THE IMPACT
OF
THE INDIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
ON
GUJARAT
CHAPTER 3
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While the general course of the Indian trade union movement was passing through an uneven channel, full of disunity and political pressure, a different trend was quietly working in Ahmedabad, building up an organisation known popularly as the Majoor Mahajan or the Textile Labour Association.

This association was established in 1920, owing to the efforts of Shrimati Anasuyabehn Sarabhai and Shri Shankarlal Banker. The former was the sister of Shri Ambalal Sarabhai, a very prominent mill owner and the latter had very close relations with a number of mill-owners. Another significant factor for the success of the Textile Labour Association was the guidance received by it from Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation.

The unions in Ahmedabad were formed on a craft basis and the Majoor Mahajan was the federation of those craft unions. Some of the craft unions that were formed were the Weavers' Union, the Winders' Union, the Throstle Union, etc. The unions began to function more and more as departments of the Association which gradually became, for all practical purposes, an
The unions were the result of a strike which took place in 1918. Mahatma Gandhi played a prominent part in the successful termination of the strike. The strike was conducted in an exceptionally disciplined and peaceful manner. It established permanently the principle of arbitration which has since then governed industrial relations in Ahmedabad. It laid the foundation for a mighty union known as the Textile Association actually established on 25th February, 1920, about two years after the successful termination of the strike. The union was established in order to carry on labour work on Gandhian lines. Mahatma Gandhi was a member of its Advisory Committee until his death. He was a member of the Board of Arbitration on behalf of the union until about 1935 when he had to resign owing to his pre-occupations with the national movement. It was the basic policy of the union to settle all disputes through representations and negotiations and failing them, through arbitration and not to resort to direct action without exhausting all other means of securing redress. There was a permanent Board of Arbitration consisting of one representative each of the union and of the millowners. In the case of a disagreement between the two, the matter was to be referred to an umpire, whose decision was final and binding upon both parties.

The arbitration machinery received its first jolt in 1921. The union had asked for a bonus of a month and half's wages out of the profits declared in the
in the year 1920. Gandhiji was of the opinion that the demand was fair and justified. The other arbitrator, however, held that bonus was an ex-gratia payment and that workers could not demand it as a matter of right. Standing firm by that view he would not also agree to the appointment of an Umpire. Consequently, there was a deadlock. Gandhiji advised the workers to go on a strike. But before the strike could begin, Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was then in Ahmedabad intervened and persuaded the mill-owners to agree to place the dispute before an Umpire. Ultimately, Malaviya was himself appointed the Umpire and the strike was avoided. The Umpire, partially granted the workers' demand.

Inspite of the machinery, a strike could not be avoided in 1923. It took place because the mill-owners wanted to impose a wage cut of 15½ per cent on the ground that the industry was facing a serious crisis. Though conducted in a peaceful manner, the strike did not succeed and the union had to call off the strike and ask the workers to accept the wage cut. This led to a temporary set-back to the union.

The Directory of Trade Unions published by the All India Trade Union Congress in 1925 said about the Textile Labour Association, that it was one of the most highly organised and ably conducted unions in India and that it had been doing almost everything for its members that could be done in a trade union movement. It conducted many successful strikes and got for its members a variety of benefits.
The Textile Labour Association now expanded its role. All manner of social reform fell within its scope. These included campaign for removal of untouchability, adoption of Khadi and Swadeshi and fight against consumption of liquor.

Initially, the Association did not look beyond Ahmedabad. But, gradually as it became well known in other parts of the country for its success, it received requests for help from other centres. In 1926, it took interest in the struggle of textile workers in Indore. Later, it took interest in similar struggles in Broach, Nadiad, Baroda and other places. At all these places efforts were made to develop conciliation and arbitration machinery on the lines of the machinery in Ahmedabad and to build organisations on the lines of the Textile Labour Association. In 1932, workers of New Shorrock Mills in Nadiad strick work, seeking recognition of their right to form the Majoor Mahajan on the Ahmedabad model. Lacking infrastructure to sustain a prolonged strike, the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad sanctioned Rs. 23000 to support the workers of this mill. The money was improperly used in distribution of foodgrain, pulses etc. which made the workers dependent upon an external support not approved of by Mahatma Gandhi who emphasised self-reliance among striking workers through alternative craft. The inevitable demoralisation among workers after remaining for six months without wages, broke the strike. However, the management later allowed the formation of Majoor Mahajan in the Nadiad mill. Subsequently, Majoor Mahajans were also formed at Jetlad, Baroda, Surat, Bhavnagar.
In 1937, the General Secretary of the Textile Labour Association became a Parliamentary Secretary in the Government of Bombay and introduced through legislation a machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes on the lines of the machinery in Ahmedabad. Later in 1945, the workers of the Association formed in co-operation with Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel and others, the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh with the object of spreading the Ahmedabad experiment to other centres and to build up trade unions on Gandhian lines. A year later it was felt necessary to establish a new central organisation of labour and Association took the lead in forming it. The Indian National Trade Union Congress, which draws many of its leaders from the Association, is in essence an attempt to extend the Ahmedabad experiment to the country as a whole.

The Association received a large measure of co-operation from the mill-owners. Before the Roy Commission the representative of Government of
Bombay said: "If the workers do not get redress after the matter has been discussed between the Millowners' Association and the Labour Union, the matter is finally referred to the Permanent Arbitration Board.

We understand that in case of disagreement between the arbitrators the dispute is referred to an umpire acceptable to both and his decision is binding.

The system is admirable in its intentions and has had a substantial measure of success".

The significance of the Textile Labour Association lies in the fact that it was for Mahatma Gandhi a laboratory for his work amongst labourers. Gandhiji had a broad and integrated outlook on life and he was concerned with all sections of the people and with their manifold problems. He wrote in one of his books: "If I had my way, I would regulate all the labour organisations of India after the Ahmedabad model." The organisation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress in 1947 can be regarded as a fulfilment, though very partial, of that desire.

Gandhiji said that the labour unions should "aim to raise the moral and intellectual height of labour and thus by sheer merit make labour master of the means of production instead of being the slave that it is." Thus, the experiment that began in Ahmedabad, assumed an all-India character.

In 1921, Gulzarilal Nanda came to Ahmedabad for doing some research work in the labour field for his doctorate. He met Gandhiji and Shankarlal Banker who successfully persuaded him to take up labour work.

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Gulzarilal Nanda gave up his research work and joined the Textile Labour Association as its Secretary. Another person to join the Association soon after was Khandubhai K. Desai, a brilliant student of the Wilson College, Bombay. Thus, the Ahmedabad union was able to secure the services of ardent, selfless and capable workers for carrying on its activities almost from the very beginning.

The several benefits the Association was conferring on its members within five years of its existence can be appreciated from the observations made by the AITUC in 1925:

"This Federation is one of the most highly organised and ably conducted unions in India. It has been doing almost everything for its members that can be done in a trade union movement and has been for all practical purposes recognised by the Millowners' Association of Ahmedabad. It has conducted many a local strike and has come out successful on more occasions than one. It pays to its members a number of benefits including the strike benefit and has introduced from June 1, 1925, the system of victimisation benefit from half to full pay. It has successfully introduced the system of collecting subscriptions by localities. It has also initiated a scheme for opening savings bank account for members. The bank is going to pay interest at the rate of 6 per cent. The union has recently hired a chawl with 55 tenements and has arranged to let these to its members at Rs. 3.50 per tenement instead of Rs. 4.50 which they would have required to
pay to the contractor. It has been conducting 20 schools, maintaining a hospital and lending money to members at a cheap rate of interest."

The All India Trade Union Congress approached Gandhi with a request to affiliate his Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad with the AITUC. Gandhi replied that he was making a unique experiment in trade union movement and that Ahmedabad was his laboratory for the purpose. However, the AITUC could not succeed in making the trade unions of this country follow the Gandhian objectives, means and methods and therefore the Textile Labour Association remained outside the AITUC all along, until, on the eve of independence, the INTUC was formed with the blessings of Gandhi to fulfil his dream of covering the country with a network of trade unions on his Ahmedabad pattern.

The worldwide trade depression in the early 1930's also affected India. In 1933 more than 50,000 workers in Bombay city alone were thrown out of employment. In 1934 almost every mill in Bombay and elsewhere introduced wage cuts. The workers were powerless to resist these onslaughts by the employers. Wherever they resisted, such as the jute workers strike in Bengal, the Tata Colliery Workers' strike in Bihar and the Textile Workers' strike in Bombay, their efforts ended in failure. Again, the communists launched a general strike in the textile industry in Bombay, Nagpur and Sholapur in 1934. The Government banned the Communist Party and declared the trade unions controlled by them illegal. The strike
leaders were detained and prosecuted under the Trade Disputes Act.

While attempts at rationalisation were being resisted by such abortive strikes under the leadership of the communists throughout the country, in Ahmedabad a peaceful and disciplined struggle to meet the same threat resulting in unemployment and retrenchment was going on under the leadership of the TLA.

Following the termination of the first world war the wages had not kept pace with the rise in prices. Consequently, there was acute distress and discontent amongst workers. Industries had, on the other hand, developed during the war years and were experiencing a period of prosperity. A number of new industries had grown and they, along with the old established industries, were making big profits. It was more profitable for them to concede the demands of workers and keep the factories working than to resist the demands and face stoppages of work. Moreover, during those couple of years there was a comparative shortage of workers owing to the epidemic of influenza which swept through the country. Workers were thus in a better bargaining position. All this helped the growth of trade unions and, as some concessions were secured through their efforts, workers rallied to them in large numbers.

Another factor which helped was the new upsurge of the national movement. The Home Rule agitation, the Montague Chelmsford reforms, the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwallah Bagh tragedy were some of the important
events influencing the minds of the people. Many trade unions were formed in those days by political leaders or under their inspiration and guidance. The political ferment that followed the end of the war had a beneficial effect on the growth of trade unions. Workers were now prepared to stand up for their rights and to resist their ill-treatment or their exploitation. This new psychological atmosphere also helped the growth of unions.

Some of the second world war developments on the trade union movement in the country and consequently on Gujarat, can also be discussed. The most important development of the period was the establishment of the Indian National Trade Union Congress which took place in May 1947. The nationalist elements working in the All India Trade Union Congress were all along feeling uncomfortable with its domination by the communists and with the activities that were being carried on by the organisation under their influence. Since 1944 the All India Trade Union Congress had become more or less a communist organisation. Its communist complexion became more pronounced in 1946, after the formation of popular Ministries in the Provinces. By this time the relations between the communists and congressmen had become completely estranged. The communists adopted a hostile attitude towards Congress Ministries. They did not also like the prospect of Congress leaders becoming the rulers of the country. They thought it to be in their
interests to stir up troubles, to foment strikes and thus do whatever they could to embarrass Congress Ministries in Provinces and make things difficult for the Congress Organisation as a whole. In view of these differences regarding ultimate aims as well as immediate tactics and strategy it became impossible for Congressmen and Communists to work together in the same Organisation. Congressmen were, moreover, feeling the need of a central trade union organisation which would generally support the policies of the Congress and Congress Governments and keep the workers away from the influence of opposition parties and the trade unions under their control. The situation became ripe for a definite step in that direction in 1947.

The desirability of organising trade unions on Gandhian lines was felt by many Congress leaders since long. But they were too busy with political and constructive work of many different types. The need became urgent after the formation of Congress Ministries in 1937. In that year the Gandhi Seva Sangh set up a Labour Sub-committee. On the recommendation of the Sub-committee, the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh was established in 1938 with the object of training labour workers and of building up with their help trade unions on constructive and peaceful lines. The work was interrupted from time to time by political developments, but by 1945 the Sangh had a number of trained workers in various industrial centres. In August 1946 the working committee of the Indian National Congress adopted a resolution advising
Congressmen engaged in labour work to follow the lead that may be given from time to time by the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh.

The Mazdoor Sevak Sangh tried for some time to persuade the A.I.T.U.C. to accept its principles and to act according to them. By a resolution adopted on November 17, 1946 it directed all unions with which it was connected to affiliate themselves with the A.I.T.U.C. The association lasted for only six months. The experience convinced the Sangh that it was not possible to persuade the A.I.T.U.C. to change its policies or to rescue it out of the hands of the Communists. The parting of ways then became inevitable.

The decision to establish a new organisation was taken at a conference of Congressmen engaged in labour work and other trade-unionists inclined towards the Congress, held in New Delhi in May 1947. Gulzarilal Nanda, the Secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh and the chief organiser of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad, who was then the Labour Minister in Bombay, was the convener of the conference. In his letter of invitation he had stated: "Congressmen in general, and particularly those working in the field of labour, have found it very difficult to co-operate any longer with Trade Union Congress which has repeatedly been adopting a course completely disregarding, or even in opposition to, the declared policy and advice of the Indian National Congress." Vallabhbhai Patel, the President of the Central Board of the Mazdoor Sevak...
Sangh, presided over the conference which was attended by representatives of over 200 unions of many trades, occupations and services. The membership that they represented was about 6 lakhs. It was decided at the conference to establish the Indian National Trade Union Congress as the new central organisation of the trade union movement. Sureshchandra Bannerjee was elected the President and Khandubhai Desai the Secretary of the provisional executive board that was set up.

The new organisation held its first conference in Bombay a year later. It grew rapidly and in a year or so it became the most representative organisation of Indian labour.

The I.N.T.U.C. had from its inception the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. It had also the active co-operation and support of all prominent leaders of the National Congress and of Congress Ministers. Some of them helped its foundation and became associated with it from time to time in one capacity or the other.

The Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad with its membership of over 60,000 immediately affiliated itself with the I.N.T.U.C. and became the main basis of its mass support.

Thus, we can say that the political developments dominated the scene during this period. One labour problem which attracted public attention was the condition of life and work of indentured workers. General elections under the new constitution, the
Government of India Act of 1935, took place early in 1937. The Indian National Congress swept the polls all over the country except in the Punjab and Bengal. The most far-reaching of the actions of the Congress Ministries was the legislation that was passed in Bombay for the settlement of industrial disputes. The Act was meant primarily for the textile industry but it was hoped that it could be later extended to other industries. It was called the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act of 1938. Gulzarilal Nanda, the former General Secretary of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad, who was then a Parliamentary Secretary, was the main architect of the legislation. The provisions of the Act were based on the experience gained in Ahmedabad. The basic feature of the Act was the provision that no change should be made in the existing conditions by either workers or employers without prior notice to the other party and prior efforts at amicable settlement through negotiations and conciliation and, in the last resort, arbitration. An elaborate machinery was provided by the Act for conciliation and arbitration.

The Second World War had a significant impact on the trade union movement in India and consequently on Gujarat. The War began in Europe on 1st September 1939. The first political effect of the war was the resignation of Congress Ministries. Popular Governments came to an end in all provinces except the Punjab and Bengal which had non-Congress Ministries. The first
impact of the war on workers and the trade union movement was the rise in prices and the scarcity of essential commodities. The prices of foodgrains and other essential goods registered steep rises and many commodities became unavailable in markets. The mercantile community took advantage of the war to indulge in large-scale hoarding and profiteering. Hoarding and profiteering became a permanent feature of the economy during the next few years. The first to react strongly of this situation were the textile workers of Bombay. They embarked on a general strike in April 1940 demanding an adequate dearness allowance to compensate against the rise in prices. The demand voiced by the textile workers of Bombay became a general demand of workers at all places and of all trades and industries. During the period of the war it became necessary for workers to place the demand again and again before the employers and the Government, as the prices kept on rising from month to month. It was only in a few places and in a few industries that a machinery was evolved for the automatic adjustment of wages. The Mill-owners Association of Bombay was the premier employers' organisation which evolved a formula for adjusting dearness allowance in accordance with rise in prices. Many other employers agreed to pay to their employees the dearness allowance that would be payable according to that formula.

It was in the light of these developments that in Ahmedabad a formula was evolved for the automatic
adjustment of the dearness allowance. In other cases workers had to make a fresh demand whenever there was a further increase in the cost of living. Another demand which became general all over the country was the demand for bonus. Taking advantage of war conditions the employers were making enormous profits. These profits were made in spite of the rise in taxes and the imposition of new taxes like the Excess Profits Tax. All the employers contended that the bonus was an ex-gratia payment and that workers could not claim it as a matter of right. They refused to concede that a trade dispute could arise out of a demand for bonus. The point had to be discussed and agitated again and again. Finally it was decided that bonus was not an ex-gratia payment, that workers had a right to claim a bonus and that workers should be paid a share out of the profits of the industry as long as their wages did not reach a living wage standard. Accordingly a large number of workers received bonuses from time to time during the war years. In some cases bonuses ranged as high as six or nine months' basic wages during a year. The real wages declined during the war years. The conditions created by the war helped the growth of trade unions.

While individual trade unions were growing in numbers as well as their following and while they were becoming more stable and better organised, the trade union movement as a whole was not developing and growing stronger in the same proportion. This was due to two
factors. The first was the inability of the movement to develop as an independent force and its limping behind the national movement. This was due to its inability to take a firm and clear stand on the momentous issue of the period—the war. The other was the split which took place as a result of that failure.

The All India Trade Union Congress, which was at the beginning of the war the united central organisation of the movement, could not adopt clear and firm stand on its attitude towards war and war efforts. There was one group in the Congress, represented by the Rightist and some nationalist leaders like Jamnadas Mehta, which regarded the war as an anti-Fascist war and advocated wholehearted and unconditional cooperation with the war efforts. At the other end were the Communists who at that time held the view, that it was an imperialist war and stood for active efforts to sabotage it. In between stood the large mass of nationalists who drew their inspiration from the Indian National Congress and who were not clear about the stand that they should take as the National Congress had not yet taken a definite stand. N.M. Joshi, who was at that time more influenced by nationalist considerations, suggested the adoption of a neutral stand, which amounted to being neither for nor against the anti-Fascist war. The attitude suited Joshi best as temperamentally he was always for a via media which would avoid quarrels and the necessity to adopt a firm position. This policy of neutrality continued to be the official position of the A.I.T.U.C.
though, in practice, it varied from time to time from resistance to war efforts to cooperation with them. As a result of this equivocal policy, the organisation could not give any clear lead to workers and became just a camp follower of the National Congress.

The communist position underwent a change towards the end of 1941 when they received definite instructions from Moscow to drop their opposition to the war and to help the development of war efforts. Hitler attacked Russia in June 1941 and that, according to the international communist movement, changed the character of the war, from an imperialist war to a people's war. It took Indian Communists six months to understand that position. But once they understood it, they became overnight the most enthusiastic supporters of the war efforts. The Government of India then released them from prisons and detention camps, removed the various restrictions on their activities, legalised the Communist Party and gave them every possible help to carry on propaganda for war efforts and against nationalist attempts to sabotage them. The Communists renewed their contacts with workers and with unions and began to persuade them to moderate their demands and to work harder in order to help the successful prosecution of the war. But they wanted to run with the hare and hunt with the hound. They also wanted to be in the good books of the Indian National
Congress which had by that time decided to oppose the war and resist the war efforts. Thus, on one side, they were supporting the war efforts and, on the other, they were also professing to resist them. It is not possible to build up any movement on the basis of such a policy of duplicity. As a result, even when they obtained the leadership of the A.I.T.U.C. they could not make it effective.

If the Communists changed in one direction, the nationalists changed in the other direction. They became war-resisters. The resistance movement developed into the "Quit India" movement and was an open, though non-violent, rebellion against the Government. The rebellion took place when the war was passing through a very critical phase. Hitler had overrun large parts of Russia and was seeking a breakthrough into Asia. On the other side, Japan was knocking at the very gates of India. Gandhiji was concerned only with the end of British rule in the country. Regarding the struggle as the final battle against British rulers, he called upon all his followers to throw themselves into it. Constructive workers were not excepted as on earlier occasions. Workers in the trade union movement were also asked to join the movement. The movement as such did not have much effect on trade unions.

Thus, in the light of the above-mentioned developments, there were strikes in sympathy with the movement in Ahmedabad. They were clearly political
strikes. They continued for some weeks and then they ended. In many places workers joined meetings and processions and also participated in one-day protest strikes, but they did not do anything more. By and large they were left untouched by the Quit India movement. A number of Congressmen working in trade unions, however, participated in the movement. They were arrested and imprisoned. The Communists moved into the places left vacant by them. They took over the leadership of many unions organised by Congressmen. Thus, they improved their position in the trade union movement and gradually acquired a stranglehold over the A.I.T.U.C.

The Congress ministries were in office in the provinces for a very brief period and they resigned from office towards the close of 1939 as a protest against the manner in which India was dragged into World War II by the British Government. In the meanwhile, the Bombay Government was able to put on the Statute Book two enactments. One was the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act of 1938. This Act, for the first time, introduced the principle of compulsory adjudication of industrial disputes and prohibited strikes and lock-outs under certain circumstances. This law was mainly based on the experience gained in the Ahmedabad experiment. The other enactment was the Shops and Establishments Act of 1939. This Act was intended to give protection to workers in shops
and commercial establishments and to regulate their conditions of employment.

Gulzarilal Nanda, who was one of the secretaries of the Textile Labour Association, had by then become Parliamentary Secretary to the Chief Minister, Government of Bombay. The Bombay Industrial Disputes Act was enacted mainly because of the initiative and interest taken by Nanda. A section of the trade union workers led by the Communists, however, opposed this legislation and there was a one-day protest strike in November 1938, sponsored by the communists.

The Bombay Government set up an Industrial Training Institute where millhands after their working hours could undergo training in some alternative trades. Another achievement of the Congress ministries in the provinces during the brief period they were in office was the appointment of a number of Enquiry Committees to go into the working and living conditions of workers in the provinces. One such important committee was the Bombay Textile Enquiry Committee, which also granted interim relief to the textile workers of Bombay. The Report of the Bombay Textile Enquiry Committee, popularly known as the "Divatia Committee", was very comprehensive and useful for trade union workers as an authoritative document.

The period from 1938 to 1939 witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of registered trade unions and their membership.
Sanh called the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Its members, some of whom were the top leaders of the country, had a firm faith in Gandhian philosophy. The Gandhi Seva Sangh used to meet once a year in a sort of seminar and discuss various aspects of constructive programmes in the context of the national situation. The Gandhi Seva Sangh had a Labour Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was Chairman of the Labour Sub-Committee of the Gandhi Seva Sangh, became chairman of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh and Jairamdas Daulatram and G.L. Nanda became Secretaries of the new Sangh.

Arrangements for training the labour workers were made in Ahmedabad and a rapid course of instruction was provided to quickly meet the demand for trained workers in the several organisations. The organisation built up by the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association provided ample ground for practical training and within a period of two years the Sangh trained 34 workers and put them to work in different parts of the country. S.R. Vasavada, one of the Secretaries of the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad and who was later on to play a key role in the national trade union movement in the country, was in charge of the training.

In July 1942, the British Government in India declared its intention to recognise the Communist Party legally, in return for its endeavours to support to British war efforts. This was a time when the Indian
National Congress, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, was about to engage in the final struggle for the liberation of India through the Quit India movement with its slogan 'Do or Die'. The Indian Communists, did everything in their power to sabotage the activities of the Congress nationalists. They supported the idea of a separate state of Pakistan too. Following the "Quit India" call by the Congress on August 9, 1942, the British Government put behind bars all important leaders. This was followed by mass arrests and cruel repression all over the country. The Communists took advantage of the imprisonment of the Congressmen and increased the tempo of their antinational political activities. They had the support of the British Government. They had the support of the Comintern. But they did not have the support of the Indian people. Thus, towards the end of World War II, the Communist Party presented a dismal picture. It had stood against the Indian freedom movement and had lost its support among the peasants and the urban proletariat.

The AITUC which was a united central organisation at the beginning of the war found that there was difference of opinion among its leadership in its attitude towards the war. The Communists in the AITUC began to act as the agents of the British and the employers and advised the workers to moderate their demands and work harder to enable successful prosecution of the war.
The Indian National Congress had by then decided to oppose the war and non-cooperate with the war efforts. The communists for some time tried to be in the good books of the Congress also. The communists wanted to play a double role of supporting the British Government in India and their war efforts and also to satisfy the Indian National Congress as opposing the war efforts. However, this could not work and the Communists in the AITUC stood thoroughly exposed.

In the final struggle for national freedom, through the Quit India movement in August 1942, Gandhiji wanted everyone to join it and even constructive workers who were exempted in the past were not given any exemption this time. Workers in the trade union movement therefore also joined the "Quit India" movement. The Government in its reply, made wholesale arrests of national leaders and imprisoned them. It was thus, due to the above mentioned developments, that there were spontaneous strikes by labour in sympathy with the movement all over the country and in the major industrial centre of Ahmedabad, the strikes continued for a hundred and five days.

Gandhiji was released on May 6, 1944. Many Congressmen were free to take stock of the situation and examine the various avenues of useful service to the country open to them in the prevailing circumstances. Many of them appreciated the vital role of the labour movement.
The Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh started providing facilities for equipping workers desirous of serving labour with the requisite theoretical background and practical training. It also did welfare work. The object was to secure through it the well-being of the working class and progressive development of its internal strength. Each branch was expected to undertake welfare activities to the extent funds and conditions permitted. P.K. Sawant was looking after the work of the Sangh at its headquarters in Bombay as Secretary.

By 1945, most of the leaders of the Congress Party had been released and in 1946, general elections were held. Nanda and Khandubhai Desai, Secretaries of the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad were elected to the Bombay Assembly and Nanda became Minister for Labour in the Bombay Province.

Nanda, as Labour Minister of the Bombay Province, amended the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act, 1938, in the light of the experience gained in the working of the Act. The result was the Bombay Industrial Relations Act of 1946. This Act provided for recognition of trade unions as the collective bargaining agent for an industry for a local area and conferred several rights on such recognised unions. For the first time, there was compulsion under this legislation on employers to recognise trade unions.

At the same time, legislation by the Centre was put on the statute book for certification of Stand-
ing Orders to regulate the day-to-day working of industrial establishments through the Industrial Employment Standing Orders Act of 1946. In March, 1947 an important legislation was enacted at the Centre, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 to provide for investigation and settlement of industrial disputes. This Act took in many of the features of the Defence of India Rules - Rule 81A and also the provisions of Trade Disputes Act of 1929. In addition, it introduced the Works Committee and Industrial Tribunals.

The communists who supported the Defence of India Rules during the British regime opposed both the Industrial Disputes Act and the Bombay Industrial Relations Act brought in by the popular Government. According to the communists, these enactments were a device to perpetuate the capitalist exploitation of labour. It did not suit the Communist Party's new programme to create problems in the way of progress of young free India. According to them, a trade union is an instrument for revolution. It was a school for communism. The communists never believed a trade union being an instrument for raising the standard of living of the workers within the legal framework. They wanted trade unions to function on an extra-legal plane. Hence, they opposed the Central Industrial Disputes Act and the Bombay Industrial Relations Act. However, in later years the communists did not hesitate to take advantage of the adjudication machinery for fear of losing labour's support. They even complained that adjudication was not
being made available to them as frequently as they wanted or as frequently as it was being given to other organisations.

On April 18, 1947, the Secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh wrote to all nationalist minded trade union leaders in the country, pointing out the anti-labour and anti-national role the AITUC had been playing and in consequence the pressure brought on the Sangh to initiate action for the formation of a new body which could voice the genuine demands of the working class for realising their aspirations at the same time keeping the national interest foremost in view. A two-day session was held by the Conference. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, President of the Central Board of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, presided at the opening session. G.L. Nanda and Khandubhai Desai were prominent among the trade unionists present in the Conference.

On behalf of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, Gulzarilal Nanda, the Secretary observed that the policies pursued by the AITUC under the communist leadership stood in sharp and total conflict with their aims. He also observed that the urgent need of the movement therefore was to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of those who were in fundamental opposition to the communists in their approach to labour matters. Concluding, Nanda said that while there was no common ground between those inspired by the communist philosophy and those who had faith in democracy, the
proposed organisation could provide a broad platform and ensure the largest measure of unity as among the latter, in pursuit of the aims of the labour movement. In his Presidential address, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel dwelt at length of the debt the trade union movement and the AITUC in particular, owed to Congressmen and explained how a situation had arisen when the establishment of a new organisation on proper lines could no longer be delayed. He also said that in their blind opposition to the Government, the communist labour leaders had thrown all regard for national welfare to the winds.

Dr. Suresh Chandra Bannerjee (Bengal), who was thrice President of the AITUC then moved the main resolution and added that the Communist Party, which occupied the dominant position in the AITUC, was making use of that platform for attaining its political ends. Moreover, Dr. Bannerjee said that their ignominious role during 1942 and the years that followed and betrayal of the national struggle for freedom had made them rightly unpopular, and the numerous strikes that they had been fomenting in different parts of the country in recent months formed part of a programme aimed at regaining their lost prestige and position.

Government employees and their associations began to make representations for increases in their pay and dearness allowance owing to rise in prices during and after World War II. The Ahmedabad Textile workers had already secured a dearness allowance consequent on the increase in prices brought about by the war. The setting up of the Pay Commission on
May 10, 1946 gave fillip to the trade union movement among the Government employees and a number of new unions and associations were formed and dormant organisations also became active on this account.

On August 15, 1947, India attained her independence from British rule. In December 1947, the Government of India convened a tripartite Conference consisting of representatives of Central and Provincial Governments and of employers' and workers' organisations. The conference reviewed impediments to production as well as ways and means for maximising production.

Thus, to conclude this chapter, we can say that the impact of the Indian trade union movement on Gujarat was indeed tremendous. The trade union movement of Gujarat was affected by the national happenings on the labour scene to a great extent. On December 4, 1917, the workers in Ahmedabad organised themselves on a trade union basis by their own initiative. That day is celebrated as Labour Day (Majoor Din) every year by the Ahmedabad textile workers. The first regular union was formed in Ahmedabad in 1920 for the Throstle Department workers. This was soon followed by the formation of other craft unions, such as the Weavers' Union, Workers' Union, Card-room and Frame Department, Workers' Union and Drivers', Oilmen's, Fishermen's and Clerks' Union, etc. These unions were federated into a single union soon after in the name of Majoor Mahajan - the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad. The Communist Party of India which was founded in the year 1925.
was weak for some time and was not taken seriously
by the people. The communists succeeded in getting
S.V. Ghate elected as one of the Secretaries of the
AITUC in 1927. For the first time, May 1 was celebrat­
ed as 'Labour Day' in Bombay in 1927 when the communists
started their political offensive in accordance with the
direction of the 1928 World Communist Congress, they
first saw that they had to work their way into key
positions in several workers' organisations. The
result was that waves of strikes and outbursts of
violence followed one another in quick succession in
several industrial areas, including Bombay textiles
in 1928-29. The Bombay Textile strike alone covered
1.5 lakhs of workers and lasted six months. But these
strikes and outbursts of violence in 1928-29 took labour
nowhere and labour became discontented with the leader­
ship of their organisations and the results produced
by them. The stock of the Indian Communists began to
slump.

Evidently the communists were testing their
strength and found it wanting. The Government replied
to the communist offensive with vigorous and decisive
acts of repression and arrested all important communist
leaders, which led to the Meerut Conspiracy Case. In
the Meerut trial 31 trade union leaders — communists,
congressmen and members of the Youth League — were
arrested simultaneously in different states. All the
accused were charged with conspiring to deprive the
King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India.
Although the case was directed against the communists, the result was far from damning them. The trial disclosed that a fantastic communist network had already spread over vast areas in India with assistance from abroad. The nature of the communist conspiracy was clear even at that time.

It was the time when the struggle against the British rule was all supreme and even the nationalist Indians who were fighting hard the British Imperialists showed a sense of sympathy to the communist leaders sent to prison. In fact, many of the Congress leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru, acted as defence lawyers on behalf of the communist leaders. Even then the communist movement in India could not grow in strength for its defect was basic.

The Indian communists, following, as usual, instructions from Moscow, began their campaign to disrupt the trade union movement. They attended the Tenth Session of the AITUC held at Nagpur in December 1929 in full force and secured a majority of a marginal character by manipulating the membership claims of their unions. They utilised the bare majority so secured for getting the session to adopt a number of their resolutions which directed the AITUC to boycott the Royal Commission on Labour, to dissociate itself with the League against Imperialism, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and some other international communist organisations. The AITUC till then was affiliated to the Asiatic Labour Conference which was denounced at this session under communist inspiration.
The consequence of the decision to affiliate the AITUC to communist international organisation forced a section to walk out of the AITUC and form a new central organisation, the Indian Trade Union Federation. Thus the communists were able to oust the "reformist" trade union leaders from the AITUC. Jawaharlal Nehru, who presided over this session, writing about it in his autobiography, stated: "In this matter as in many others, my sympathies were with the left. The result was that the nationalists played into the communists' hands. The dissidents met after the session, formed the Indian Federation of Trade Union and elected Subhas Bose as its President.

In the political field also, the communists were so enthusiastic to prove their loyalty to the foreign masters, by directly opposing the struggle for national independence, that in Bombay they went to the extent of creating disturbances at the huge public meeting held on Chowpathy sand on January 26, 1930. People had gathered there in lakhs to take the pledge to sacrifice everything for the achievement of independence. It was for the first time after the famous Lahore Congress Resolution demanding complete independence that the entire country was stirred to pledge itself to oust the British from India.

The communists came in a procession in order to demonstrate their opposition. Though the procession was very small, they wanted, with the aid of a few volunteers in red shirts, to pull down the Congress flag and hoist
the red flag in its place. However, realising the
temper of the people, they quietly removed their red
shirts and managed to disappear silently into the
crowd. Gandhiji's emphasis on non-violence came to
their rescue. They thus saved themselves physically
but had alienated the sympathy of the Indian masses.

The communists had a very uphill task even
otherwise. The basis of their philosophy was atheistic
materialism which was looked upon with contempt by the
Indian people as the product of immature thinking. The
communists' approach ignored the fact that the Indian
people had been brought up in an atmosphere of religion
and spiritualism for thousands of years.

Since its beginning, the CPI was avowedly a
part of the Comintern (Communist International) being
its creation. The "Programme of the Party", published in
1930, openly declared, "The CPI declares with pride that
it considers itself a section of the Communist International."
The statutes of the Party published in 1934 also stated,
"Decisions of Comintern are unquestionably obligatory for
all members of the party." This statement was significant
in as much as it was an unambiguous admission of the party's
loyalty to Moscow.
FOOTNOTES

8. Ibid, p. 98.
10. Ibid, p. 102.
15. Ibid, p. 57.
17. Ibid, p. 65.
18. Ibid, p. 66.