour at the office of the International Labour Office, Geneva. (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 19 of 1922, Week ending 13 May 1922. p. 514 Lokopakari, Madras dated 4 May 1922.)
had been doing a great deal for the uplift of the depressed classes in their respective districts ... against the oppression of the landlords and tyranny of village officers. This provoked the jealousy of the Mirasdars in those districts and their representations in the Council".

Caste Democracy in Labour Welfare Administration.

After the six months' prolonged caste conflict, the Madras Labour Union had become a rendezvous of unemployed hands who had no hope of ever being re-employed in the Mills. The Mills' capitalists having succeeded in cleaving the labour on caste basis, went ahead to foster caste-consciousness in order to keep it as the permanent live-shell to blow up class unity. For this purpose they set up "The Work people's Welfare Committee" on 10 January 1922 consisting of Mr. A.P. Symonds the senior Director of the Binny & Co., as its President and Patron, two other directors as other patrons, the two Mill Managers Mr. Hargreaves and Mr. A. Bentley as Vice-Presidents and the Carding Master, the Spinning Master, the Weaving Master, the Chief Engineer, the Chief Chemist and one of the joint principals of the Mills' school and 26 representatives of the labourers as other members of the Committee. Of the 26 representatives of the labourers 22 represented the following departments of each mill, and they were elected by the workers in their own department: manager's office 1; warehouse 1; dye house 1; mechanics' shop 1; engine and building 1; carding 1; spinning 1; sizing 1; weaving 3. In addition to the departmental representatives there were four general representatives for the whole of the mills, two from each mill, who were elected at the same time as the other two-22, but by the whole of the work people, irrespective of department. All these labour representatives had to be elected annually by the labourers of the different departments by secret ballot on a basis of
communal representation, and the different castes and creeds employed in the mills were all represented on the Committee. In the Weaving department, a system of communal voting for three candidates, to represent the Hindus, Mohamadans and the Adi-Dravidas of the Department was effected.\(^1\)

Mr. K.O. Anthoni formerly of the Madras Police, who had rendered signal assistance to the Management during the six months' caste conflict was appointed as the permanent secretary of the Welfare Committee. The labourers drawing not less than ten annas a day and having not less than one year's service were eligible to vote, and any labourer with not less than three years' service was eligible for election as a member of the committee. Representatives of the sub-committees responsible for the various welfare activities outside the mills, such as Athletic Association, Dramatic Society,\(^2\) Workmen's stores and village committees were to attend the meetings of the committee once a month and to make a report of their activities. The meetings of the Committee held once a fortnight were presided over by the President and one of the Vice-Presidents alternately. Thus the Committee was formed to assume the character of a general control body in which all welfare activities inside and outside the mills were concentrated.\(^3\) The Madras Labour

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\(^1\) The capitalists of the Mills had cleverly segregated the labourers into their castes even during mid-day meals. Immediately adjacent to the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills were two chutras which were used primarily for labourers taking their midday meals and as a resting place during the midday break. Separate accommodation was provided for different religions and castes.

(Royal Commission on Labour in India. op.cit., p. 139 Written Evidence of Messrs Binny & Co. (Madras) Ltd.)

\(^2\) The Dramatic Society was extremely popular with the labourers. Only religious dramas like 'Markandeya', 'Vatsala Kalyanam', 'Nandanar Charitram', and 'Rajabhakti' were staged.


\(^3\) Royal Commission on Labour - op.cit., p. 135 Written Evidence of Messrs Binny & Co. (Madras) Ltd.
Union decried these attempts of the capitalists and asked its members to boycott the Welfare Committee. But the Union's efforts did not meet with success. Nevertheless in May 1922 a number of Adi-Dravidas who had recently been thrown out of work for misconduct or other reasons joined the union and sought its help.

**Birth of a Rival Union - A Protege of the Binny Company.**

In 1926, the Binny & Co. Ltd., promoted a new union namely, 'The Buckingham And Carnatic Mills Employees Union, Madras' as a rival body to the Madras Labour Union. The new union was formally started on 19 March 1926, in a meeting held under the presidency of the Justice Party leader, the Hon'ble Prof. M. Rathnaswami, who was then president of the Madras Legislative Council. The new union was permitted to hold its meetings at the Mills' Theatre. Four representatives, two from each mill were permitted to be nominated by the new union to serve in the Mills' Welfare Committee. It was reported that the capitalists had the knack of putting on the back of the new unionists. For instance, when the

1/ The Welfare Committee and the sub-committees were dissolved by the management after the Second World War in view of 'the unyielding attitude of labour. - Madras Labour Union Golden Jubilee Souvenir, op. cit., p. 72.

2/ The capitalists had granted official recognition to this rival body on 8 March 1926, ten days earlier to its formal inauguration. Perhaps the company wanted to escape any future obligation to recognize the Madras Labour Union in view of the trade union legislation then pending, which proposed to confer legal status to registered trade unions. But the Act of 1926, when implemented, did not make it obligatory on the capitalists to recognise it. The company came forward to recognize the Madras Labour Union at last in 1932, when it found it no longer possible to sustain the rival union.

The *Swadesamitran*, Madras, on 19 April 1926 wrote: "It is indeed regrettable that they (M/s. Binny & Co. Ltd.) should have come forward to recognize a union started yesterday, ignoring a union which has been working for many years past. But we warn the company not to feel elated over the fact that the matter has ended. It does not conduce to the dignity and prestige of the company that they should support a body which is being daily condemned by labourers numbering over 7000". (TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 17 of 1926)
Madras Labour Union undertook to file compensation cases free of cost to victims of accidents, the capitalists put pressure on the victims to apply for compensation through the new union and the welfare committee. Whenever the labourers persisted in applying through the Madras Labour Union, the authorities resorted to the device of depositing even small amounts with the Labour Commissioner thus depriving the labourers of immediate payment.1/

On 24 June 1926 at a meeting of the new union, its Vice-President Mr.T.V.Subramaniam Pillai said that, 'being in touch with the employer he was in a position to state that all the women workers in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills (about 250 in number) would be dismissed with effect from 1 July 1926 for their folly in joining the Madras Labour Union'. He asked whether these women workers would be found employment by Mr.Shiva Rao, the President of the Madras Labour Union. On 1 July 1926 all the women were served with a month's notice. No doubt a belated denial was sent to the papers by Mr.Subramaniam Pillai that he had made the statements attributed to him on 24 June. But Messrs. V.S.Rathnasabapathy, V.A.Manickam and M.Krishnamurti Rao who were present at his speech, confirmed the report in a letter to the press. The Hindu, New India, Swarajya and other papers condemned these wholesale dismissals on the following days. For instance, the Swarajya in its issues dated 5 July 1926 wrote: "It is clearly an attempt to wreck the Madras Labour Union by a deliberate process of victimisation. They have started with the women workers probably thinking that it would be an easy matter to bully the women workers into submission. ... The women workers have proved even more loyal and united than the men, for they have in a body resolved to face dismissal rather than disown the union ... We are afraid that if

1/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India, op.cit., p.185.
immediate steps are not taken to check the mad career of the mill authorities, serious developments are bound to follow. A public meeting was organised under the auspices of the Women's Indian Association in Gokhale Hall to protest against the company's action. But a few minutes before the meeting was to commence, however, an announcement was made that on the intervention of the Welfare Committee of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, the notices of dismissal had been cancelled. The meeting, however, thanked the company for showing a sense of fairness, and a situation which might otherwise have had serious developments was happily averted.

Progress of Labour Movement - Second Phase: Battle for Recognition.

The next phase of the struggle of the labour unions to obtain recognition from the capitalists commenced in 1927 with the implementation of the Trade Union Act of 1926. Vigorous attempts were made to resuscitate all those unions which could not breathe under the capitalist suffocation. In the Government Press where there were an epidemic of nearly 1000 dismissals and removals of men during the five years preceding 1927, the labourers formed the Madras Government Press Employees' Association on 25 June 1927, and registered it on 19 November 1927. S. Satyamurthi Aiyar, M.L.C. was elected patron; K. Bashayam, as president; T. Govindaswami Mudaliar, printer, as working president; S. Subramania Aiyar, as vice-president. The aim of the Union was announced to be not to work against the employers but to represent the grievances of the men and improve their conditions. The Union sought the Government recognition. The Government

1/ TNA - Confidential - Native Newspaper Report No. 28 of 1926 Week ending 10 July 1926, p.847.
2/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India. op.cit., p.187.
3/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India - op.cit., p.43. Evidence of Mr. J. Gray, Commissioner of Labour.
informed the union that the Government would not recognize departmental associations of non-gazetted subordinates, unless special reasons were shown which differentiated them from other non-gazetted officers for whom the central Association existed, viz., The Madras Non-Gazetted Government Officers' Association which had been recognised by the Government.

The Association after suitably amending certain rules of the Association again addressed the Government to the effect that, as the Government Press Employees' Association was purely a labour organization and trade union registered under the Indian Trade Unions Act, it stood entirely on a different footing from that of the Madras Non-Gazetted Officers' Association and the employees of the Press were governed by the Factory Act and Rules and were subject to peculiar conditions with regard to service, pay, pension leave and other matters. On this the Superintendent of the Press began to threaten and coerce the office-bearers individually with a view to break the association, while at the same time continuing his campaign against the employees by visiting them with varying degrees of punishment. It was at this time that the association elected C. Basudev, the Justice party leader as its President.

Mr. Basudev held weekly meetings drawing the attention of the Government to the very unsatisfactory conditions in the Government Press, the large number of punishment and praying for recognition and relief. This evidently infuriated the Superintendent who dismissed from service, the secretary of the association on 5 May 1928, on the sole ground of convening meetings while on leave and also the treasurer of the association who had put in nearly 30 years of service and on the verge of retirement. The treasurer had since been reinstated by Government on appeal, while the secretary
with 14 years of permanent and pensionable service to his credit found no relief from the Government. The Government were most unsympathetic and continued to insist on sweated labour and to support the reactionary policy of the superintendent and issued an order dated 5 May 1928, prohibiting Government employees from continuing or becoming members of an association registered or sought to be registered under the Indian Trade Unions Act. Thereupon the Madras Government Press Employees' Association ceased to function and the certificate of registration was cancelled by the Registrar of Trade Unions, Madras on 4 November 1929.¹

The first conference of Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Employees Union was held in Madras on 6 and 7 January 1926, under the presidency of Mr. N. M. Joshi. Mr. Joshi referred to the necessity for strengthening the union and having sufficient funds to carry on their work. He then dwelt on the attitude of the agent of the railway in imposing conditions for the recognition of the union and on their grievances as to wages, leave, medical relief, provident fund, gratuity, housing accommodation, etc. In February 1926, E. L. Aiyar and Mr. Gnanamuthu were deputed to go to Delhi to present their grievances to the members of the Legislative Assembly which was then discussing the railway budget. The second annual conference of the union was held on 6 and 9 January 1927. The attendance at the Conference was very poor and the meeting had to be adjourned precipitately owing to the disorder that was caused by the men on lower wages who grumbled that inspite of their regular payment of subscriptions, the union had not done anything for them. In April, 1927, the Union sent a deputation to the agent to discuss some of their grievances, but were greatly disappointed at the reply given.

A workman of the stores section died on 1 August 1927, and all the workmen applied for permission to attend his funeral on 2 August 1927. The foreman refused to grant the permission applied for, whereupon the men handed him an application for leave for transmission to the works manager, and left the workshops in anticipation of sanction. The next morning when they went to work as usual, they were informed that 72 men who were signatories to the leave application were suspended from duty for the day. This created a stir among them and some of them suggested a strike. But they were dissuaded by the President and Secretary of the Union. In December 1927 Mr. S. Srinivasa Aiyangar M.I.A. was elected General President of the Union. But in January 1929, the office of the General President was abolished. V.V. Giri and B. Shiva Rao were elected as President and Vice-President respectively of the union, while the former Joint President Mr. Panchakshara Achari, an employee in the workshops was divested of his post. Another Joint President of the union, Mr. S. V. Aiyar severed his connection with the union, and became president of a new union formed by certain members who seceded and started a union for non-workshop people. The new union was registered on 5 February 1929.

In the month of September 1929, there was trouble again in the Madras Electric Tramways and Supply Corporation Employees' Union, Madras. Trouble arose due to E.L. Aiyar, the Union vice-President accepting the appointment of legal adviser to the company, a position which the majority naturally regarded as incompatible with holding offices in the union. Hence E.L. Aiyar and along with him Mr. Shafi Mohamed, the then president were ousted from their offices. Mr. S. P. Y. Surendranath Vageli Arya and Mr. N. Dhandapani Pillai were elected as president and vice-president respectively at
a midnight meeting of the union. Both Mr. Arya and Mr. Pillai were now leaders of the Justice Party. The Union was registered on 18 January 1929. A series of conversations took place in March 1929, between the representatives of the union and the agent and the agent designate and Commissioner of labour. The result was embodied in a number agreements providing for the recognition of the Union by the employers subject to various stipulations and for the manner in which grievances and other matters should be represented to the Company. This represented an important step in the formation of definite understanding between employers and the union of their employees. 1

Outlook of Justice Party Leaders towards Labour Movement:

The outlook of these Justice Party leaders who had been elected to the labour union was revealed when they said: "The labour movement is not an anti-capitalist movement in the sense that it is out to destroy capital. It does not believe in the mere negative propaganda; it believes in the positive gospel of reconstruction. It believes in elevating the labourers who are deprived of their primary privileges and rights and on whose unremitting and unrewarded labour society lives. It is a movement inspired by the sentiments

1/ The new labour leaders belonging to the Justice Party did not believe in the exclusive prerogatives of either the noisy, blustering and one-sided extreme labour workers nor in the threats of coercion of some of the conservative and narrow minded pro-capitalist-propagandists. They said: "Both employers and employees are human beings. As human beings it is but natural to err. Sinlessness and infallibility are not the monopoly of either class of people. Neither a council exclusively composed of capitalists alone can understand the difficulties of the labourers, nor a council exclusively composed of the labourers, can understand the financial or otherwise difficult problems of the capitalists. It is the tie of friendship, fellow-feeling and goodwill prevailing in the deliberations of a joint council of both the employers and employees that will enable us to achieve better results than mere harsh and angry words or autocratic and dogmatic assertions". (Royal Commission on Labour in India, op.cit., p.105. Evidence of S.P.Y. Surenaranath Voogoli Aryal)
of love and justice for men and women who have to work hard with their hands without being properly cared for any recompense".\(^1\) They also stated that capital was as necessary as labour; that capital without labour was as barren and unproductive as a store of electricity which without a machine could not display its marvellous power; that labour without capital was as useless as a well-built machine without electric current in it; and that capital and labour must go together. They said: "We believe in a labour-capital movement. Every labourer must be looked upon as a capitalist and every capitalist as a labourer. Our Union believes in the idea of service and not in the idea of profit. Where the latter idea prevails and mammon sits on the throne, there authority, coercion and cruel conceptions of discipline are invoked to break the will of the labourers. Where the idea of profit is the dominant idea there the creative worker is transformed into a submissive automation and a tool of the boss, but where the idea of service is the main motive power, there kindness, understanding, co-operation and mutual goodwill are called forth, and lazy, dull, careless and irresponsible workmen are converted into willing, diligent and original contributors to the wealth and happiness of this world".\(^2\)

The Madras Kerosene Oil Workers' Union headed by M. Singaravelu organised a serious strike in the Burma Oil Company, Madras during April and May 1927; the strike lasted

1/ ibid.
2/ ibid.

They said: "We do not believe that economic justice will alone solve all the ills and evils of humanity. It is something more fundamental and much deeper than the principle of economic justice. Economic justice would be meted out only when the employers and employees are governed and controlled by higher and nobler conceptions of life. The whole problem is one of inward attitude towards our fellow-beings, purified, sublimated and humanised by higher moral and spiritual principles of life".(ibid).
26 days and came to a successful end on 17 May 1927. The
strike began on account of reduction of the staff made by the
company and the removal of certain benches in the machine
shop which were previously provided for some of the men.
Official and unofficial mediation had almost succeeded in
bring the dispute to an end when, on 10 May 1927 a lorry
coming from the Burma Oil Company installation at Tondiarpet
was attacked and set ablaze by strikers. The Commissioner of
Police brought reinforcements and resorted to repressive
measures to quell violence. At this, the labourers of the
Asiatic Petroleum Company and Standard Oil Company also struck
work in sympathy. Finally when the labourers returned to work
on 17 May 1927, the criminal cases ensuing on the fracas of
10 May 1927 were withdrawn; and proceedings taken under the
security section against M.Sangaravelu were also dropped on
his undertaking to refrain from inciting disorders. 1/ Later,
in the beginning of 1929, V.M.Ramaswami Mudaliar of the Congress
and T.M.Parthasarathy Mudaliar of the Justice Party were
elected as President and Vice-President respectively of the
union. T.Muthuswamy Pillai and R.Ketari Muthu Chetty were
wore elected as its Secretaries.

The Madras Harbour and Port Trust Workmen's Union
was started in October 1925 with V.L.Sastri and N.Sriramulu,
as its President and Secretary respectively. But the Chairman
of The Port Trust refused to grant them interview for the
representation of the men's grievances. In May 1926 M.Singarave-
lu was elected as President in the place of V.L.Sastri.
By this time S.P.Y.Surendranath Voegeli Arya and V.L.Sastri
were elected as President and Vice-President respectively
of the Madras Printers' Union. M.Singaravelu, V.Chakkarai
Chetty, E.L.Aiyar and Thiru Vi.Ka. were practically controlling

1/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India - op.cit., p.28
Evidence by the Government of Madras.
and conducting the affairs of such other unions as the
Massey & Co. Workshop Employees Union, the Diocesan Printers' Union, the Madras Corporation Scavengers' Union, the Corporation Workshop Employees' Union and the Madras Aluminium Labour Union.

Labour Strikes and Collapse of the Choolai Mill.

There had been a series of strikes ranging in duration from a few hours to a few months in the Madras United Spinning and Weaving Mills Co. Ltd., known as the Choolai Mill, on various occasions for various reasons including wage rise and better conditions. The experience of the Madras Labour Union in the Choolai Mill had been for several years that, whenever representations were made to the local authorities of the Mill, the Union was used to be told that only the head office in Bombay could deal with the matter; when, however, the head office was approached, the Union would be told that the men on the spot must decide. Thus the Union had to shuttle between Madras and Bombay every time. However the unending discord between the Mill and the Union finally resulted in the liquidation of the Mill itself as shown below.

The introduction of the two loom system in 1928 brought about a great deal of discontent among the men, who feared that there would be retrenchment on a large scale in consequence of this system. The weavers also protested against the offer of the management of a fifty per cent wage on the second loom and the bad materials supplied. A committee was appointed by the Labour Commissioner, but not until the men had downed tools after patiently waiting for several months. It is significant that, while men had demanded 75 percent on the second loom, the committee appointed by the Labour Commissioner, after careful investigation, came to the conclusion that the men should be paid 80 percent on the
second loom or, 5 percent more than the original demand of the men. But however the management as usual had sought various pretexts for putting off the grant of many of these concessions. In a prolonged wage dispute during 1938, the company expressed its inability to concede to the Union's demands. Owing to continued loss, it wound up its business, closed down the mill and went in for voluntary liquidation on 8 May 1939.¹

Communists and militant unionism.

As stated in the preceding Chapter the Communists became very active in Madras during the 1930s. A band of dedicated young communists and socialists namely, P.Jeevanandam, A.S.K. Aiyangar, B.Srinivasa Rao, P.Ramamurthi, K.Murugesan, V.Subbiah, P.Sundarayya, P.Rajavadiivelu, M.Kalyanasundaram and Russia Manickam assisted the leaders namely, M.Singaravelu, Amir Haidar Khan and S.V.Shahe in establishing communist cells and labour unions in various industries and other establishments. Some of the important unions organised by them were the Press Workers Union, the Madras Tramway and Electric Supply Workers Union, the Toddy Tappers Union, the South Indian Railway Labour Union, the Madras Corporation Workers' Union. Unlike reformist unions militancy and political demands were the important characters of these unions. Since these leaders realised that caste prejudices and religious beliefs created obstacles in the way of class struggle and class unity, they exhorted their 'comrades' to fight against them. The Communist leader M.Singaravelu presiding over the 'Madras Atheists Conference' held in Madras on 31 December 1933 warned: "Comrades, crucial battles are ahead of us. So we cannot rest on our oars now... Religious beliefs and other age-old obscurantist ideas are

thrust down the throat of people. This is a dangerous trend. Gandhiji advocates religion and theism. Further he is trying to make some re-adjustment in caste system at least to reform it.... The so-called removal of untouchability is a mere device to strengthen religious beliefs among the people. The untouchables numbering about 6 crores are economically poor and downtrodden. What they need is not God or religion. They need a square meal a day and an opportunity to earn a decent livelihood. There is another danger ahead. The Hindu Mahasabha, the Sanatanists, Muslim communalists etc., are still striving hard to capture the legislative assembly so that theism can be enthroned again. These are the worst reactionaries in this unfortunate land. Beware comrades, not to lose this opportunity for contesting and capturing every seat in every village and panchayat, in every taluk and district boards. Fearless expose the sham of casteism and oppression. Dethrone ignorance and theism. Please enthroned in its place Atheism and Socialism. ¹ One of Singaravelu’s dedicated disciples P.Jeévanandam emerged as the most popular mass leader in Madras, and wielded a very great influence with the working class as its true friend and tireless fighter in the cause of communism. One of his songs describes in a vivid manner the despicable and appalling state of poverty of the working masses. ² Another of his song ridicules theism and declares that there is no God. ³


² The poem begins with the theme of exploitation thus:
"இன்னைல் எவ்வளவு நீங்க நோயா
நேர்முறை எப்படி வந்தா
பாறா காண்பதும் ஏன் – ஏல் செய்யுங்கா
செய்யுங்கா வந்து ஏன் (மடலு)

and continued as given in Appendix No.IV,(i)

³ A stanza from this poem reads thus:
"உனக்கு எனது வாழ்வின் உருமாறா
சாய்வது உணை குறிப்பிடும்

the entire poem is as given in Appendix No.IV,(ii)
In 1937 M. Singaravelu was elected as the President of the Madras Tramway and Electric Supply Workers Union, for which one Mr. V. S. Somasundaram, a communist, was made the General Secretary. The General Secretary of the union was suddenly dismissed on the afternoon of 1 March 1937 and there was a lightning strike early in the morning of the following day by the workers. In spite of the fact that only three workers out of the 220 men of the morning shift presented themselves for work at 5 a.m., the Company was able to begin working the trams in full strength by 9 a.m., and the workers began to drift back that very day and on the following two days, and they were taken back as they came without penalty. All except 155 men had returned by the evening of 4 March. Of the 155 men, five persons namely M. Natesa Mudaliar, M. Annaswami Mudaliar, M. Natesa Mudaliar, A. Ramanathan and R. E. Ethirajulu were singled out and dismissed for 'unsatisfactory performance of their duties, which included conduct; the other 150 men were allowed to rejoin duty with penalty.\footnote{1}

The labourers lay low at that time and exactly a year after, on 11 March 1938, the majority of the labourers decided by secret ballot to go on strike demanding reinstatement of the 5 men dismissed in the earlier strike. The Government of Madras intervened and appointed on 3 May 1938, Justice V. Pandurang Row as arbitrator to inquire into the matter of dispute. The Arbitrator decided 'that the five persons mentioned in the issue were not re-engaged, not for unsatisfactory performance of their duties, which included conduct and that they were victimized for association with the Labour Union and the strike of March 1937'.\footnote{2} The Company thereafter had given effect to the award and agreed to pay them wages for the period of their enforced unemployment.

\footnote{2}{Ibid, p.252.}
The Company agreed also to refund the forfeited annual increments and the fine of three days' wages imposed on those workers who had taken part in the strike of 1937.\(^1\)

On 28 October 1939, P. Jeevanandam, who was then President of the Madras Presidency Trade Union Congress, was arrested for criticising the Second World War as Imperialist War, and was released from prison after two and a half months. On 11 January 1940, he was asked to leave the Madras Presidency, but in March 1940 he was again arrested and kept in Vellore jail.\(^2\) At this time about 150 communists including S.V. Ghathe and A.S.K. Aiyangar were also languishing in Vellore jail. In 1942 they were all released from jail in view of their 'peoples' War' approach. Their intensified activities in the trade union movement during 1942-48 brought several unions under their sway.

Caste and Comunal considerations in Labour Representation.

The question of representation of labour in the central and provincial legislatures had assumed considerable importance ever since the signalling of Reforms in 1919. Early in 1924 an attempt was made by a labour deputation before the Reforms Enquiry Committee presided over by Sir Alexander Muddiman to secure better representation for labour in legislatures. Though the Committee recommended the introduction of the elective principle for labour, there was no appreciable change in the policy of the Government towards labour. The Indian Central Committee presided over by Sir C. Sankaran Nair suggested the reservation of one seat for industrial labour in the case of Madras Presidency. C. Basudev, the labour leader of the Justice Party was nominated against this seat in the Madras Legislative Council in 1930.\(^3\) S.H.

\(^1\) ibid. p.5
\(^2\) BALATHANDAYUTHAM K - writes: "1940 க்குச் சொத்தாக 11-ம் சடாம்பியர் கோபாலா இரழ்வு போன்ற விளக்கம் என்றும் கூறியவர் 1937 க்கு முன்பிருந்து கொண்டார். "
\(^3\) ibid. p.49
Slater, the Labour Commissioner to the Government of Madras stated before the Indian Statutory Commission that Industrial labour force was infinitesimally small that there was no need for any political and special representation for labour in the council.1

Every Commission and Committee appointed thereafter in connection with reforms also paid considerable attention to this question of enfranchisement of Labour - (1) the Provincial Franchise Committee set up by the various Provincial Governments in India in 1931; (2) the Franchise Sub Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference, (3) the Indian Franchise Committee; (4) the Provincial Delimitation Committee set up by local Governments in India; and (5) the Indian Delimitation Committee set up in 1935 under the Chairmanship of Sir Lawrie Hammond.

The Royal Commission on Labour in India was of opinion that the method which was likely to be most effective in securing the best representation of Labour was that of election by registered trade unions. The Indian Franchise Committee were, however, unable to accept trade unions as the sole basis of representation and they recommended representation through constituencies composed of registered trade unions and also through special labour constituencies composed of workers in factories employing a minimum of ten persons in selected areas and centres. On the basis of a combination of these two methods, the Committee recommended six seats in the provincial legislature in the case of Madras Presidency.2

2/ At the XII session of the AITUC which met at Madras on 10 September 1932, J.N.Mitra in his presidential address observed: "The working class cannot gain anything from any reforms granted to India with the consent of the British Parliament. The future reforms will not be granted to the Indian people but to the native allies of imperialism. Therefore, in my opinion there is no reason for the Trade unionists to gloat over the creation of labour constituencies in various provinces of the country". (PREM SAGAR GUPTA - (Ed) op.cit., p.220.)
Earlier when the Indian Franchise Committee visited Madras for taking Evidence, Mr. J. Sivashanmugam Pillai, representing the All-India Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, Madras, recorded the following before it: "I propose vocational basis of representation not by election but by nomination. In nominating labour representatives caste also should be taken into consideration. India is a peculiar country in which caste predominates. All the labourers in the tanneries are depressed classes. All the owners of the tanneries except a few are Mohammadans. A Mohammadan labourer who represents, say, the mill labourers, will not sympathise with the tannery labourer. The Mohammadan labourer will join his co-religionist, I mean, the Mohammadan tannery owner. Hence I pay special attention to caste."¹ Such a statement from a responsible leader like J. Sivashanmugam Pillai makes it once again clear that caste prejudices and conflicts deterred the labour from developing on the basis of class consciousness. The evidence cited above supports the hypothesis that class consciousness disappears before the ubiquitous caste consciousness. Mr. C. Basudev deposed in his evidence that till the adult franchise was a feasibility in India there should be provision for special representation of labour. But he opposed the view that the registered trade unions should be accepted as the basis of franchise. He considered that the bigger unions dominated by Brahmin leaders in Madras would swamp the smaller unions.² His view was supported by two others of the Justice Party's labour leaders Mr. S. Natesa Mudaliar and T. M. Parthasarathy Mudaliar.³ The President of the Madras Port Trust Workers' Union, Mr. Mani Kotiswara Mudaliar supported the franchise for labour through registered Trade Unions.⁴

² ibid.
³ ibid.
In 1935, the Indian Delimitation Committee raised the question again whether registered trade unions should form constituencies for labour or whether as an alternative a special labour constituency should be created. Mr. B. Shiva Rao, the President of the Madras Labour Union in his evidence before the Committee stated the following:

"a) only registered trade unions should be regarded as constituencies for the special labour seats in each province;

b) voting should be direct, by all the members of such Unions and not through electoral colleges;

c) in areas where such unions do not exist or are too weak to be entrusted with the responsibility, provisional arrangements may be recommended for special labour constituencies, but only for a temporary period; and

d) there should be no restrictions placed upon unions in electing their representatives, whether workers, ex-workers or outsiders who are members of the Executive Committees".  

However Mr. C. Basudev reiterated his view before the Indian Delimitation Committee also. He said that he was against giving representation to trade unions as they were not satisfactorily functioning. He observed that by artificially encouraging trade unions, the real interests of labour could not be secured; and that if they recognized trade unions they would be placing the workers' destinies in the hands of political tricksters. His experience of trade union movement in the Presidency was that it was directed against European employers: it was run on racial grounds.

He said that in the case of unorganised labour, outsiders might represent it. But in the case of trade unions only workers should represent. The Indian Delimitation Committee recommended that out of six seats given to labour in Madras Presidency, all railway unions in the presidency and unions of textile workers in the Madras District got one seat each and the four remaining seats were divided between special labour constituencies of (1) textile workers in Coimbatore and Malabar, (2) Madras city Dock and factory labour (excluding railways and textiles), (3) Vizagapatnam dock and factory labour, and (4) West Godavari, Kistna and Guntur factory labour.

When Trade Unions were made the channels of elections, party dissensions and, caste and communal prejudices teared off the Indian Trade Union movement. With the advent of Provincial autonomy, and the formation of Ministries, every Ministerial Party tried to utilise the trade unions for their own purposes and the Trade Unions became the preys to ministerial job hunting. The AITUC President R.S. Ruikar said: "I think it will be an evil day for Trade Unionism when Trade Unions are dragged into the elections, by being made the electorates. Already communalism has made its appearance in the Trade Union Movement; but the evil of communalism will be aggravated by the creation of Trade Union constituencies. Trade Unions will be exploited for Party and communal purposes. Already .... the Railway Labour Franchise and creation of Trade Union constituency in Madras appears more an apple of discord". He said further: "I feel that the creation of Trade Union constituency will definitely give a setback to the Trade Unionism. Mushroom Trade unions set up by Communal leaders or prospective ministers will be

the order of the day and the Trade Union Movement will be
torn to pieces on the rocks of party and communal strife.
The healthy growth of Trade Unionism is only possible if the
Trade Unions are not made the basis of elections to the
Legislatures". 1/ The President of the National Trades Union
Federation, Jammadas N. Mehta in his presidential address to
the Second Session of the Federation at Nagpur, on 29 December
1935 warned: "Communal champions and Government henchmen
prowl about a large number of unions and use them for their
private ends. The economic side of the struggle has not yet
received sufficient attention and politics largely dominate
the movement; slogans are expected to take the place of spade
work". 2/

Efforts to federate the labour unions in the city under
a common banner were made from the beginning by vested interests.
On 29 October 1918 Mrs. Besant's New India announced the
formation of a Central Labour Board in Madras committed to
the definite objects of the establishment of new unions in
the city and province, and the creation of harmonious relations
between capital and labour. 3/ The Congress leaders took it
cool because they would not yield to the Theosophists' dominance
and hence the Central Labour Board did not take off. 4/

2/ Indian Labour Journal, Nagpur, dated 29 December 1935o.(iii)
3/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of
India No.3891-W-I dated 1 November 1918.
Thiru Vi.Ka. writes: "நோக்கிச்சித் நிலையாகும் விளக்கங்கள் அல
கீழ்க்குறிச்சித் நிலையாகும் விளக்கங்கள் என்றும் இது
தொகு. முடி எனும் அடிப்படையில் உள்ள விளக்கங்கள்
நேரிய விளக்கங்களுடன் நேரிய விளக்கங்களைக் குறிப்பிட்டு
செய்ய வேண்டாம்" (Tamil)
In July 1919 under the Chairmanship of Dewan Bahadur P. Kesava Pillai, a Central Advisory Labour Board was constituted by men like G.S. Arundale with a view to assist and coordinate the activities of various labour unions in the city.

On 21 March 1920, the first Madras Provincial Labour Conference was held in Madras with P. Kesava Pillai presiding and Thiru Vi.Ka. acting as reception committee chairman. The conference attended by over 3000 labourers from various parts of the Province urged the Government to ensure a minimum wage from the employers and to nominate labour representatives to the legislative council. At this time Harisarvathama Rao and T. Adinarayana Chetty took efforts to constitute a new Central Labour Board. Finally on 4 July 1920, a new Central Labour Board with Thiru Vi.Ka. as President and Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya as Secretary was constituted. Thereafter the Board took efforts to affiliate to it all the unions in the city and conducted public meetings at Marina on every Sunday, to which the union members came with flags in strong processions, shouting slogans for labour unity. In March 1922, a meeting of the Board resolved that all the trade unions in the city should be reconstituted, and that the labour leaders should be asked to take special interest in the matter of reviving the unions. Another Provincial Labour conference was held under the auspices of the Board on 16 and 17 February, 1924 under the Presidentship of Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu. The Conference expressed its disapproval of Singaravelu's Labour and Kisan Party of Hindustan.

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No. 1209-W-1 dated 3 April 1920.
2/ At this time a letter from Mr. Wadia to all labour unions advising them to keep clear of politicians and the Gandhi propaganda flustered the non-co-operators, who re-doubled their efforts to make further inroads in labour movement. (TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report sent to Govt. of India - No. 173-0-1, dated 20 May 1921).
4/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports sent to Govt. of India. No. 2288-1, Public dated 4 March 1924.
In the 1925 elections M. Singaravelu and V. Chakkarai Chetty were elected to the Madras Corporation respectively from the Elephant Gate and Choolai Divisions in the city, on the Congress Swarajist Party tickets. In April 1927 there was a serious rift in the Madras Congress Swarajist Party between M. Singaravelu and the Brahmin leaders, namely S. Satyamurthy Aiyar, Rangaswami Aiyangar and Srinivas Aiyangar in the matter of selection of candidates for the Madras Corporation elections.\(^1\) As a result M. Singaravelu formed a separate party, namely the 'Labour Political Party', to contest the civil elections.\(^2\) His new party and the Madras Labour Union jointly helped V. Chakkarai Chetty and G. Selvapathy Chetty to win the elections to the Corporation respectively from Pedduraickenpet and Perambur divisions in 1927.\(^3\) But in the 1928 elections Mr. Selvapathy Chetty lost his seat to the Justice Party.\(^4\)

Anticipating new reforms in the constitution many prominent leaders of labour, during 1933/35, formed various political parties, which were mostly shortlived. V. V. Giri formed the Provincial Labour Political Party at a conference of trade union leaders and workers held in Madras in August 1933.\(^5\) In February 1934, V. M. Ramaswami Mudaliar, M. L. C., founded the Political Labour Party with a view to establish a swaraj constitution on a socialistic basis and to socialize all the means of production, distribution and exchange.\(^6\)

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1/ ANAIMUTHU, V. (Ed.): Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R. - Speeches and Writings of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy, op.cit., Vol.III, p.1722. Periyar condemned 'the Brahmin machinations' to capture power for themselves in the Madras Corporation, in the then ensuing elections. (ibid)

2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Reports No. 7/0-1 dated 2 May 1927.


4/ The Royal Commission on Labour in India - op. cit., p.178.

5/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report No. p.4-16, dated 22 August 1933.

6/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report No. p.4-4, dated 20 February 1934.
Immediately in April, that year, G. Selvapathy Chetty founded the Madras Young Men's Labour League. Again, in May 1934, Mr. Selvapathy Chetty formed two more organisations, namely, the South Indian Labour Political Party and the South Indian Central Labour Board. In June 1934, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, 'the professional agitator', convened a meeting of about 80 persons representing various labour unions in the city and with their approval formed the Central Labour Political Party with a view to bring together all the rival labour parties. On 1 January 1935, G.S. Arundale launched in Madras a new political party namely, the Indian National League.

In January 1935 at the First Provincial Labour Conference held at Golden Rock, G. Basudev, M.L.C. set up a new national labour organisation called the All-India Trades Union Federation with himself as the Secretary and Mr. T.V.K. Naidu as the President. He alleged that the AITUC had become anti-government and the National Trades Union Federation had become the monopoly of outsiders. He said that under the guise of patriotism and nationalism the Congress had done nothing but to serve the interests of the rich mill owners and capitalists. In March 1935, he was unanimously elected as the President of the Madras Provincial Labour Party at its conference held in Madras.

1/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report No. p.4-11 dated 5 June 1934.
2/ TNA - Confidential - Fortnightly Report No. p.4-18 dated 20 September 1933.
Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu contended that he was offered the presidency originally; that he also accepted it; and that now he was cheated like this. But V.O.C. expressed happiness over the choice of C. Basudev for the presidency of the party. V.O.C. said that the time had arrived when labour should seek to benefit from every organisation in the country prepared to work for its uplift; that the country had room for any number of parties; and that labour had but to go with its own organisation so long as the other organisations in the country did not come to clash with its ideals. V.O.C. also said that he was one of those that welcomed the advent of the Justice Party, for it was with its advent that non-Brahmins as a class came to assert their self-respect. V.O.C. unwillingly advocated caste consciousness in labour as well as in society.¹

Thus it could be seen from the foregoing analysis that the tentacles of casteism and communalism crept into the labour movement andcribbed its growth. Thiru Vi.Ka. after a dedicated twenty five years of service to the cause of labour, as its brave and intrepid soldier, looked back with nostalgia and lamented that, casteism and communalism besides other factors retarded the growth of the labour movement in India.²

¹/ Indian Labour Journal, Nagpur, dated 17 March 1935. p.3.

²/ See APPENDIX No.III for a detailed statement of Thiru Vi.Ka.'s Views on Labour.