AHMEDABAD'S LABOUR STRIKE

OF 1918.
CHAPTER - 4

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Ahmedabad has played the key role in the trade union movement in Gujarat. The city of Ahmedabad is one of the leading textile centres of India, ranking next in importance to the island city of Bombay. Ahmedabad produces 25% of the total cotton cloth production of India and over 50% of the country's total output of fine cotton cloth, a major part of which is exported. This progress is partly due to a long period of peaceful and healthy labour-capital relations to which Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, substantially contributed.

Most of the textile mills in Ahmedabad were members of the Ahmedabad Mill-owners Association (M.O.A.). It was founded in 1891 and its object was to protect the interests of the mill owners and the industry.

The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (T.L.A.) is the legally recognised representative union for the local area of Ahmedabad inaugurated by Gandhi on the 25th February 1920. Besides the promotion of organisational and industrial objects, the T.L.A. pays much attention to the welfare and social development of its members corresponding to Gandhian ideals.

The Gandhian experiments in labour-capital
relations in the Ahmedabad textile industry had
genesis in the famous wage dispute of 1918. The
struggle on the side of the workers was led by
Gandhi himself. It was during this struggle that
he laid down the principles which were to underlie
and guide the T.L.A. The struggle was followed by
the organisation of the workers into a trade union
and the creation of a permanent Arbitration Board
composed of Gandhi and the then President of the M.A.O.

Between April 1920 and September 1921, 23
disputes were referred to this Arbitration Board
related to the problems such as reduction of working
hours, systematisation of the arrangement regarding
drinking water, dining sheds and so on, provision for
housing, etc. These matters were decided by the
Arbitration Board to the satisfaction of both the
parties.

In October, 1921, there was a dispute regarding
bonus equal to 1½ months pay. Madan Mohan Malaviya
who was the umpire gave his award on the 28th October,
1921 and it was accepted by both the parties. The
Arbitration Board intervened in 1922 on the complaints
relating to beating of the workers by the immediate
officers and the annual bonus. In the beginning of
1923, the mill-owners decided that the wages of the
workers in all the cotton mills of Ahmedabad be
reduced by one-fifth in view of the trade depression.
This agitated the labour leading to tension. On 1st
April 1923, a strike was held. Mr. C.P. Andrews tried

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to bring about a compromise between the parties. There were several disputes between the labour and the capital during the next seven years.

Thus, we have briefly described some of the major events in and around 1918 which all had their own significance. Now let us deal with the great and epoch-making event that took place in Ahmedabad in 1918 under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership and guidance. In 1918 through their struggle for justice, the workers began to realize the worth of their own wealth.

Gandhiji decided to enter into the life of the workers, since superficial advice without intimate knowledge of the outer and inner life of the workers was likely not to succeed and even if it did not entirely fail, its success would be insignificant. Leaflets were issued by the employers' group because they felt that they must say something in reply to the leaflets issued by Gandhiji.

Due to Gandhiji's efforts, Ahmedabad and through Ahmedabad the whole of India, had the benefit of this straight, noble and righteous struggle. In different parts of India, on several occasions, struggles have taken place between the millowners and workers, but none of them was conducted as was the one at Ahmedabad in 1918, with clean weapons, on the strength of willpower rather than of wealth. In no other struggle, was the result so beneficial to both the sides.
Now let us discuss the various leaflets issued during the struggle.

A lock-out commenced on the 22nd February. From that date the workers of the Weaving Department were compelled to remain without work. When the millowners issued notices withdrawing the Plague Bonus and there was unrest because of it, the employers resolved to get the dispute settled by arbitration and it was assumed that the workers would agree. Accordingly the millowners resolved on 14-2-1918 to appoint an arbitration board to decide what increase in lieu of the Plague Bonus was justified because of increase in the cost of living. Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Shankerlal Banker and Shri Vallabhbhai Patel representing the workers and Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, Sheth Jagabhai Dalpathbhai and Sheth Chandulal representing the employers, with the Collector as Chairman, were appointed to arbitrate. Thereafter workers in some of the mills struck work due to misunderstanding. That was a mistake and the workers were ready to rectify it. The employers, however, thought that the workers were in the wrong in striking before the Award was given by the arbitrator and, therefore, they cancelled their resolution regarding arbitration. They simultaneously passed a resolution that workers be paid off their due wages and be discharged if they were not content with a 20 per cent increase. The weavers were not satisfied and accepted a discharge and lock-out by the employers commenced.
But the arbitrators for the workers felt it their responsibility to tell the workers, under the circumstances, what increase they could properly demand. They decided amongst themselves after full discussion that 35 per cent increase was proper and decided to advise the workers accordingly. But before doing so they intimated their intention to the millowners and promised to consider if they had anything to say against it. The employers did not express their view on this matter. The workers whose demand was for a 50 per cent increase withdrew it and resolved to ask for a 35 per cent increase according to the advice of their arbitrators. Accordingly the following Leaflets were issued.

1. "WORKERS' PLEDGE"

"The workers have resolved:

(1) Not to resume work until a 35 per cent increase on the July wages is secured.
(2) During the period of the lock-out not to cause any disturbance, not to indulge in beating or assaulting, not to commit robbery, not to damage employers' property, not to use abusive language, but to remain peaceful.

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"We saw in yesterday's issue what the workers' pledge is. We have now to consider what we should do to carry out that pledge. We know that the employers have crores of rupees and the workers have nothing. But if, workers have no money they have hands and feet which can do work and there is no part of the world which can do without workers. If the worker therefore, realizes this,
he will know that he holds the key to the situation.

Wealth is useless without the worker. If the worker realizes this, then he can be sure of success, provided he has also certain qualities. Without them he is worthless. Let us see what these qualities are:

(1) The worker should be truthful. There is no reason for him to tell a lie. Even if he tells a lie he will not get the desired wage. The truthful can be firm and a worker who is firm is never defeated.

(2) He should possess courage. Many of us become permanent slaves through fear of what might happen to us if we lost our jobs.

(3) He should have a sense of justice. If he asks for wages higher than his deserts, there will be hardly any one who will employ him. The increase we have demanded in this struggle is just. We should, therefore, have faith that sooner or later we are bound to get it.

(4) He will not show anger nor harbour animosity towards his employer. Every human being is liable to err. It is our belief that the employers err in not giving us the increase asked for. If we remain straightforward till the end, the employers are sure to rectify their mistake. At present they are full of wrath. Also they suspect that if the present demands of the workers are granted, the workers will always harass them. To remove this suspicion, we should do our utmost to re-assure the employers by our behaviour.
The first step in this direction is not to harbour enmity towards them.

(5) Every worker should remember that there is bound to be suffering for him in such a big struggle. But happiness follows misery deliberately suffered. That we do not get enough to eat is a misery. But we have been suffering it due to our ignorance. To remove this miserable plight we have now represented to the employers that it is not possible for us to maintain ourselves without the demanded increase in wages. Under the circumstances we have decided deliberately to suffer the pangs of hunger, if we do not get the increase demanded to remove our perpetual starvation. How long can the employers continue without showing compassion towards us?

(6) Lastly, the worker should remember that God is the helper of the poor. It is for us to struggle and we are bound to be rewarded according to His will. We should realize this, trust in Him and remain peaceful so long as our request is not granted.

A worker who behaves in the aforesaid manner will never find it difficult to keep to his pledge.

Today we shall discuss how the workers should spend their time during the lock-out. There is a proverb among us that the idle resorts to mischief. It is, therefore, not at all good that ten thousand men should remain idle in Ahmedabad. Let us start by saying what the workers ought
not to do:

1. They should not waste their time in gambling.
2. Nor pass the time by sleeping during the day.
3. They should not spend all the time in talking of the employers and the lock-out.
4. They should not frequent tea-shops. Many go to hotels and discuss useless things there and eat unnecessarily.
5. They should not go to the mills during the continuance of the lock-out.

Now in regard to what the workers should do:

1. The dwellings of many workers and their surroundings are generally dirty. The workers are unable to attend to this when they are at work. Now when they are compelled to be idle, they should utilize some of the time in cleaning their houses and compounds and repairing them.

2. Those who are literate should spend their time in reading books and increasing their knowledge. They can also teach the illiterate. If they do so, they will learn to help each other. Those who are fond of reading should go to the Dadabhai Library and Reading Room or such other free reading rooms.

3. Those who know the art of tailoring, cabinet making, or wood carving and engraving, can find work for themselves. If they cannot, they can get our assistance in finding it.

4. Every person should acquire practical knowledge of at least one occupation besides the one from
which he gets his livelihood. Workers can, therefore, spend their time in learning some new and easy occupation. To obtain such instruction they can secure our help.

In India person in one occupation thinks it below his dignity to follow any other occupation. Besides, he considers some occupations low and degrading. Both these ideas are wrong. There is no question of inferiority or superiority among occupations which are essential for a man's existence. Nor is there any shame in taking up an occupation other than the one we are used to. We believe that weaving cloth, breaking stones, sawing wood or splitting it, or working in a farm are all necessary and honourable occupations. It is, therefore, hoped that instead of wasting time in idleness, workers will utilize it in such good work.

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We have said how workers can fulfil their pledge and what they should do during the lock-out. Now we shall state in this leaflet how we propose to help them.

Let us state firstly what we cannot do:

(1) We shall not help the workers in doing anything which is wrong.

(2) We shall have to abandon the works and cease helping them if they do wrong or make exaggerated demands, or commit violence.

(3) We can never wish ill of the employers, and in every action of ours, we shall take into consideration their good. We would seek the welfare of the workers while
at the same time we safeguard the employers' interests.

Now as to what we shall do for the workers:

(1) We shall work for the workers so long as they maintain good conduct as they have done hitherto.

(2) We shall do all we can to obtain for them 35 per cent increase in wages.

(3) We are still requesting the employers. We have not yet attempted to win public sympathy, or educate public opinion. But we are prepared to acquaint the whole of India regarding the workers' condition when the proper time comes and we hope to obtain public sympathy for our cause.

(4) We shall not rest till the workers have attained their right.

(5) We are trying to acquaint ourselves with the condition of the workers in its economic, moral and educational aspects. We shall show the workers how they should improve their economic condition. We shall strive to raise their moral level. We shall find out and show them how to live more cleanly if they are living in filth. We shall try to impart knowledge to them if they are ignorant.

(6) We shall assist those who are reduced to starvation in this struggle and cannot find any work. We shall eat and clothe ourselves only after feeding and clothing them.

(7) We shall nurse the sick and get the assistance of vaidyas and doctors.

We have undertaken this task with the full realisation of our responsibility; we consider the workers' demand to be entirely just. We believe that eventually
satisfaction of that demand will not harm the employers' interests but will do them good. It is because of this that we have joined this struggle.

We shall now consider the employers' position. Workers' efforts can lead to either of these two results:

1. Workers may get a 35 per cent increase in wages, or
2. They may have to resume work without securing any rise.

If the workers get an increase it would benefit them and the employers would get the credit. The employers' efforts can produce one of these two results:

1. The employers may give the workers an increase in wages.
2. They may not give the workers any increase.

If the employers give the workers an increase, the workers would be satisfied, they would get justice. The employers are afraid that if the workers are given what they demand they would become insolent. This fear is baseless. Even if the workers are suppressed today, it is not impossible that they would get insolent when an opportunity arises. It is even possible that the suppressed workers may harbour animosity. The history of the world shows that whenever the workers are suppressed, they have risen in revolt whenever they had an opportunity. The employers feel that conceding the workers' demand would enhance the influence of their advisers on them. The employers will satisfy the workers.
if they grant the increase demanded. If the workers fail in their duty, the employers can always rely on the help of the advisers and stop the loss now caused to both sides. The workers will ever remain grateful if their demand is met and there will be goodwill between the employers and the workers. Thus in the workers' success lies the success of the employers and in their defeat lies the defeat of the employers. Instead of this pure justice, the employers have adopted the western or modern devilish kind of justice so called.

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Pure justice is that which is inspired by fellow feeling and compassion. We in India call it Eastern or Ancient justice. Where there is no place for fellow-feeling or compassion, it is known as devilish or modern justice. Out of feeling or regard a Father gives up many things for the son and vice versa and in so doing both eventually gain. In giving up for another, the giver experiences a feeling of pride and considers it a sign of his strength and not of weakness. There was a time in India when servants used to serve in the same household from Father to son for generations. They were respected and treated as members of the family where they served. They shared the misery of the employer and the employer was with them in their joy and sorrow. Servants did not ask for higher wages when there was a dearth of servants and masters did not reduce wages when the supply was plentiful. History records that many great deeds were achieved by our people because they
had made this pure justice the law of their lives. This is the ancient or Eastern tradition.

A totally different way of life prevails in the West today. It is not to be supposed that all persons in the West approve of modern justice. There are many saintly persons in the West who lead a life of purity, adopting the ancient standard. But in most public activities of the West at present there is no place for feeling or mercy. It is considered just that a master pays his servants, as he finds convenient. It is not considered necessary to think of the servants' requirements. So also the worker can at will make a demand, irrespective of his employers' financial condition and it is considered just. Each thus thinks only of himself and is not bound to think of the other. The present war in Europe is fought on the same principle. At any rate, we want the workers to observe the ancient justice and its cannons as we know them and only thus do we wish to help them to secure their rights.

South Africa is a large British Colony. The Europeans have been there for over four hundred years. They have freedom to govern themselves. There are many European workers employed in the railways of that country. These workers felt dissatisfied with their wages; but insisted of trying to have their wages increased, they thought of capturing the Government. That was unjust; it was devilish justice. It resulted in bitterness between the Government and labour and the entire South African country
was frightened.

While this was going on our workers behaved justly. When the above-mentioned railway strike took place, a strike involving 20,000 Indian workers was going on. The European workers wanted to exploit the strike of the Indians. Our workers refused to be exploited. They said, "Ours is a struggle of Truth. We do not desire to harass the Government. We will, therefore, suspend our struggle during the period of your fight." With this statement our workers stopped the strike. We call this true justice. Eventually our workers succeeded and the Government too got credit, because it was just enough to accept our demand. At the end of the struggle, the bonds of love between the Government and us became closer. Respect for us was higher. Thus a struggle fought on the basis of true justice is beneficial to both the sides.

Another matter to be noted in the above instance is that in a struggle for Truth, both sides need not be followers of Truth. Even if one side keeps to the Truth, the struggle for Truth is bound to succeed. We, therefore, should understand that if we fight non-violently and do not lose courage, we are bound to succeed in the end.

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In this issue we are not going to discuss satyagrahis, who have become famous in the world. It would be more advantageous for us to know to what extent even men like ourselves have been able to suffer non-violently. Mm. Hassan and Hussain were
bold and resolute satyagrahis. We feel that there can be no comparison between our capacity and theirs. An equally memorable name is that of the devotee Prahlad. But we think that we are not capable of such devotion, resoluteness, love for truth and courage and so finally we remain what we are. Therefore, let us on this occasion think of what other persons who were like ourselves have done. Such a satyagrahi was Harbatsing.

Harbatsing was an old man of 75 years. He had gone to South Africa on a five-year contract to work on an agricultural farm on a monthly salary of seven rupees. When the strike of 20,000 Indians referred to in the last issue commenced, he also joined it. Some strikers were jailed and Harbatsing was among them. And verily, Harbatsing died in jail and became immortal. Had he died outside, no one would have noticed his death.

Similar to Harbatsing is the case of the Transvaal merchant — Ahmad Muhammad Kachhalia. During the struggle in which Harbatsing lost his life, Kachhalia went to prison several times. He allowed his business to be ruined.

Just as an old workman and a middle-aged merchant fought for their word and suffered, so also did a girl of seventeen years. Her name was Valliyamma. She also went to jail for the honour of the community in that struggle. She died on the fourth or the fifth day after her release from jail.

The Satyagraha of all the three was pure. All the three suffered hardships, went to jail but kept their pledge. It should not be difficult for us to do what our brothers
and sisters have done in our own age.

2.

Yesterday we discussed the examples of three Satyagrahis; they were not the only Satyagrahis in that struggle. 20,000 workers were out of work at a time and the trouble was not over within twelve days. The entire struggle lasted for seven years and during that period hundreds of men lived under great suspense and anxiety and stuck to their resolve. 20,000 workers lived homeless and without wages for three months. Many sold whatever goods they had. There were Hindus as well as Muslims among them. One of them is the son of the Moazim of the Jumma Masjid of Bombay. His name is ImamSaheb Abdul Kadar Bawazir. He who had never suffered any hardship before, endured the rigours of jail life and during imprisonment cleaned roads, broke stones, did other hard labour and lived on tasteless and simple food for months. At present he has not a pie with him. Similar is the case of Dadamiya Kaji of Surat. Two seventeen-year old youngsters of Madras - Narayanswami and Nagappan - suffered in the heat and sacrificed their lives, but did not give in. Also women who had never walked before took to hawking and worked in jail as washer-women.

Considering these examples which worker among us will not be prepared to suffer ordinary inconvenience to keep his troth?

In the leaflets issued by employers many unbecoming things have been written in anger; many
things have been consciously or unconsciously exaggerated and some have been twisted. As Satyagrahis, we cannot meet anger with anger. It is not proper even to correct the mis-statements contained therein. It is just sufficient to say that we should neither be misled nor get peeved by such writings.

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It is hardly a fortnight since the lock-out commenced and yet some say that they have no food, others that they cannot pay even house rent. The condition of the houses of most workmen is very bad; there is not sufficient light or ventilation in them. The houses are very old. The surroundings are filthy. The clothes worn by workers are dirty. Some cannot afford the washerman's charges, others say that they cannot afford soap. The workers' children run about the streets. They go without any schooling. Some of the workers use their young children for earning money. Such extreme poverty is regrettable. But a 35 per cent increase is not the only cure for it. Even if wages are doubled, but other remedies are not adopted, they would still remain poor. There are many reasons for this poverty. We shall consider some of them today.

On enquiry from workers we learn that when they are short of money they pay interest ranging from one anna to four annas per rupee per month. This is a terrible drain. Mohammed the Prophet had realized how heavily the burden of interest weighed on the poor. Therefore, the strict injunctions in the Holy Quran against charging interest.
For similar reasons the rule of not more than twice the principal must have been prescribed in the Hindu scriptures. If on account of the present struggle all workers take an oath not to pay such excessive interest they will relieve themselves of an unbearable burden. Nobody should pay an interest higher than twelve per cent. We know that there are some who can rescue their co-workers who are crushed under the load of interest. Outsiders will hardly interfere in this.

As days pass by, more and more leaflets, misleading the workers are being issued by the employers. It is also rumoured that the lock-out is to be lifted on Tuesday and that those workers who return will be taken back. It is also said that he who brings with him five or more other workers will be given a reward. Nothing needs to be done against these tactics. Employers are entitled to prevail upon workers to resume work by employing others to persuade them.

Tomorrow, i.e., Tuesday morning we are to meet at 7.30 a.m. at the usual place. The best way not to be tempted by the employers' re-opening the mills is to attend the meeting. You should also look for workers from other parts of the country, who are not known to you and who have hitherto not attended these meetings and bring them to the meeting.

An idle worker should certainly starve. He may be despondent. But the industrial has no cause to be uneasy even for a moment.
A new chapter begins from today. The employers have decided to lift the lock-out and have expressed their willingness to take back those who are ready to accept the 20 percent increase. Therefore, the lock-out by the employers comes to an end today and the strike by the workers commences. You have all seen the announcement of this decision made by the employers. They say that many workers are ready to resume work but are unable to do so owing to the lock-out. This information of the employers ill accords with the daily meetings of the workers and the oath they have taken. The workers have considered all things before taking the pledge and now they cannot resume work without securing a 35 percent increase, whatever may be the temptation or the misery they may have to encounter. Herein lies their honesty. If you weigh a pledge against lakhs of rupees, the weight of the pledge will be greater.

Let us consider what workers are likely to gain by breaking their oath. At present, in India any honest person can earn twenty to twenty-five rupees per month by intelligent work. The worst that can happen to him will be that his employers may dismiss him and he may have to look for other work. A thoughtful worker should realize that he can get work anywhere after a few days' search. But we are sure that the employers do not want to adopt such a drastic step as to dismiss the workers. If workers are firm in their resolve even the hardest hearts will relent.

It is possible that the workers from outside
Gujarat (i.e. those from the North or the South) do not have an adequate idea of this struggle. In public work we do not and we do not desire to distinguish between Hindu, Muslim, Gujarati, Madrasi, Punjabi; etc. We are all one and desire to be one. We should, therefore, give to them correct information about this struggle in a sympathetic manner and they should be made to realize that it is to their advantage as well as to everybody else's that they identify themselves with the rest of us.

Rumours are afloat that many workers are willing to resume work, but that others prevent them by coercion and by threats of physical assault. It is necessary for every worker to remember our resolve that if they bring pressure to bear on their fellows and stop them from going to work by threats, we shall not be able to help them at all. In this struggle he alone will succeed who keeps to his pledge voluntarily. The workers' struggle depends solely on the justice of their demand and the rightness of their action. Not to coerce anyone and to labour for one's own maintenance are principles which it is very essential to observe in this struggle.

As money is the weapon of the rich, so is work the weapon of the worker. Keeping to one's pledge implies having a sense of honour and self-respect.

This struggle is not merely to get a 35 per cent
increase; it is to show that workers are prepared to suffer for their rights.

Farhad broke stones for the sake of Shirin, his beloved. For the workers their pledge is their Shirin. For the sake of truth Harishchandra sold himself; why should workers not suffer hardships for being true to their pledge? For their faith Imam Hassan and Hussein suffered greatly.

If workers depend on others' money for their livelihood, millowners will think that such help is sure to terminate sooner or later; and they will not listen to the workers. If, on the other hand, workers who have no means of subsistence began to do manual work, the employers will feel that they will lose their workers unless they pay the 35 per cent increase. Thus it is we who can shorten or lengthen the struggle.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTION

Some workers believe that those who have become weak cannot be persuaded to become strong. This belief is entirely unjustified. It is our duty to impart knowledge to those who do not know what the struggle is.

It is necessary to understand the motive and significance of Gandhi's vow to fast. The first thing to be remembered is that his vow is not intended to influence the employers. If the fast is conceived in that spirit it will adversely affect our struggle and
our honour. Even if fifty persons determine to starve themselves to death on the employers' premises, how can the employers give the workers a 35 per cent increase if they have no right to it?

Let us examine the objects for which the fast has been undertaken. Gandhiji saw that the oath was losing its value among the workers. Some of them were ready to break their pledge out of fear of starvation.

The workers realized that they would secure justice at the hands of the employers only if they remained firm by their oath. They were strengthened by Gandhiji's fast. They understood that they had to fight with their own strength and that the uplift of the workers depends on the workers themselves.

Shri SHANKERLAL BANKER'S LEAFLET

This is the first leaflet I write for you. I wish, therefore, to state at the very outset that my right to advise you is only nominal. I have not done any manual labour. Therefore, I feel hesitant in giving advice on this occasion. But, even though I have done nothing for you in the past it is my keen desire to do what I can hereafter according to my capacity. I write this with that desire.

Two days ago our situation had taken a serious turn. Some of you were in straightened circumstances, but instead of taking to labour to get relief from those circumstances as urged so often by Gandhiji, it was
appreciated that some of you would break the vow and get back to the mills. But that situation has now passed away.

Our oath is to obtain a 35 per cent increase. But employers feel that if they gave the 35 per cent, the workers will become domineering and insolent that they will become unruly at the slightest provocation and run the industry by resorting to strikes on trifling matters. I see no reason for entertaining such a fear. Workers can never desire that an industry which gives them their daily bread should be destroyed. We should decide not to make unreasonable demands and not to resort to remedies like strikes to secure justice until all other avenues are exhausted.

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VICTORY FOR BOTH

We have said in the previous leaflets that in Satyagraha both the parties invariably succeed. He who struggles for the truth and obtains it, of course succeeds. But even he who first opposed the truth and later realizes it and concedes it, should be considered to have succeeded. From that standpoint the workers' pledge is fulfilled as well as the employers' and so both the parties have won. The employers had taken an oath that they will not give more than 20 per cent. We have respected their oath also. So both have retained their pledge. Let us now see what the settlement is.

1. Workers are to resume work tomorrow, i.e., on
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the 20th and on that day they will get a 35 per cent increase; on the 21st, a 20 per cent increase.

2. From the 22nd they will get an increase not exceeding 35 per cent, according to the decision of the arbitrator.

3. The foremost litterateur of Gujarat, a saintly person, Prof. Anandshankar Bapubhai Dhruva, M.A., LL. B., a professor and Vice-Principal of the Gujarat College, will be Arbitrator.

4. The Arbitrator should give his award within three months. During the period, workers will be paid an increase of 27½ per cent, i.e., the workers will have to give up half of their demand and the employers half of theirs.

5. Whatever amount is decided by the Arbitrator will be adjusted against the 27½ per cent, i.e., if the Arbitrator awards more than 27½ per cent, the employers will give that increase and if he awards less than 27½ per cent, the workers will refund the excess.

Two things have been accomplished by this settlement. First, the honour of the workers is upheld; secondly, if a serious dispute arises between parties it should be settled not by resort to a strike but by arbitration. It is not one of the terms of the settlement that in future the parties settle their differences by arbitration, but since the settlement has come about through arbitration it is presumed that on a similar occasion in future also an arbitrator will be appointed.

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We have accepted 35 per cent for one day deliberately, in view of the circumstances. If the Arbitrator feels that a smaller increase is proper, we shall accept less and our vow will not thereby be broken at all. We have accepted the principle of arbitration for all times.

The workers must remember that their condition hereafter will depend on the quality of their work.

Peace is now the desideratum.

The greatest victory of the workers is this - God has kept up their prestige - their vow. He who keeps his honour thus has got everything.

THE ARBITRATOR'S DECISION

"A dispute occurred last winter between the group of Ahmedabad millowners and the weavers regarding rates of wages and this had led to a regrettable condition of strike and lock-out. The dispute was referred to me by both parties as arbitrator on 20th March 1918, after which date arbitration proceedings commenced.

On 28th June I received the millowners' statement. Some important questions arose out of this and I asked both parties to give explanations. Up to 3rd July nothing in writing was received from the workers' side.

From facts obtained from the parties, I find that in the majority of mills 35 per cent increase is
already being given and in some cases as much as 50 per cent. I, therefore, consider it proper to give a 35 per cent increase for the remaining period of the dispute and declare by virtue of the authority invested in me as arbitrator that millowners should give workers a 35 per cent increase for the remaining period of the dispute, i.e., they should pay the difference of $\frac{7}{2}$ per cent in addition to the $\frac{27}{2}$ per cent now being paid.

In conclusion, I note with satisfaction that both parties have acted peacefully and with mutual tolerance and have continued to work smoothly in the mills while the award, which was delayed by mutual consent, was still pending. I hope that they will continue to work together peacefully.

10-8-1918 - ANAND SHANKER BAPUBHAI DHRUVA

GANDHIJI'S EXPLANATION REGARDING THE STRUGGLE AND HIS FAST.

"I feel that I should offer an explanation to the public about my recent fast.

About a month ago when I had been to Bombay, I was told that if the bonus paid to workers in Ahmedabad mills during the plague was discontinued it was likely that they would strike work and create mischief. I was requested to intervene and I agreed to do so.

Since last August workers were paid about 70 per cent (on wages) as bonus owing to the plague. The attempt to stop that bonus created dissatisfaction among them. Millowners at the last moment agreed to increase their
wages by 20 per cent on account of high prices. But workers were not satisfied with this. The dispute was referred to arbitration and Mr. Chatfield, the Collector of Ahmedabad, was appointed as umpire. In spite of this workers in some mills struck work. When this happened, the employers backed out of arbitration and declared a lock-out. They also decided to continue the lock-out till out of exhaustion workers were reduced to a state of accepting the 20 per cent increase.

Shri Shankerlal Banker, Shri Vallabhbhai Patel and I were appointed on the Arbitration Board from the Workers' side.

It has to be noted that workers were paid 70 per cent rise on wages on account of plague and they had declared that since prices were rising higher they would not accept anything lower than a 50 per cent increase. As against this we told them to accept a mean between their 50 per cent and the 20 per cent offered by the millowners. (That a mean, viz., 35 per cent was fixed upon for acceptance was merely an accident.).

The meeting after some remonstrance agreed to accept 35 per cent increase and it was also agreed that the moment employers were prepared to refer the dispute to arbitration, workers would also willingly do so.

Thereafter, every day thousands of workers collected under the shade of a tree outside the city. Some of them came walking great distances and reiterated their solemn resolve on oath not to accept anything less than 35 per cent.
The millowners also made their hearts hard. They resolved not to pay more than 20 per cent and appointed agents to induce workers to return to work. 22 days passed in this manner.

I knew that my oath had many defects. But of two alternatives, viz. (1) that ten thousand men should all of a sudden abandon an oath taken before God and reiterated solemnly for 20 days consecutively, or (2) that I should be criticized for causing embarrassment to employers in an unfair manner, I preferred the latter.

I wish to mention two names before I close this letter. India has reason to be proud of them. Shri Ambalal Sarabhai was the representative of the Millowners. He is a worthy gentleman, well educated, clever and resolute. His sister, Shrimati Anasuyabehn was the representative of the mill workers. Her heart is as pure as gold and she is very kind to the poor. Mill workers adore her and her word is law to them.

I have never heard of a struggle where bitterness hardly existed and where there was so much courtesy on both sides. This sweet result has been chiefly due to the influence of Shri Ambalal and Shrimati Anasuyabehn.

Thus, we have briefly described above the leaflets issued during the struggle. The movement also affected the regions of Saurashtra and Bhavnagar. The communist influence of M.N. Roy was also significant. Gandhi used to say that he was a Communist minus their violence. He said that he did not propagate Samyavad (the theory or ideology of Communism) but Samyadharma
Before we end this chapter, let us briefly compare and contrast the Gandhian ideology and the Marxist or the Communist ideology.

(1) CONCEPT OF IDEAL STATE:

Both the ideologies desire the establishment of a stateless and classless society but Gandhiji wanted non-violent means whereas Marx desired violent means to achieve this end.

(2) CAPITALISM:

Marx, unlike Gandhi, wanted to remove the government through violent revolution in order to destroy capitalism root and branch.

(3) SPIRITUALISM VS. MATERIALISM:

Gandhiji was a staunch believer in God. Marx did not believe in God. Gandhiji did not attach any importance to materialism and luxuries of life. Marx was a materialist and he gave materialistic and economic interpretation of history.

(4) ENDS AND MEANS:

Gandhiji preached non-violence for the achievement of the ends and Marx stood for violent means to achieve the ends.

(5) CLASS WAR:

Marx believed in class-struggle involving a continuous conflict between the capitalists and the workers. Gandhiji however said that class-struggle brought ruin to the country and made the production of goods fall considerably.
(6) INVESTMENT OF CAPITAL:

Gandhiji was ready to accept the private ownership on land of the landlords while Marx was not ready to allow private ownership on land. Gandhiji was also in favour of co-operative farming, while Marx was in favour of collective farming, in which there is a great control of the state.

(7) DEMOCRACY VS. DICTATORSHIP:

Gandhiji said that there should be decentralisation of power and democracy. Marx believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat and wanted to give maximum powers to the workers.

Thus, we have described about the views of Gandhiji and Karl Marx on some of the important aspects which ultimately had a great impact on the trade union movement in most parts of the world and consequently on India and Gujarat.

Let us now briefly discuss the Class-less Society Approach of Karl Marx.

In Marx's views, trade unions represent a prime instrument of class-struggle between proletarian-workers and capitalist businessmen. Further, the origin of trade unionism goes to the growth of industrial capitalism. Marx believed that the trade unions did not properly represent the workers. Marx saw in the trade unionism the inherent conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed and found the origin of unionism in the capitalistic order.

Now, let us briefly discuss Gandhiji's approach.
Gandhiji's philosophy was based upon the "Sarvodaya" principles of Truth, Non-Violence and Trusteeship in which class-harmony prevailed. He considered trade unions as essentially reformist organisations and economic institutions which must be organised on the basis that capital and labour are not antagonistic but are supplementary to each other.

Gandhiji's view was that trade unions should not only undertake the functions concerned with improving the economic conditions of workers, but must also try to raise the moral and intellectual standards of labour and should bring about an all-round development through internal efforts. They should also undertake programmes for teaching supplementary occupations to their members so that uncertainty of employment during strike may be reduced to the minimum.

According to Gandhiji strikes could be permitted and would succeed if these conditions are fulfilled:

(a) The cause of strike must be just.

(b) There should be practical unanimity among the strikers.

(c) Strikes should be peaceful and non-violent.

(d) Workers should undertake strikes only after taking up alternative jobs for their living during the strike period.

(e) Workers should go on strike only after the capitalists failed to respond to moral appeals and only as a last resort after exhausting all other means of persuading the capitalists to concede the just demands.
Gandhiji did not favour unions taking part in political activities for two reasons. First, because the workers were not enlightened and second, because the political parties exploit the workers for their own ends.

Regarding sympathetic strikes, he advocated that such strikes should be organised in sympathy of workers who were seeking for just cause after exhausting all other means of settling disputes and were following the non-violent path. He, however, disapproved strikes organised by workers doing essential services.

Gandhiji insisted that strikes should be undertaken only after adopting the legitimate means of settling disputes. These means in his views were (a) the moral appeals to the conscience of the employers to concede to their just demands, and (b) when moral appeals failed, resort to voluntary arbitration. Gandhiji would not like the parties to declare strike or lockouts without first trying to refer the dispute to an umpire who would give a decision on the dispute which would be binding on the parties.

Regarding the difference between his technique and that of the Communists or the Socialists for realizing the goal of economic equality, Gandhiji said:

"The Socialists and Communists say they can do nothing to bring about economic equality to-day. They will just carry on propaganda in its favour and to that end they believe in generating and accentuating hatred. They say, 'When they get control over the state, they will enforce equality.' Under my plan, the state will be there to carry
out the will of the people, not to dictate to them or force them to do its will. I shall bring about economic equality through non-violence, by converting the people to my point of view by harnessing the force of love as against hatred. I will not wait till I have converted the whole society to my view but will straightway make a beginning with myself. It goes without saying that I cannot hope to bring about economic equality of my conception, if I am the owner of fifty motor cars or even of ten bighas of land. For that I have to reduce myself to the level of the poorest of the poor. That is what I have been trying to do for the last fifty years or more, and so, I claim to be a foremost Communist although I make use of cars and other facilities offered to me by the rich. They have no hold on me and I can shed them at a moment's notice, if the interests of the masses demanded it.  

Finally, let us observe a significant comment of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel while addressing the Ahmedabad workers in 1940. He told them to become united and strong, obey willingly the teachings of Gandhiji, wear Khadi and get rid of untouchability.

The role of Shri Indulal Yagnik also was significant. In his autobiography, he declared Shri Shankerlal Banker as his close friend. Indulal was introduced to Anasuyabehn by Shankerlal Banker.

Khandubhai Desai, another important leader of Gujarat said that Anasuyabehn Sarabhai devoted her entire
life for the welfare and upliftment of the poor sections of society and thus became a source of inspiration among us.

We shall deal with the above mentioned personalities later. In the next chapter, we shall deal with the trade union movement in Gujarat in length and also the influence of the leftist ideology on the movement.
FOOTNOTES

1. Dayal Parmeshwari, Gandhian approach to social work, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad March 1986 p.135

2. Ibid, p. 135

3. Ibid, p.135

4. Ibid, p.135


7. Ibid, p. 94.