CHAPTER 9

Indian National Trade Union Congress

We are going to discuss the relationship between the Indian National Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Congress, the political party which has been in power at the Union level since independence and which has held power in most of the states for most of the time.

I. THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Although the Congress is unable to win even 50 per cent of the votes cast in general elections it is still able to win about 70 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha. In most states the party occupies an almost unassailable position. In only a few states is the opposition to the Congress at all strong. The Congress is the only truly all India party.

That the Congress is the only national party with mass support is mainly a legacy of history rather than the result of any particular qualities that the party may now possess. Founded in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Indian National Congress became a mass party demanding independence from British rule under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. As the organization leading the struggle for independence, the Congress attracted a wide range of support from most parts of India. Within the Congress were to be found businessmen and communists, Hindus and Muslims, peasants and workers. The organization, with its heterogeneous components, was united by a single goal. To some extent, even after the goal was attained in 1947, the Congress continued to be supported by all kinds of interests, some of which were in opposition to others. Some of these heterogeneous groups left the Congress during the years after independence. The communists were expelled from the Congress in 1945, the socialists established a separate party in

1 In the 1962 general elections for the Lok Sabha, Congress won 44.72 per cent of the valid votes cast and 361 seats out of 494. Of the twelve states where elections took place to the Legislative Assemblies in 1962, Congress gained more than 50 per cent of the votes only in three states (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Mysore). Indian National Congress, Report of the General Secretaries (January 1962 to December 1963), pp. 17-24.
1948, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee formed the Jan Sangh and Acharya Kripalani formed his own party before the 1952 elections, and the Swatantra Party was founded in 1959. All of these parties were led by men who at one time or another had been members of the Indian National Congress. Despite these defections the Congress continues to keep within its organization a bewildering range of ideologies and interests and in the popular mind, especially in rural areas, it continues to be regarded as the party of Gandhi and Nehru, the party that brought India her freedom.

The Congress owes its strength to the traditional support it receives from the rural masses who make up about 70 per cent of the electorate. At the local level the party is controlled by the rural rich such as landlords, traders and money-lenders. Often these local Congress leaders come from families and castes that have traditionally held positions of leadership. Often the village poor, the small peasants, the tenants and the landless are more or less economically dependent on them. Thus, the rural masses vote for Congress because of a sentimental attachment to the names of Gandhi and Nehru, because of their attachment to traditional village leaders and sometimes because of their economic dependence on traditional leaders.

In urban areas the Congress, despite its ‘democratic socialism,’ is often supported by business and industrial interests, because the Congress is the party in power. Naturally businessmen who come into regular contact with the government do not support parties that have no chance of taking charge of the government. But business support is mainly financial, the votes must come from more numerous sections such as the working class, small traders and middle-class employees. Such support is not always forthcoming.

Thus the Congress party is essentially a rural party, as any successful party in India has to be. Its supporters and its personnel, especially at the state level, come from rural areas so it is natural that rural areas should be considered most important by State governments. The problems of the working class are therefore only of marginal importance to the average Congress legislator. At the Union level, the very diversity of the Congress party’s support, especially regional diversity, enables the party’s leadership to take a more detached view, indeed forces it to, because no
single regional or class interest is able to dominate the all-India party. One might expect the working class to receive more favourable treatment at the hands of the Union government than at the state level, not because the working class is stronger at the all India level but because various other interests tend to cancel each other out leaving greater scope for detached decision making.

Ideologically the Congress is a 'democratic socialist' party. Many of its policy statements are made in terms similar to those used by 'democratic socialist' parties in the West such as the British Labour Party.¹

The most important factor determining the relationship between the Congress and the trade unions is the fact that Congress normally controls the various governments. The government must concern itself with the maintenance of law and order and the securing of the interests of the entire community rather than the interests of a particular section such as the working class. Obviously the government has an interest in encouraging the development of a passive trade union movement and a disciplined working class. When the Congress came to power in 1947 these goals were expressed in industrial relations legislation by the government and the encouragement given to the INTUC by the Congress party.

II. THE OUTLOOK OF INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS

The trade union leaders, who in 1947 met in New Delhi and formed the INTUC, were, although all Congressmen, far from a homogeneous group. They came from all over India and had had very different previous experiences of trade unionism in very different circumstances. Basically there were two different traditions represented among the founders of INTUC.

The strongest single union represented at the INTUC inaugural meeting was the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad. The union was strongly represented in the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh which had taken the initiative in calling the

¹ Mr Khandubhai Desai says that one of the reasons for INTUCs support for Congress is the similarity between the Congress and the British Labour Party which is supported by the trade unions in Britain, Interview, New Delhi, March 1965.
meeting. In addition, trade union leaders who had been trained at Ahmedabad had set up unions in other centres, particularly in Bombay and Indore. These unionists had adopted a distinct philosophy of industrial relations based on the teachings and practice of Mahatma Gandhi who had played a leading role in the foundation of the union at Ahmedabad. Industrial relations in the textile industry at Ahmedabad were characterized by industrial peace and settlement of disputes by voluntary adjudication either by selected individuals or through the courts. The Ahmedabad union was clearly the strongest union in INTUC and has since then supplied many of INTUC’s leaders such as Nanda, Khandubhai Desai and Vasavada. In addition important leaders like G. D. Ambekar of Bombay and V. V. Dravid of Indore were trained at Ahmedabad.

The second tradition to be found in INTUC is represented by those unionists who had previously been active in the AITUC. This was in contrast with the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad which had never been associated with any national federation of labour for the reason that it felt that its constructive activities among the workers would be hindered if some of its energies were diverted to the internal politics who had become so important in the national federations. The second, non-Ahmedabad, group itself was a heterogeneous collection of ‘leaders who had a wide variety of experience. During the 1930’s many of them had been leaders of unions affiliated to AITUC but others such as V. V. Giri had left AITUC in the split that occurred in 1929 and had been associated with the more moderate NTUF. Of those who had been associated with AITUC, some were also members of the Congress Socialist Party. Suresh Chandra Banerjee, Hariharnath Shastri, and Kashinath Pandey, all of whom were later to hold the office of president of INTUC, were former members of the Congress Socialist Party. This non-Ahmedabad group of trade unionists, was generally less influenced by the ‘indigenous’ theories of Mahatma Gandhi and more influenced by western ideas both in regard to industrial relations and to politics generally. In industrial relations they emphasized the right to strike and the need to fight for the workers’ rights and in politics they believed in some form or other of socialism.

One other historical experience affected some of the trade unionists who formed INTUC. After Congress ministries had come to power in 1937 some States
appointed trade union leaders to positions in the labour ministry where the leaders were able to view industrial relations from a point of view other than that of labour. This experience cut across the two traditions mentioned above in that the two most prominent labour ministers, Nanda in Bombay, and Giri in Madras, respectively represented each tradition.

Thus, the trade unionists who joined INTUC in 1947 did not start thinking about the problems of trade unionism then. They had strongly committed themselves on many issues in the past and had learnt many lessons from their diverse experiences. Their previous commitments and the lessons they had learnt had not been identical. In some cases they were not even similar. Unless a leader rejects his past altogether and takes on a completely new political stance he cannot but be affected in the present by his past actions which he continues to justify. So the leader who had been in AITUC, remembers the militant struggles in which he had participated in the 1930's. The ex-NTUF unionist remembers how he had been able to restrain the workers who were being led on by irresponsible leaders from AITUC. The man from Ahmedabad remembers with feelings of pride and perhaps a sense of superiority how he had been engaged in 'constructive work' while elsewhere in India trade union leaders were engaged in destructive strikes. And finally the trade unionist who had been a minister had an insight into trade union matters as seen by the government with its wider responsibilities. He had felt the pull of two loyalties and knew that it was much easier to criticize a government than to run a government. These diverse experiences were woven together in the INTUC.

III. THE 'GANDHIAN' TRADITION

The Textile Labour Association with a membership of nearly 60,000 was by far the largest of the 200 unions that became affiliated to INTUC in 1947. TLA leaders took important positions in INTUC and their peculiar ideology of industrial relations was adopted by INTUC. The TLA was so influential partly because it was one of the few strong unions in India and also because of its association with Mahatma Gandhi.
The Textile Labour Association had its origins in a momentous dispute between the workers and the Ahmedabad mill-owners which was conducted in 1918.\(^1\) The workers were led in the dispute by Gandhi. The manner in which Gandhi conducted the strike and the method of its settlement were unique in the history of Indian industrial relations and probably in the history of industrial relations anywhere. For Gandhi the struggle was only a particular application of the weapon of 'satyagraha' which he had devised not only as a means for furthering the cause of Indian nationalism but as a means for the attainment of 'truth' and justice. For Gandhi's followers in the trade unions, the methods used at Ahmedabad in 1918 constituted an ideal to be applied as far as possible to the settlement of industrial disputes elsewhere.

The dispute at Ahmedabad was caused by the announcement by the mill-owners in January 1918 of the withdrawal of a 'plague bonus' which had been granted to workers during the previous year following the outbreak of an epidemic. The 'plague bonus' in some cases amounted to as much as 70 or 80 per cent of the workers' wage and was intended to induce the workers to remain in Ahmedabad despite the risk to their health. When the bonus was withdrawn workers protested on the grounds that prices had risen from two to four times in the previous six months. The workers demanded 50 per cent increase on their July 1917 wages. However, being illiterate, vulnerable to victimization and unorganized they were unable to resist the mill-owners alone.

Ambalal Sarabhai, the leading mill-owner in Ahmedabad, had a sister, Anasuyabehn, who had visited England shortly before and returned to India full of ideals of social service. In Ahmedabad she set up night-schools for textile workers and engaged herself in other social work. Through this work she became known as a friend, of the working class and in fact in December 1917 she led some workers on a short strike in the textile mills. It was natural in the dispute of 1918 that the workers

should have turned again to her for guidance. In her work she was assisted by
another member of the mill-owners’ social circle, Shankerlal Banker.

Meanwhile one of the mill-owners had asked Gandhi to try to settle the
dispute. Eventually both sides agreed to submit the dispute to an arbitration board
consisting of three members from each side, Gandhi being one of the
representatives on behalf of the workers. However, no sooner had the arbitration
process commenced than some restless workers in some mills went on strike.
Although Gandhi soon persuaded the workers to go back to work, the mill-owners
used the stoppage as an excuse to avoid arbitration and to declare a lock-out. Later
the millowners announced that they would be prepared to re-open the mills if
workers agreed to a 20 per cent increase in wages. Gandhi then investigated the
workers’ conditions and decided that the workers would be justified in demanding a
35 per cent increase in wages.

Once Gandhi had decided that an increase of 35 per cent was just and
consistent with truth, he refused to consider any settlement that would result in gains
of less than the just increase.

He, therefore, asked the workers for a pledge that they would not return to
work until the mill-owners agreed to meet their demands in full. At the same time
Gandhi obtained a pledge from the workers that they would not use any form of
violence.

Than the mill-owners pointed out that they too had a ‘pledge’ to keep, a
pledge to grant no more than a 20 per cent increase in wages. Gandhi appreciated
the logic of this argument and suggested a settlement that enabled both the workers
and the mill-owners to keep their pledges. On the first day that the workers returned
to work they should receive a 35 per cent in wages, on the second day a 20 per cent
increase, and on each succeeding day a 27½ per cent increase should be paid until
an independent arbitrator had investigated the cases for both sides and made an
award which would be applied retroactively. The mill-owners accepted these
proposals and Gandhi broke his fast. Eventually the arbitrator granted the full 35 per
cent increase demanded by the workers.
For Gandhi the stoppage of work at Ahmedabad was not a mere strike, but a 'satyagraha,' a striving for truth. According to Joan Bondurant 'satyagraha' 'is characterized by adherence to a stated truth by means of behaviour which is not violent but which includes self-suffering. It seeks to effect change and it operates within a conflict situation.' Thus the satyagraha, when applied in the field of labour, can be distinguished from an ordinary strike and the settlement reached at the end of a satyagraha is not a mere compromise.

The first distinguishing feature of Gandhian methods in industrial relations is that only 'truthful' claims should be made.

A strike is a form of 'Satyagraha' a striker, therefore, would not submit to superior force or hardships; once he resolves, he keeps firm to it and even at the cost of privations including starvation, he sticks to the resolution.

A strike was justified in Gandhi's view only if other means of settlement had faded. Firstly the parties should try to convince each other of the truth of their claims. Secondly they could agree to appoint a respected arbitrator. Gandhi was prepared to respect the interpretation of truth reached by an arbitrator even if it did not measure up to his own version. Finally if the employers refused to accept arbitration, the workers had to go on strike which would continue until their demands were met. The objective of a strike was not the coercion of the employers but their conversion. By being steadfast in their behaviour the workers would show to the employers that truth was on the workers' side. Gandhi did not want the employers to relent because of losses due to the strike or for other such practical reasons but because they had been convinced that the workers' claims were just.

Gandhi's recognition that different men might sincerely take a different view of truth, implied for him the use of non-violent means. The objective was to persuade

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1 Bondurant, op. cit., p. 36.
2 ibid., p. 8.
3 In 1919 Gandhi was examined before the Hunter Committee. The Committee's counsel had the following exchange with Gandhi:
his opponents that they were in error. This could never be done through violence. Occasionally Gandhi's definitions of non-violence were somewhat eccentric but in the normally accepted sense of the word, non-violence is a sine qua non of the Gandhian approach to 'industrial relations. Non-violence was also implicit in Gandhi's theory of 'trusteeship.' On one occasion Gandhi told a group of mill-owners:

What I expect of you is that you should hold all your riches as a trust to be used solely in the interest of those who sweat for you and to whose industry and labour you owe all your position and prosperity.

Naturally, if the employers were to be considered as 'trustees' in this sense there could be no justification for the use of violence against them. The lesson Gandhi taught was that the workers should always respect the good in their opponent.

Thus, the essence of Ghandhian methods when applied to trade union questions is its emphasis on persuading the employers rather than on coming them, the strict adherence to non-violence, and a willingness to bear any suffering rather than to betray a principle.

Two years after the strike in 1918 the Textile Labour association was founded. Since then it has developed into what the INTUC has described as one of the ideal trade union organizations in the world. Following Gandhi's advice, the TLA has emphasized the non-industrial, 'constructive' aspects of trade unionism, such as workers' education, medical care, prohibition, eradication of untouchability, and other

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Counsel: 'Different individuals would have different views as to truth. Would that not lead to confusion?' 
Gandhi: 'I do not think so.'
Counsel: 'Honesty striving after truth differs in every case.'
Gandhi: 'That is why the non-violence part was a necessary corollary.
Without that there would be confusion and worse.'
Bondurant, op. cit., p. 20.
1 e.g. he justified the resistance in 1947 when Pakistan attacked Kashmir.
2 Soman, op. cit., p. 72.
3 During the dispute at Ahmedabad, Gandhi expressed his admiration for the mill-owners' leader Ambalal Sarabhai. 'His resolute will and transparent sincerity were wonderful and captured my heart. It was a pleasure to be pitched against him.' Gandhi, op. cit., p. 432.
questions affecting the workers' social life. For Gandhi the trade union's function did not end at the factory gate.

The system of dispute settlement developed at Ahmedabad after 1920 has greatly influenced official thought in India on industrial relations. In 1920 a permanent arbitration board was set up consisting of one representative of the mill-owners and one of the TLA. The TLA's representative for many years was Gandhi himself. The board was to settle any dispute that arose. If the arbitrators could not agree among themselves they were to call in an independent umpire to make the final decision. In the early stages the system was only partly successful and in 1923 it broke down altogether when the mill-owners bypassed the arbitration board in bringing in a large wage reduction which led to a general strike that continued for more than two months. The arbitration system, however, survived the strike and continued to function until 1938 when the Bombay Industrial Relations Act was passed. For the next fourteen years disputes were settled by the adjudication machinery of the courts. Then in 1952 the old system of voluntary arbitration was revived. The system of court adjudication had been found to be time consuming, excessively legalistic and resulting in settlements imposed from outside rather than genuine agreements between the parties. A number of important agreements were reached by collective bargaining. Today nearly all disputes at Ahmedabad are settled out of court.\(^1\) Despite the arbitration machinery, strikes have not been unknown at Ahmedabad in individual mills and in small groups of mills\(^2\) and there was one major political strike which followed the commencement of the 'Quit India' movement in 1942. This strike lasted for 105 days.

Supporters of the Gandhian approach to industrial relations tend to regard the concept of voluntary arbitration as his main contribution to industrial relations. This approach is regarded as 'indigenous' and sometimes as uniquely Indian.

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\(^1\) A.N. Buch, Secretary of the TLA, says that only '5% of minor disputes and 1% of major disputes' are settled in court. Interview, New Delhi, March 1965.

\(^2\) By 1948, over 150 strikes had taken place, some of which had lasted for as many as six months. K. Desai, op. cit., p. 12.
IV. TRADE UNIONISM AT JAMSHEDPUR

The second most important union to be affiliated to INTUC in 1947 was the Tata Workers' Union representing workers of the Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur in the state of Bihar. The traditions of this union were different from those of the union at Ahmedabad. Its history until the Second World War was one of constant struggle both against the company and against rival unions. Among its leaders were some of India's most militant unionists.

The Tata Steel Works was opened in 1911. The company was based on a Parsi family from Bombay which had made its fortune in cotton textiles. The steel works were set up at Jamshedpur in the southern part of Bihar, an area which includes a large number of tribal inhabitants. The work-force was very heterogeneous. Thus there was little cultural affinity between the management and the working class.

The first union at Jamshedpur was formed following a spontaneous strike in 1925. During the strike there was rioting and five people were killed in police firings. General strikes were again held in 1922 and 1928. During the 1928 strike Subhas Chandra Bose came to Jamshedpur and was elected as president of the union. In 1929 a strike in the Tinplate Company at Jamshedpur lasted for 9 months. One of the leaders of this strike was an ex-employee of the company, Michael John.

During the 1930's there was considerable rivalry between different unions and some of the leaders were arrested for their participation in the nationalist agitation. In about 1937 Professor Abdul Bari came to Jamshedpur and re-organized the union and re-named it as the 'Tata Workers' Union. Bari was its president and Michael John its general secretary. Bari was a very fiery and militant leader. One commentator claims that 'the legendary Bari . . . built his leadership by considerable personal abuse of management.' His attitudes can be illustrated by two anecdotes. It had become a tradition at Jamshedpur that the birth anniversary of Jamshedji Tata

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1 This summary of the history of the Tata Workers' Union is based on Moni Ghosh, Our Struggle (1959).
be celebrated by the workers each year. Bari was opposed to this paternalism and demanded that the workers boycott the celebrations in 1939. On another occasion Bari was negotiating with the management. During the course of the negotiations Bari was offered a cup of tea. He refused to accept the tea unless a similar offer was made to every employee. The story is that every worker received a cup of tea that day. Bari’s fiery personality led to his own untimely death in 1947 when due to a misunderstanding with some policemen he was shot dead.

The leadership of the TWU was closely connected with the Congress party. Subhas Chandra Bose was of course an all-India leader of the Congress. Bari, too, was an active politician who was Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1937 and at the time of his death was president of the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee. Due to its political connections the union led a major strike in 1942 in support of the ‘Quit India’ movement. Production did not return to normal for a ‘few months. The TWU was also affiliated to the AITUC.

Thus, the historical and sociological background of the TWU was quite different from that of the TLA. There was little sense of identity between management and workers. The work-force at Jamshedpur had not had time to settle into the ways of industrial life before the development of trade unions. The result was industrial unrest and indiscipline. The difference in the type of leadership is symbolized by the differences in personality between Gandhi on the one hand, and Bose and Bari on the other. Inter-union rivalry at Jamshedpur was another factor making for greater militancy. Where there is more than one union it is natural that each should try to outbid the others in making demands upon management. In Ahmedabad a strong union had been established before any rival could challenge it but it was not until the late 1930’s that a single union emerged to represent the Tata workers. Since 1947 the history of the TWU has continued to be one of conflict either with the communists or between various factions within the union. The spirit of co-operation that was essential to the Gandhian approach has never been able to prevail at Jamshedpur.

1 Ghosh, op. cit., pp. 41-42.
3 Ghosh, op. cit., p. 52.
V. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY

INTUC was thus made up of unions that had grown out of all kinds of conditions. This raised problems for the national leadership which tried to frame policies that would be acceptable to all affiliates. The predominant position held by trade unionists from Ahmedabad can be seen from its policies but equally visible is the influence of leaders who represent a trend of thought quite different from that of the orthodox Gandhian. Organizationally the influence of the TLA is very apparent. Excepting for two of the 18 years since its foundation the offices of the president or of general secretary have been held either by one of Khandubhai Desai, S. R. Vasavada or G. D. Ambekar. Both Desai and Vasavada were officials of the TLA and Ambekar was trained at Ahmedabad. In the two exceptional years the office of treasurer was held on one occasion by Ambekar and on the other by A. N. Buch, another official of the TLA.

INTUC claims that it differs from the other trade union federations in that it places greater emphasis on taking a 'national' rather than 'sectional' approach to many problems. It tries to see things from the point of view of the nation rather than simply from the point of view of the working class. This approach is partly due to the Gandhian influence and, of course, partly due to the relationship between INTUC and the ruling party. Jawaharlal Nehru used to tell INTUC and its members that 'workers are citizens first and workers afterwards,' and Gulzarilal Nanda in speeches at INTUC meetings has often emphasized the absolute necessity of increasing production if poverty is to be overcome. But while the government has argued that the working class should take a 'national' point of view in its own long-run interests, the Gandhian argument has been frankly moralist. The Gandhians sometimes point out that the workers are not the poorest class in India and that they should therefore altruistically help those who are living in worse conditions. For example at an INTUC annual session, Anasuyabehn Sarabhai advised the delegates:

We cannot however ignore the fact that there are many other sections of society more depressed and in greater need of assistance than the industrial workers. Hence a duty lies on the organized working class to serve the backward classes while securing their own progress.\(^1\)

The Textile Labour Association has even gone so far as to request its members to boycott the products of their own mills in the interests of the poorer sections of the community. On Independence Day, 1953, the TLA passed a resolution which,

\[\ldots\text{urges upon all workers of Ahmedabad to carefully consider the message of Mahatma Gandhi on this auspicious day, and requests them not to purchase foreign goods and articles, and take a pledge to use only products of village and home industries, thereby help in this great task of liquidating unemployment.}\(^2\)

The Gandhians believe that unemployment, particularly in rural areas, can best be overcome by encouraging labour-intensive industries, such as the hand-spinning and weaving of cloth. This policy is re-inforced by their belief in self-sufficiency and the superiority of the village life. The policy of boycotting mill-cloth, if completely successful, could seriously affect the employment of mill-employees but in practice there appears to be no real chance that such a policy will ever be successful. Similarly in Indore where the INTUC textile workers union was set up by Ahmedabad-trained leaders the 'national' approach has been emphasized. One of the union leaders told an American scholar that,

\[\ldots\text{if it were in the interests of the (Congress) Party and the government, I would favour closing all mills in Indore. It would be my job to educate them (the workers) of their broader duty to the Party, the country and their village brothers.}\(^3\)

\(^1\) INTUC, Speech by Chairman, Reception Committee, Fourth Session, 1951, p. 6.
\(^2\) Indian Worker (hereinafter IVW) 22 August 1953, p. 11.
\(^3\) R. James, 'Politics and Trade Unions in India.' Far Eastern Survey, March 1956, p. 43.
The Gandhian influence can be seen further in INTUC's emphasis on 'indigenous' methods in industrial relations. The Gandhian approach is regarded as a peculiarly Indian phenomenon. The way of concensus rather than conflict is believed to have its roots in the ancient panchayats while the conflict that is so characteristic of collective bargaining is regarded as a foreign imposition. Also, the belief in accepting the judgment of a respected arbitrator reflects a traditional Indian attitude to authority.

Another characteristically Gandhian policy that has been adopted by INTUC is its support for the strict enforcement of prohibition. The TLA, for example, forbids 'Those among workers known to be addicted to alcoholic drinks'\(^1\) from standing for elective positions in the union. After the Maharashtra government liberalized\(^{1}\) its policy of prohibition in 1964, the General Secretary of INTUC pointed out in his report that 'Mahatma Gandhi used to say that he would rather prefer prohibition to Swarajya.\(^2\)

INTUC officially supports 'socialism' which is a concept derived more from western than from Gandhian thought.\(^3\) One of the objectives of INTUC is 'to place industry under national ownership and control.'\(^4\) However, INTUC does not appear to have been in any hurry in its advocacy of nationalization. Its general secretary in 1949, Khandubhai Desai made this clear:

Let me, however, warn you friends that nationalization cannot be brought about merely by resolutions in a twinkling of the eye. . . . Any undue haste in this direction would only retard the future progress or strengthen the hands of the reactionaries.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) That the socialist policy of nationalization is not anti-Gandhian is demonstrated by the way in which Gandhi, in 1926, introduced the following addition to the list of objectives of the 'TLA—'and lastly, in due course, to secure nationalization of the textile industry.' Soman, op. cit, p. 232.
\(^5\) INTUC, General Secretary's Report, 1949, p. 10.
However two years later the Gandhian, Desai, had been succeeded as general secretary by the former Congress Socialist, Hariharnath Shastri. Shastri criticized the emphasis placed in the First Five year Plan on agriculture and the absence of heavy investment in industry. The absence of public investment left the field open to private investment. Thus the result was:

... to foist private enterprise on the country or the future. The planners seem to believe that private enterprise under state control and discipline can be made to serve the interests of the country and its people. I am not optimistic in that respect.

Shastri admitted that the complete elimination of mate enterprise in the immediate future would not be a practicable proposition:

All the same, the Commission could have put before the country the goal of elimination of private enterprise and it could have indicated the lines and stages by which this could be achieved.¹

At various times since then the INTUC has called for the nationalization of all natural resources, the manganese mining industry and of other mines, of life insurance, banking (which was later nationalized), the food-grains trade, mismanaged textile mills and of various other particular industries and establishments.

INTUC has, on the other hand, been far from satisfied with the results, especially in labour relations, of the extension of the public sector. Referring to management in the public sector, Khandubhai Desai said: 'They were 20 years behind the private sector.'² The INTUC disillusionment with the public sector had reached such an extent by 1964 that its president, Kashinath Pandey, admitted:

With due respect to their faith in nationalization, which I also share to a great extent, I cannot refrain myself from saying that I feel my legs shivering when I stand

to support nationalization because I am immediately reminded of the miserable plight of workers and inefficient management of undertakings in the public sector.¹

One section of INTUC, therefore, expresses reservations on the policy of nationalization that are based on empirical grounds. The Gandhian reservation is much more basic. To the Gandhians, nationalization alone was meaningless. What was required, according to S. R. Vasavada, was:

... a change of heart and outlook of all whether he was a worker or an employer. . . . Nationalization of industries would be premature unless such a consciousness came over all concerned.²

Thus, within INTUC the Gandhians have always urged patience on the issue of nationalization and have set somewhat unrealistic conditions to be met before nationalization should take place. Those who drew their inspiration more from the socialistic doctrines of the West have been more enthusiastic supporters of nationalization although in later years their enthusiasm had begun to wane.

The difference in approach between the Gandhians and the socialists is again illustrated in their attitudes towards economic planning. Generally INTUC has enthusiastically supported planning but has reserved the right to criticize particular aspects of particular plans. The Gandhians have tended to approve of the slower rate of industrialization and economic growth which is implicit in their emphasis on agriculture and small-scale industry. Before the First Plan was published, Khandubhai Desai, as the president of INTUC, said:

... I would urge upon the powers that be, to give priorities in the first instance to the rural resources so as to ensure increased production in food and industrial raw materials. The resources of the country being limited, any plan for the utilization of the economic resources for industrial development will be a diversion, unsuited to our country.³

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¹ INTUC, Presidential Address, 1964, p. 9.
When the Planning Commission did in fact produce a plan that followed along the lines suggested by Desai, it was severely criticized by INTUC's general secretary, Harihamath Shastri, who argued that

To provide employment to the surplus rural population and to ensure the same to the urban masses, there is no other alternative except to regard the industrial progress of our country a matter of vital importance. . . (The Commission) proposes to devote to industry only one sixth of the money assigned for agriculture.¹

The Second Plan placed an emphasis on industry that was lacking during the First Plan. During the plan period unemployment continued to rise which led INTUC to adopt the slogan 'full employment through greater emphasis on small-scale village and cottage industries.'² In emphasizing the reduction of unemployment rather than the increase of production, the Gandhians in INTUC leave themselves open to the charge that they are putting a 'sectional' interest ahead of a national interest. To such a charge the Gandhians would reply that the 'national' interest cannot be measured in economic terms alone. S. R. Vasavada in 1961 said:

Approach to planning should not be in terms of quantitative production alone and the machines and foreign exchange required for the same; the centre of planning should be the MAN and not the machine. . . . The approach to planning must be with a view to also build up men of character.³

To what extent has INTUC regarded a policy of wage restraint as a corollary to its support for economic planning? Until 1951 it seems that INTUC was exercising such restraint that real wages were falling. The general secretary in his report in 1951 said that INTUC had 'observed great restraint in refraining from pressing for complete neutralization of every successive stage in the rise in the cost of living.'⁴ However in the same report the opposition of INTUC to the wage freeze policies that

¹ INTUC, Annual Report, 1951, p. 124.
⁴ INTUC, Annual Report, 1951, p. 17.
were to become part of the First Five Year Plan is recorded. During the First Five Year Plan Khandubhai Desai was appointed Union Minister for Labour and it seems likely that his influence was one of the reasons for the reversal of wage policy for the Second Plan. Desai favours a 'dynamic wage' which he says is a necessary incentive for workers, apart from the moral argument for a rise in wages. When the Second Plan commenced in 1956, INTUC, far from advocating wage restraint, was asking the government to consider a 25 per cent increase in wages in exchange for a commitment to two years industrial peace on the part of labour. Although INTUC generally supports increases in wages there are occasions where, in special circumstances, it regards wage cuts as being in the best interests of the workers. For example in 1959 in Maharashtra the INTUC accepted a wage cut in the textile industry 'in the interests of the workers themselves' presumably because of difficulties experienced by the industry at that time.

The issue of rationalization and modernization of machinery is another issue where the workers' short-run interests may conflict with the national interest. At first in 1951 INTUC was hesitant on the issue:

In the present economic state of the country rationalization can be justified only to the extent it can be done without creating unemployment and that too with a view to cheapen the products for the consumers and enable the workers to reach a living wage standard.

On the question of the introduction of automatic machinery INTUC protested on good Luddite grounds:

... operatives attending to such machinery are liable to suffer severe nervous strain, and ultimately nervous break-down, as a result of the extreme monotony and very high speed of the machines. A strong representation was

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1 ibid., p. 38.
2 Khandubhai Desai, interview in New Delhi, March 1965.
3 INTUC, Report, 1956, p. 27.
made to the Government of India to put a ban on manufacture, import and installation of such machines.¹

The INTUC position on rationalization consisted of a psychological predisposition to oppose it combined with an intellectual acceptance of its necessity in certain conditions provided that it did not result in retrenchments. In 1955, in the city of Kanpur, the policy was put to a test. The mill-owners introduced a rationalization scheme, which, according to the Labour Minister, Khandubhai Desai, consisted of normal and usual schemes of rationalization that contained nothing which Bombay, Sholapur and Ahmedabad mills had not already done. He was confident there would be no retrenchment.² The effects of the rationalization scheme, however, were such that it resulted in a three months strike that had such popular support that even the local INTUC union was forced to join with the communists and the HMS. However the central leadership of INTUC continued to support the rationalization scheme and disaffiliated its own union in Kanpur because it had supported the strike. Thus in a crisis the INTUC, at least at the central level, took the 'national' approach, although for the local union to have done so would have resulted in a complete liquidation of its strength.

By 1963 the INTUC’s attitude had progressed much further and in the textile industry rationalization was regarded as beneficial rather than as a threat:

The Textile workers are less worried about the problems created by modernization or installation of automatic machinery than what would happen to the units which do not either have finances or plans to renovate the textile units.³

As part of its 'national' policy INTUC generally tries to limit strikes. In the late 1940's when the communists seemed to be calling strikes on every conceivable issue, INTUC apparently opposed all strikes.⁴ By 1953, due largely to the influence of Hariharnath Shastri, INTUC had taken on the appearance of a more militant

¹ INTUC, Annual Report, 1955, p. 28.
² IW, 28 May 1955, p. 3.
⁴ INTUC, A Review, May 1949, p. 76.
organization. Shastri denounced the 'apathetic attitude of the Central Government' on labour questions and even went so far as to threaten to call a general strike if nothing were done to ease the situation for the workers. Whether the threat was serious or not is not clear but in any case the strike did not take place.

There is considerable variety in the propensity of different INTUC unions to call strikes. The Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh in Bombay has never called a strike since the achievement of independence in 1947. The TLA at Ahmedabad has a similar record. In Bengal, on the other hand, the INTUC unions for jute workers have often supported strikes, including, since 1959, a number of general one-day strikes in the jute industry. It can be argued that the use of the strike weapon depends less on ideology than on the actual conditions in which a union finds itself. A strong union like the one in Ahmedabad can afford to oppose a strike called by opposition unions. But when the opposition unions in Kanpur called a strike on the rationalization issue, the relatively weak INTUC union had to join them. INTUC leaders in the field face very real dilemmas when rival unions call strikes on popular issues. For example in about 1956 an award was handed down for some coal-miners but the employers failed to implement the award properly. The workers were discontented and the communists were preparing to give a strike call. Sensing what was happening the INTUC leader gave fourteen days notice of a strike against the award in the hope that some sort of settlement could be reached without a strike and without the communists getting the credit. The leader happened to visit Delhi during the fortnight. The Labour Minister, Khandubhai Desai, summoned the INTUC leader and lectured him on the teachings of Gandhi and the sanctity of awards. The INTUC leader defended himself on the grounds that a strike notice was better than a strike, and the choice was limited to those two alternatives. Eventually the management appreciated the situation and properly implemented the award.

In 1960 a general strike call was given by all the unions in the cashew-nut industry in Kerala. The strike had widespread support leaving the INTUC union no choice but to join it. Because of their association with the AITUC union in the strike they were reprimanded by the national leadership of INTUC. They defended

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themselves with the novel, but plausible argument that their participation 'in the strike had a salutary effect in keeping out violence and maintaining discipline.\(^1\)

The Congress government exercised some pressure on INTUC to avoid strikes. At the 1962 session of INTUC the Labour Minister, Gulzarilal Nanda, requested that workers with grievances should not actually stop work but should send a message to the State Labour Minister saying, We should be considered as on strike.' Nanda hoped that the State Labour Ministers would treat such messages with the same urgency that they would treat an actual strike.\(^2\) Sanjeeva Reddy, when he was Chief Minister of Andhra, was rather more blunt:

There should be no occasion for strikes when the Government was constituted of representatives of the people.\(^3\)

However when the State of Kerala elected a communist government the change in INTUCs attitude to the government was matched only by the change in AITUC's position in one textile mill, INTUC led a strike in 1958 that lasted seventy days\(^4\) and later in 1959, INTUC was associated with the agitation that led to the downfall of the communist government.

Thus it is clear that INTUC does participate in strikes quite often. At the same time it claims to participate less than the other federations do. In August 1963, the Labour Minister, Nanda, claimed that '99 per cent of the cases of work stoppage, as reported to the Ministry, were due to AITUC.\(^5\) However the statistics published by Nanda's ministry for the year 1963 presented a somewhat different picture to that painted by the Minister. INTUC unions had been responsible for 35.9 per cent of

\(^1\) INTUC, Report, 1961, p. 89.
\(^2\) INTUC, Report, 1963, p. 28.
\(^3\) INTUC, Report, 1957, p. 27. The approach of Sanjeeva Reddy here has a striking similarity to that of communist theory. Another state Labour Minister said in 1958: 'In a welfare state like India, there is no need for trade unions because the state does more for workers than their own trade unions.' Trade unions could be useful for activities connected with education, culture and sports.' Quoted by Van Dusen Kennedy, The Conceptual and Legislative Framework of Labour Relations in India, Industrial and Labour Relations Review, July 1958, p. 499.
\(^4\) IW, 4 August 1958, p. 6.
strikes and 45.2 per cent of the man-days lost in stoppages, compared with AITUCs responsibility for 34.7 per cent of the disputes and 27.6 per cent of the man-days lost. 1993 was not a typical year in that it was the year following the declaration of the emergency. The total number of stoppages and amount of time lost was considerably less largely because of the extremely cautious policy which had been adopted by the Communist Party. Before the emergency INTUC did not figure so prominently. In 1959, for example, it was responsible for 26.9 per cent of stoppages and 24.6 per cent of the man-days lost, which were proportions less than those of AITUCs but more than those of HMS, which of course is a very much smaller organization. If the measure used were man-days lost per member, INTUC would come below both HMS and UTUC on the list.

VI. INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS AND THE CONGRESS

The INTUC was set up by Congress and most of its leaders are Congressmen. But, from the organizational point of view, it is quite separate from the Congress. It has its own constitution and organization. Its office-bearers are in no formal sense responsible to the leaders of the party. However, as Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out:

Technically the INTUC and the Indian National Congress are two separate organizations and neither is subordinate to the other. Still it goes without saying that the INTUC 'has been sponsored and nursed mostly by Congressmen and derives its strength from the moral and other support of the Congress. As such it is imperative that in all political matters. All Congressmen working in the INTUC should treat the Congress as its supreme body and abide by its code of conduct.'

INTUC claims that there is a clear division of work between the Congress and the INTUC. The functions of the ruling party are one thing, those of a trade union are another. Congress, being a multi-class organization, naturally would have wider

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responsibilities than those of a purely working class organization. Because of this, says INTUC,

there could not be any question of encroachment of one upon the other. . . the functions of the two organizations should be mutual and complementary and their working should be harmonious.¹

During elections the INTUC has always given formal support to the Congress. In July 1951, before the 1952 general elections, the INTUC Working Committee meeting at Bareilly, passed its 'Bareilly Resolution' which pointed out 'that the Indian National Congress alone' fulfilled the conditions necessary for obtaining the support of the working class. The resolution justified INTUC's support for the Congress on the grounds that firstly Congress had paved the way for realization of the goal of classless society by accomplishing the winning of independence; secondly, Congress alone could ensure stability 'in the present period of grave international crisis and national emergency'; thirdly, Congress was essentially a party of the rural masses 'whose problems and aspirations are very much akin to those of workers'; and lastly, Congress had promised 'social justice,' and improved living standards and conditions of work.² INTUC therefore, called upon workers to support the Congress.

The reasons given by INTUC for its support for Congress could have hardly served to enthuse the working class. INTUC's support for Congress was due not so much to any policies of Congress that favoured the working class as to INTUC's sense of the political weakness of the working class. In the 1951 report, the INTUC general secretary asked what else could INTUC do.

If elections are fought on working class ticket there are hardly any prospects of success and even if a few candidates succeed they will be utterly incapable of playing any effective role in shaping the future policies.³

¹ INTUC, Report, 1959, p. 34.
² INTUC, Annual Report, 1951; p. 29.
³ ibid., pp. 129-130.
However, by supporting Congress there was the possibility that trade unionists would get places on the Congress ticket which would ensure for them the powerful support of that organization and increase their chances of winning. Once in parliament or in the legislature, the trade unionist would have easier access to the ministers in Congress governments and in addition there was every chance that prominent trade unionist-Congressmen would be elevated into the ministry.

Before the 1952 elections a number of INTUC leaders from Bengal had split away from the Congress and had joined another party. They stood as candidates in opposition to the Congress in the elections but remained as officials of INTUC afterwards. However, by the time of the 1957 elections these leaders had left the INTUC and joined the HMS. Thus, in 1952, INTUC members had been permitted to oppose the Congress. In 1957 the General Council of INTUC laid down the law:

It is needless to indicate in this context that any member of the INTUC desirous of contesting the elections, will do so only on the Congress ticket.

INTUC justified its support for Congress on the grounds that there was a ‘fundamental ideological unity between the Indian National Congress and the INTUC.’ INTUC also expressed its approval of the general direction in which Congress was leading, namely in the direction ‘of socialist order of the society,’ and of particular measures taken with this goal in view such as land reforms, community development, nationalization of life insurance, labour legislation and so on.¹

INTUC supported Congress once again in 1962 but not with the enthusiasm with which support was given in 1957. The general secretary, in his 1962 report, said:

During the two terms of its regime, the policies followed by the Indian National Congress and its Governments at the Centre and the States occasionally did cause some dissatisfaction and hardships and at times by not

¹ INTUC, Report, 1957, pp. 35-36.
fully rising up to the expectations of the people, but on the whole its policies led the country to political stability and fostering economic progress.

The general secretary went on to say:

At this juncture the country was threatened by disintegrating and reactionary forces of communalism and other vested interests within the country and by communism from within and outside. 1

The argument in support of Congress in 1962 was rather negative. In 1957 the INTUC was praising Congress for the steps it had taken toward socialism, whereas in 1962 they were asserting that the alternatives to Congress rule were disintegration, communalism or communism. Congress seemed to have become merely the lesser evil.

The policy of supporting Congress has resulted in a number of INTUC leaders entering the Lok Sabha or the state assemblies. In 1957 a very small proportion of the total number of Congress candidates were from INTUC, but those who were nominated had considerable success. Fourteen INTUC candidates were placed on the Congress ticket for the Lok Sabha elections and of these eleven were successful. Unfortunately for INTUC, among their defeated candidates were the Union Minister for Labour, Khandubhai Desai in an Ahmedabad constituency and G. D. Ambekar in Bombay. Both suffered because of the linguistic agitation in Bombay State at that time. For the state legislatures, 56 INTUC members stood as Congress candidates and 54 were successful. 2

In 1962 INTUC recommended 130 names for the consideration of the Congress in the selection of its candidates. Of these only about half were eventually given Congress ticket. 3 In elections to the Lok Sabha only five out of nine INTUC candidates were elected. Among the casualties were S. R. Vasavada, the general secretary, and Ramsinghbhai Varma, one of the vice-presidents of INTUC.

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3 IV, 16 April 1962, p. 3.
was more successful at the state level where eighty per cent of its candidates were
successful. Nevertheless in the state assemblies only 45 seats were held by INTUC
out of a total of 1,773 seats won by the Congress. Only in Assam did INTUC
constitute a significant group among the Congress legislators. Plantation workers in
Assam were responsible for the return of all 12 INTUC candidates among the 79
Congress MLAs. In the major industrialized states the INTUC groups in the
assemblies were very small. In Maharashtra there were five INTUC MLA's out of
215 Congress MLA's, in Gujarat five out of 113, in Bihar two out of 185 and in West
Bengal five out of 157.

When an INTUC leader moves into a Congress Ministry, of course, INTUC
becomes rather more influential. Of the five Union Ministers for Labour since
independence, two have been INTUC leaders, one was slightly associated with
INTUC, and two were not associated with INTUC. The two non-INTUC leaders were
both from the Scheduled Castes. Thus to become a Union Minister for Labour it is
apparently necessary to be either associated with INTUC or to be a member of a
Scheduled Caste. The first Minister for Labour, Jagjivan Ram, was from a Scheduled
Caste. He was succeeded in 1952 by V. V. Giri, who had been a member of the
original executive of INTUC but had not taken a very active part in it after 1947.
Organizationally Giri was not very close to INTUC and ideologically he was quite
separate from it with his emphasis on collective bargaining and his desire to
dismantle the machinery of compulsory adjudication. In 1954 Giri resigned and was
replaced by Khandubhai Desai who was virtually the mouthpiece of INTUC. During
his term as Labour Minister, Desai continued to sit with the INTUC Working
Committee. Desai made no effort to assume a neutral stance as a minister. He
openly proclaimed that he would support INTUC. He admits that there were
occasions when his duties as Labour Minister led him to take positions that were
unacceptable to the INTUC leaders but they were on minor issues which were
settled 'within the family.' When Desai was defeated in the 1957 elections he was
succeeded by his close colleague, Gulzarilal Nanda who had already been in cabinet
since 1950 as Minister for Planning. Nanda also continued to sit with the INTUC

1 IW, 19 March, 1962, p. 3.
3 Khandubhai Desai, in interview, New Delhi, March 1965.
Working Committee and to advise INTUC on all major questions. Nanda remained Labour Minister until 1963 when D. Sanjivayya, a member of a Scheduled Caste, was appointed to that position. Nanda, however, continued in cabinet as Home Minister, and for a few days as Prime Minister. Sanjivayya, too, after he became Labour Minister, has attended sessions of the INTUC Working Committee. A number of Union Deputy Ministers for Labour have also come from the ranks of INTUC, such as Abid Ali Jafferbhoy, R. K. Malaviya, and B. C. Bhagwati.

At the state level the relationship between INTUC and the state governments has varied from case to case. In some states the appointment of an INTUC Minister for Labour seems to be almost automatic whereas in other states there is a continual feud between INTUC and the state government. In Bombay, Gulzarilal Nanda had taken over the Labour Ministry in the government elected in 1937. He again held the labour portfolio in 1946, which he retained until his elevation to the Union cabinet in 1950. In 1950 the INTUC treasurer Shantilal Shah joined the Bombay Government as Labour Minister and in 1960 another INTUC treasurer, P. K. Sawant, became Maharashtra's Minister for Agriculture. For a brief period after the 1962 elections the Labour Ministry was held by M. G. Mane, who had not been associated with INTUC, but he was replaced by N. Tidke, an INTUC leader from Nagpur, in 1963. After the division of Bombay state into Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960, M. Vyas, an official of the TLA at Ahmedabad, became Gujarat's Labour Minister. Thus, INTUC has provided the Minister for Labour for almost the entire history of Bombay State, and later Maharashtra and Gujarat. With the appointment of Tidke in 1963, there were three INTUC leaders in the Maharashtra Cabinet. Similarly in Assam where the then general secretary of INTUC, K. P. Tripathi, became Labour Minister in 1957, the INTUC has enjoyed a close relationship with the government. In Madhya Pradesh, V. V. Dravid held the Labour Ministry from 1952 to 1964. Bhagwat Dayal Sharma, president of the Punjab INTUC, became Punjab's Labour Minister in 1962. At the other extreme stands West Bengal. In 1947 INTUC's national president, Dr Suresh Chandra Banerjee resigned to become West Bengal's Labour Minister but he soon resigned from the ministry and since then no more INTUC leaders have joined the West Bengal Ministry and relations between the government and INTUC have been particularly bad.
VII. INDIAN NATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS AND THE GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL

The relations between the Congress and INTUC have been in a state of constant turmoil in West Bengal from 1948 to the present day. The turmoil has been largely due to political rather than purely labour factors.

Bengali politics had always been characterized by groups and factions. As independence approached three main groups were apparent in the Congress. One group was based on the old revolutionary organization, 'jugantar.' A second faction, known as the 'Hooghly' group was regionally based being made up of members coming from areas along the Hooghly river in West Bengal. A third group was centred on the Abhoy Ashram with its headquarters at Comilla in East Bengal. If any group in Bengal could be called Gandhian it was the 'Abhoy Ashram' group, In fact it was Gandhi who had given the Ashram its name. No group alone was strong enough to set up a government in West Bengal so the Congress High Command, backed by Gandhi, intervened with the result that Prafulla Ghosh of the Abhoy Ashram' group became Chief Minister. He took Suresh Chandra Banerjee into his Cabinet as Labour Minister and Banerjee also became president of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee. However, like the 'Jugantar' group, most of the 'Abhoy Ashram' supporters came from East Bengal. The 'Hooghly' group, led by Abhoy Ghosh and Prafulla Sen, who was Minister for Food, formed a predominantly West Bengali dissident group in the Congress. The dissidents' opportunity came when Prafulla Ghosh took some strong measures against black-marketeering, including the arrest of one Marvari businessman. Pressure was brought to bear on the government for the release of the businessman by the powerful Marwari business community in Calcutta as well as pressure for the inclusion of a Marwari in the cabinet. Ghosh refused to submit to the pressure, but when it became apparent that both the ‘Hooghly’ and ‘Jugantar’ groups were not supporting him on the issue, he resigned. Later Ghosh claimed that his resignation was 'the result of a clique and a conspiracy' organized jointly by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Marwari industrialist, G. D. Birla.

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2 Janata, 24 February 1957, p. 11.
Instead of electing one of their own men as Chief Minister, the ‘Hooghly’ group decided to support Dr B. C. Roy, a member of the Calcutta ‘establishment’ who once had been one of Gandhi’s physicians. The new government recognized the importance of being supported by the industrialists in a state as relatively industrialized as was West Bengal. Men with industrial backgrounds have entered the cabinet since then but no trade unionist has.

Although the ‘Abhoy Ashram’ group was defeated politically, Banerjee and his colleague, Deven Sen, continued to control the INTUC in West Bengal. For two years the ‘Abhoy Ashram’ group tolerated its minority position in Congress but in November 1950, following the defeat of Prafulla Ghosh’s friend, J. B. Kripalani, for the presidency of the Indian National Congress, they decided to set up their own party, the Krishak Praja Mazdoor Party with Banerjee as president and Ghosh as general secretary. Later in 1951 this party merged with Kripalani’s followers when they broke away from the Congress. The new party was called the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party. At the same time Banerjee was president of the state INTUC and Deven Sen was its general secretary, and both Banerjee and Sen were members of the national working committee of INTUC.

The central leadership of INTUC was somewhat disturbed by these developments. The INTUC Bulletin of January 1951 stated:

We reiterated our view that the future of the working class in this country lay in closer alliance with the Congress and we expressed our deep concern on the decision taken by our colleagues in Bengal in associating with a rival party. All the same we reiterated our faith in the independent character of the INTUC which has no organizational link with the Congress and we held the view that the only criterion that could determine the relationship of any person with our organization could be his faith in and adherence to our constitution, its objectives and method.¹

¹ INTUC, Annual Report, 1951, p. 128.
There seemed to be little doubt that Suresh Chandra Banerjee did adhere to the objectives and methods of INTUC. Equally it was quite understandable that Banerjee did not see much hope for the working class in alliance with Congress in Bengal.

During the 1952 elections some INTUC trade unionists stood on KMPP tickets against Congressmen and this was tolerated, although discouraged by the national INTUC leadership. As the KMPP in Bengal was constituted mainly of East Bengalis cut off from their home bases by partition, the party failed miserably in the elections. After this loss, the KMPP began to look around for electoral allies. In Calcutta they decided to cooperate with the Communist Party in the municipal elections. The national INTUC general secretary, Hariharnath Shastri visited Calcutta in order to persuade Banerjee and Sen against this course of action but he failed.

Eventually the KMPP, in its search for electoral allies, ran into the Socialist Party, which for similar reasons, was engaged in the same search. The result was the merger of the two parties as the Praja Socialist Party in 1952. This complicated matters further for the INTUC. Now the leaders of the Bengal INTUC were not only in an opposition political party but in a party which itself had sponsored a trade union federation in rivalry to INTUC. A problem was also created for the PSP which in Bengal found its own members controlling two rival trade union organizations.

Because Banejee and Sen continued to co-operate with the communists on some issues, the national INTUC stepped in and dissolved its Bengal branch and an ad hoc committee was set up with Kali Mukhejee, a Congressman, as convenor. Fresh elections were conducted a year later in April 1953, under the supervision of the national president, Michael John. There was considerable oppositions from some members against PSP members being allowed to contest the elections. When Michael John over-ruled these objections a group of about forty led by Byomkesh Mazumdar and Mrs Maitreyee Bose walked out of the meeting. However some 500 members remained participate in the vote.¹ The result was the election of two

¹ IW, 2 May 1953, p. 9.
general secretaries, one being Deven Sen of the PSP and the other was Daya Ram Beri of the Congress. The Central INTUCs policy was stated:

We stated many a time that we would under no circumstances allow any group of persons to exploit our organization or any of its units for anti-Congress propaganda or in any political exploitation. At the same time as an independent working class organization, the INTUC could not function as a close preserve of the Congress. Acceptance of any such policy would jeopardize the very effectiveness of the organization and undo the very purpose for which it was started.¹

Following the re-election of Sen to an office in INTUC, the Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee passed a resolution banning Congressmen from working with INTUC.² Later it set up a Labour Sub-committee headed by Kali Mukherjee which, no doubt, had the function of undermining the PSP element in INTUC.

Manoeuvring in INTUC continued until the end of 1954 when the two factions were able to agree on a list of office bearers. Mrs Bose became President and three general secretaries were agreed upon, namely Kali Mukherjee, Daya Ram Beri and Deven Sen, Although Sen appeared to be in a distinct minority among the office bearers, he claims that he continued to control the organization.³

The factional dispute was finally solved in April 1956 when Sen, who had been under pressure from the PSP to leave INTUC, at last resigned. According to Sen, he resigned because of:

. . . increasing interference by the President of the Pradesh Congress and the State Chief Minister in the affairs of the B.P.N.T.U.C.

The president of the BPNTUC, Mrs. Bose, on the other hand, said that she was not aware of any such interference although she admitted that the Congress

¹ INTUC, Annual Review, 1953, p. 94.
² IW, 16 May 1953, p. 12.
³ Deven Sen, in interview, Calcutta, March 1965.
president had a right to discipline Congressmen. But in her opinion, 'This cannot be called interference.' Sen immediately took his unions into the HMS and soon became general secretary of its West Bengal branch.

Thus for about six years the West Bengal branch of INTUC was torn by factionalism which at its basis, had nothing to do with trade unionism. According to Kali Mukherjee, his differences with Sen were entirely political. If Sen had resigned from the PSP, Mukherjee says he would have been happy for Sen to remain in INTUC. For most of the six years Banerjee and Sen had the support of the national leadership of INTUC. Both had been members of the foundation executive of INTUC. Their 'Gandhian' background was appealing to the Gandhian element in INTUC while the fact that in the 1930's they had joined the Congress Socialist party gave them something in common with the socialist element. In contrast to Sen and Banerjee, Kali Mukherjee had previously been a member of the Communist Party which he left before independence. In addition the Congressmen in the West Bengal INTUC had been associated with communists, socialists and others in an effort to dislodge the INTUC president, Michael John, from the leadership of a number of unions in the Asansol area of West Bengal. In these circumstances it was possible that if Sen and Banerjee had not resigned, they could have remained in INTUC indefinitely with the support of the central leadership.

The West Bengal Congress Party, led by Atulya Ghosh, naturally did not relish PSP control of the working class in a state that was relatively highly industrialized. Ghosh therefore encouraged the INTUC dissidents against Sen. At the same time the PSP was not prepared to fully trust and support Sen so long as he remained in INTUC. According to Sen, the PSP was not anxious to place him on its main bodies and the INTUC was discouraging him from accepting such positions. Nevertheless in Bengal Banerjee became the president of the PSP and Sen was on the executive. It has been suggested that the PSP group left INTUC when they did because they may not have received the full support of the PSP in the coming 1957 elections if they had remained in INTUC.

1 IW, 16 April 1956, p. 11.
2 Kali Mukherjee, in interview, Calcutta, March 1965.
3 Deven Sen, in interview, Calcutta, March 1965.
The case seemed to support the contention that in the long-run, a trade union organization supported by one political party could not continue to contain members of another, rival party.

Not long after the PSP element had been eliminated from INTUC a new conflict developed in West Bengal between the INTUC' leaders, Mrs Bose and Kali Mukherjee, and the State Congress. By 1958 Atulya Ghosh, the Congress boss,' was encouraging a number of unions run by Congressmen but which were not affiliated to INTUC, and were often competing with INTUC unions. In early 1959, Nepal Roy, a Congress MLA claimed to have set up a new INTUC branch in West Bengal but this claim was rejected by the central office of INTUC which also pointed out that Roy's own union had already been disaffiliated from the INTUC because it had formed a front with the communists. Later Ghosh scored a major success when he managed to take over the Hindustan Steel Workers Union, the INTUC union at the Durgapur Steel Plant which is situated in the Burdwan district of Bengal. Atulya Ghosh's Lok Sabha constituency is also in Burdwan district. Mrs. Bose had been president of the union. Under Ghosh's presidency the union was recognized but it seemed to be lacking in popular support as it could only manage to pick up one of the ten seats in the elections to the plant's works committee in September 1962.\(^2\) Later Atulya Ghosh extended his trade union activities to unions for bank employees in Calcutta, a group of workers who are notoriously anti-Congress.

The INTUC responded to these incursions with growing militancy. They cooperated with the communists in calling a one day general strike for jute workers in December 1959, and also participated in a 42-days tramways strike in Calcutta. The cooperation between INTUC and AITUC in these strikes was a clear breach of INTUC policy. In May 1962, when the INTUC annual session was held in Calcutta, Kali Mukherjee took the opportunity to denounce the West Bengal government in very strong terms. He claimed that wages in West Bengal were extremely low compared with other states and that this was the cause of widespread industrial unrest in Bengal. Mukherjee explained the reason for this state of affairs:

\(^1\) IW, 23 March 1959, p. 1.
\(^2\) Trade Union Record, 20 September 1962, p. 2.
It is well known in history that in order to attract British capital in Eastern India, wages in Bengal were deliberately kept low for the exploitation of Indian labour. . . . The present State Government, it seems, is also adhering to the same policy which it inherited from the British. . . . This is the basic reason for the low wage structure and dearness allowance that is prevailing in the State.

Mukherjee claimed that the state government was being excessively influenced by 'the Jute Kings of Bengal.'

Why did 'the former allies in the battle against Deven Sen split up so soon after their victory? The most common explanations given to me were in terms of personal clashes and ambitions. It is possible to provide a deeper, although more tentative, explanation.

One reason for Atulya Ghosh's dissatisfaction with the INTUC may have been their poor showing of the Congress in working class constituencies in the 1957 elections. According to statistics prepared by Kali Mukherjee (with a somewhat different purpose in mind), of the 35 seats in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly with a significant working class population, Congress could win only fourteen. From the point of view of the party, stronger organization was required among the working class. In Calcutta white-collar workers are reputed to be '100 per cent Communist' and it is among these workers that Ghosh has sponsored more unions. The Durgapur steel plant is also situated in a district where the Congress was relatively weak compared with other districts, and it was also a district in which Atulya Ghosh had a personal interest.

The INTUC's dissatisfaction with Congress may have been due to a failure by the Congress to reward the INTUC leaders for driving the PSP element out of INTUC. The INTUC leaders have had difficulty in obtaining Congress tickets in West

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1 Kali Mukherjee, Thoughts on Industrial Relation, p. 21.
2 IW, 19 March 1962, p. 12.
3 According to one official of INTUC in West Bengal.
Bengal even in working class areas and none had been taken into the state ministry in contrast to the situation in other states. In addition the ministry did include business interests.

Perhaps the basic cause of the clash between INTUC and the government is the relative weakness of INTUC in the major industries. About a quarter of Bengal's industrial workers are employed in the jute industry. According to my own calculations, of the 60,743 jute workers belonging to the 14 unions with memberships of over 1,000 in 1963-64, only 22,256 belonged to unions affiliated to INTUC. Slightly more belonged to the AITUC unions while the others were spread between HMS, and the two wings of the UTUC. In the engineering industry even INTUC leaders admit that AITUC is firmly entrenched and of the ten largest unions for bank employees in Bengal in 1963-64, not one was aligned with INTUC. Thus INTUC is not able to make its presence felt except in alliance with other unions including AITUC. Politically INTUC is unable to deliver much in the way of electoral goods. At the same time the owners of the jute industry support the Congress. (The Swatantra Party has had no success in Bengal). Why should the Congress risk losing industrial support in order to give concessions to a trade union movement that has been unable to prove its political worth anyway? Naturally in these circumstances the INTUC feels frustrated.

VIII. FACTIONALISM IN BIHAR

In Bengal, in the latter period, the INTUC formed a united group opposed to the readership of the State Congress party. In other states factionalism has cut across the distinction between trade union and party. The factional divisions within the Congress have similarly divided the INTUC. The state of Bihar provides an illustration of this type.

Relations between the Tata Workers' Union and the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee were excellent in 1947 when Professor Abdul Bari led the union and Rajendra Prasad led the Congress. When Prasad moved into the Union government

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¹ Based on unpublished statistics obtained from the Labour Directorate of the West Bengal government.
he was succeeded as president of the Bihar PCC by Bari. After Bari's death in 1947
he was succeeded in the Tata Workers' Union by Michael John. The good
relationship with the Congress continued until about 1951. According to Moni Ghosh,
a former secretary of the TWU, personal differences arose among Congressmen
interested in labour, following the appointment of a new editor of a weekly
newspaper dealing with labour.¹ Soon an anti-John group was formed with the
encouragement of some leaders in the Congress and some ministers. The leader of
the group was Chhotelal Vyas who was also a member of the General Council of the
national INTUC. Vyas formed a union of temporary workers in the steel works at
Jamshedpur and in surrounding factories. The provincial Labour Minister attempted
to promote a compromise under which Vyas would leave the steel workers with John
and John would leave certain other factories with Vyas.

The dispute widened in 1953 when Atulya Ghosh lent his support to Vyas
against Michael John's union at the Burnpur steel plant of the Indian Iron and Steel
Company which is situated in West Bengal. The Burnpur plant was within Ghosh's
Lok Sabha constituency and apparently the Congress had not received enough
votes from the areas in which workers in John's unions lived. Atulya Ghosh
approached Kali Mukherjee who was the secretary of the West Bengal Legislature
Congress party and Mukherjee joined Vyas in his agitation against Michael John.
Vyas asked the workers at Burnpur to adopt 'go-slow' tactics, according to the
national INTUC, in order 'to compel the company and the Government to interfere in
the elections of the union.'² Vyas's supporters also attacked the union's office which
led to the outbreak of violence. The company declared a lock-out and the violent
agitation which followed resulted in a police firing. Among the supporters of the
'Action Committee' of which Vyas was the chairman were Congressmen from Bihar
and West Bengal and also some communists and socialists.

After the outbreak of violence, the national INTUC expelled Chhotelal Vyas
and reprimanded Kali Mukherjee, and the All India Congress Committee instructed
the Bihar Congress to expel Vyas from the party. With the intervention of the AICC

¹ M. Ghosh, op. cit.
² INTUC, Annual Report, 1953, pp. 95-96.
the disruption of the previous eight months subsided. In the presidential address to INTUC in December 1953 Michael John gave a warning:

> What happened at Burnpur should be an eye-opener to the democratic trade union movement. We have resisted until now the attempts of Communists, Socialists and other political parties to utilize the working class as a pawn in their political game. We shall similarly resist any such attempt by Congressmen also.¹

In this dispute the supporters of Vyas were prepared to adopt extreme tactics to depose John. For eight months steel production was restricted because of their campaign. The Congressmen who opposed John were prepared to align themselves with any opponents of John whether they were in Congress or not. The West Bengal Congress, too, wanted to depose John, in order to place one of their own men in charge of his unions in Bengal. This could have been part of their own campaign against Deven Sen as John had constantly supported Sen. When the West Bengal government proposed that government supervised elections be held at Burnpur the INTUC reacted strongly. K. P. Tripathi described the proposal as a ‘threat to constitutional trade unionism.’² Eventually the weight of the High Command of the Congress party was thrown behind John and he survived.

The next challenge to Michael John came from the communists who were organizing themselves at Jamshedpur.³ The first sign of communist influence to the outside world was the victory of the secretary of the Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union, Kedar Das, in the Jamshedpur seat for the Bihar Legislative Assembly in the 1957 elections. Das defeated a TWU-supported candidate. Another TWU candidate narrowly defeated a communist in another working class constituency in Jamshedpur. After this a number of communist-led strikes took place which culminated in May 1958 with the closure of the Tata Iron and Steel Company plant, the outbreak of violence and police firings. It has been suggested that one important

¹ IW, 26 December 1953, p. 13.
² IW, 10 October 1953, p. 5.
³ I have been told that the communists had been... infiltrating the Tata Workers' Union for some time before the rise of the communist-led Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union to a position of serious opposition in 1957.
cause of the growth of communist strength and the strike in May 1958 was the agreement signed by Michael John with the company in 1956 that failed to provide anything but marginal benefits for the workers.¹

At this stage John enjoyed the support of Binodanand Jha who had become the Labour Minister in Bihar and who had previously been a member of the General Council of INTUC. However there were signs of discontent within the Bihar INTUC which eventually came into the open in 1961. R. L. Verma, who had been deputy president of the TWU, under John, since 1955 made an attempt to oust John. Among the criticisms he made against John was one relating to the fact that John was a South Indian who could not understand the problems of workers in Bihar. A no-confidence motion was passed against Verma by the union’s executive committee. However, the voting figures, 86 to 2, did not show the real state of John’s popularity as 56 members of the committee had remained neutral.² After the meeting Verma alleged:

... outsiders were allowed and there were 150 hired goondas present in the union compound to over-awe the members. ... It is well known in this town that any worker who opposes John is harassed by the Steel Company and even discharged or dismissed.³

For its part INTUC claimed that Verma had been,

... indulging in numerous undesirable activities such as holding of meetings, exciting people against the Union, raising provincial feelings and leading small processions, using abusive and filthy language against the Union office-bearers etc.⁴

In the succeeding years, opposition to Michael John developed further with the encouragement of one of the factions in Congress. As the new Chief Minister,
Binodanand Jha, adopted a friendly policy toward John, the dissidents who opposed Jha naturally gave their support to John’s opponents within INTUC.

In the 1962 elections Michael John received a further setback when the Communist Party defeated the Congress for the Lok Sabha seat of Jamshedpur and increased their total of Assembly seats within the Lok Sabha constituency from one to three. Of the other three seats, Congress won only one. The failure of the Congress in Jamshedpur strengthened the position of his opponents. Then in 1963, under the Kamaraj Plan, the Chief Minister, Binodanand Jha, resigned and in the ensuing election of a new Chief Minister, his nominee was defeated by K. B. Sahay, the leader of the dissident group. With the election of Sahay, things became even more difficult for Michael John and Sahay gave almost open support to John’s opponents. Rival unions were set up and the government decided to amend the Trade Unions Act to enable it to conduct union elections in many factories. Attempts were made to take over unions controlled by John. For example, the dissidents claimed to have won the elections in the TELCO Workers Union in 1963, however the company, the Tata Engineering Locomotive Company, continued to recognize the old office-bearers who belonged to Michael John’s group. In December 1984 the dissidents called a strike and TELCO announced a lock-out. The Bihar Government came to the union’s rescue by banning strikes and lockouts in the TELCO plant under the Defence of India Rules. Later J. R. D. Tata accused the Bihar government misusing the Defence of India Rules and of ‘creating complete disruption among the organized labour of INTUC.’

Thus since 1951, Michael John, who is president of about 60 unions in the industrial belt that spreads over parts of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa, has suffered from an almost continuous stream of challenges that have been political in their nature. In the early 1950’s he was challenged by Congressmen, in the late 1950’s by communists, and then again in the early 1960’s by Congressmen. John, himself, has a reputation for being essentially a trade unionist who had tried to keep out of politics. Perhaps this has been a cause of his trouble, in that he has never firmly

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2 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 3 February 1965.
supported any group of politicians and therefore, he has not received much protection from them. A second problem has been the deteriorating political performance of the Congress in areas where John leads INTUC unions. Naturally the Congress would prefer a trade unionist who can deliver votes for the party. In their periodical opposition to John, the Congress political groups have done much harm to the reputation and strength of INTUC and have also caused serious disturbances to industrial peace.

IX. FRACTIONALISM IN MADHYA PRADESH

The history of the INTUC in Madhya Pradesh provides another case of how factionalism in the Congress has had its consequences in the INTUC. In this case, however, unlike in Bihar, the factionalism in the INTUC seems to have originated in the trade union movement. Only after the split in the INTUC do the parties appear to have aligned themselves with groups in the Congress organization.

The Indore Mill Mazdoor Sangh was revived in 1943 by V. V. Dravid and Ramsinghbhai Varma on their release from gaol. The union was modeled on the TLA at Ahmedabad. Apart from normal trade union work the union participated in all sorts of welfare activities including the building of a housing colony for mill workers. Dravid represented the union on the central working committee of INTUC and in 1951 he was elected as one of its vice-presidents. However in 1952 he was appointed Labour Minister in the old state of Madhya Bharat. Dravid kept up his INTUC connections in an informal way and Ramsinghbhai Varma became president of the state INTUC and later one of the national INTUC’s vice-presidents. When the state of Madhya Pradesh was formed in 1956, Dravid continued in his position as Labour Minister.

Relations between INTUC and the government deteriorated. The state INTUC in 1959 passed a resolution condemning ‘the reactionary and conservative outlook’ of the state government. Nevertheless the government continued to pursue a policy that strengthened INTUC. In September 1959, Dravid introduced the Industrial Relations and Trade Unions Amendment Bill which provided that only complaints

\[1 \text{IW, 20 April 1959, p. 2.}\]
through the recognized union would be entertained by the Labour Ministry. The
opposition union organized demonstrations against the bill and INTUC organized a
procession demonstrating in favour of the bill. However, the government applied
Section 144 against the INTUC procession which was led by Varma, although no
action was taken against the communist procession on the same day. About a month
later Varma and some others were arrested for their defiance of the order under
Section 144. Varma was convicted, fined and sentenced until the rising of the court.
Later he appealed to the High Court and the conviction was quashed. The central
INTUC gave its support to Varma against the government.

The dispute continued for the next few years. In 1960, for example, the
government refused to register an agreement entered into by an INTUC union
because, according to the Labour Minister, it was 'contrary to rules.' And in the
1962 elections, Varma was defeated for his Lok Sabha seat 'because of local
factors,' as INTUC put it.  

In 1963 the dispute flared into the open once again when the Labour Minister
introduced another amendment repealing part of the 1959 amendment so that
aggrieved workers could by-pass the recognized union in taking complaints to the
conciliation and adjudication authorities, if the recognized union would not take up
the case. According to the Times of India:

Observers say that the amendment was made after the INTUC-
controlled Mazdoor Sangh in Indore failed to take interest in the cases of
some workers allegedly belonging to the Dravid faction.

In the later part of 1963 tension rose between the two groups and armed
police were posted at the INTUC headquarters in Indore. Violence broke out on a
number of occasions, and Varma was imprisoned under the Defence of India Rules.
The central leadership of the INTUC was unable to settle the dispute partly because
it, too, was divided over which side to support. Eventually the Madhya Pradesh

1 IW, 14 March 1960, p. 5.
2 IW, 19 March 1962, p. 3.
3 Times of India, 24 June 1963, quoted in Trade Union Record, 5 July 1963, p. 4.
4 Times of India (Bombay), 23 November 1963, 12 December 1963.
branch was dissolved and Dravid was asked to resign from the Ministry in order to re-constitute the INTUC.

Thus in Madhya Pradesh the work of the INTUC was severely hampered and a wide split developed between the unions and the government because of factionalism arising, most probably, out of a conflict in personalities, but which became more complicated because one of the participants was a member of the government and both were members of the same political party.

X. OTHER STATES

In Bengal, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, conflict between the state government and INTUC has only been more acute than elsewhere. In other states where the Congress has been seriously divided as in the Punjab and in Andhra the trade unions have been used as pawns in the struggle. In Madras the Congress party has been united under the leadership of Kamaraj but there the INTUC has had bad relations with the government. In Madras city the INTUC has never been able to build up any strength, partly because of government support to HMS unions, G. Ramanujam, who was elected general secretary of INTUC at the end of 1964, and who comes from Coimbatore in Madras State, is not even a member of the Congress party. His opposition to Congress is so strange that in 1962 he contested an Assembly seat as an independent against a Congress candidate. This action was disapproved of by other INTUC leaders, but no measures were taken against him.

XI. INTUC AND THE GOVERNMENT

It is often said of INTUC that it is merely the labour wing of the Congress and that Congress governments show undue favouritism toward their labour wings. The foregoing discussion has indicated that the relationship between Congress governments and INTUC can be much more complex, particularly at the state level. The range in relationship varies between that prevailing in Gujarat where the TLA seems to have the right to nominate the Labour Minister to West Bengal where the INTUC has been in a state of permanent opposition to the government. In other states the INTUC is divided along factional lines which often reflect similar factional
differences in the Congress party and the government. Sometimes the group that controls the government controls INTUC also, ‘but sometimes it does not. The relationship between government and INTUC, therefore, is hardly subject to an India-wide generalization. The relationship is dependent on all kinds of local factors.

Where the INTUC has some strong support as in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Assam the relationship between INTUC and the state government has been generally good. The INTUC in those states has built up a considerable membership compared with other unions and has generally been able to help the Congress politically in elections. The maintenance of good relations has been facilitated in these states by a relative absence factionalism that has torn the congress in other states. Madhya Pradesh is another state where INTUC has a substantial membership but factionalism both in INTUC and in the Congress prevent a permanently good relationship. Where the INTUC is less strong vis-a-vis the other unions it is natural that the government is less concerned with INTUC’s opinions which results in frustration for INTUC leaders. Also where INTUC is weak it is less able to resist domination by the politicians and the importation of political conflicts into the union.

INTUC undoubtedly receives support from the government in many cases but there are many exceptions. One even hears allegations of Congress government support to communist and other unions against INTUC in certain instances because of factional rivalries but it is naturally difficult to provide documentation of such cases. In western India, namely Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh special industrial relations legislation has been passed to replace the central Industrial Disputes Act for certain industries. This legislation has given great privileges to ‘recognized’ unions. The main industry covered by this legislation has been the cotton textile industry where INTUC has had the ‘recognized’ status. The legislation has generally given the ‘recognized’ union the exclusive right to approach the adjudication machinery which naturally gives the union a great advantage over its rivals.

It does not appear that the government has used its discretion to refer disputes to adjudication in a way that is especially favourable to INTUC. In 1951,
Bombay’s Labour Minister, Shantilal Shah, said that in 1950-51, 771 cases were referred to adjudication and 161 refused. Eighty per cent of cases brought by HMS were referred and 65 per cent of AITUC cases. INTUC had only the slightest advantage in that 84 per cent of its cases were referred. Some years later the Union Deputy Labour Minister, Abid Ali, gave statistics to Parliament relating to reference to adjudication by the Union government in 1955. During the year INTUC had made 2,245 applications of which 49.8 per cent were granted. Regarding the other federations fewer applications were made but in the case of each federation, over sixty per cent of the applications were granted.

The government can also use its influence to have INTUC unions recognized in the public sector. In all three public sector steel plants the INTUC union is recognized, although at Rourkela recognition was delayed until 1964, some five years after operations commenced. In the case of ordnance workers, when the INTUC-supported Indian National Defence Workers Federation split off from the All-India Defence Employees Federation in 1959 on the grounds that AIDEF was communist controlled, the Defence Ministry refused to recognize the INTUC union. Even after the central government employees’ strike in 1960 when the Ministry withdrew recognition from the AIDEF, it failed to recognize the INDWF. A year after the strike both federations were granted recognition. N. K. Bhatt, a vice president of the INDWF, puts the two and half year delay in recognizing the INTUC down to “bureaucracy.” It has also been suggested that the Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon was opposed to recognizing the INTUC union.

Thus while it can be said that there is a general pre-disposition on the part of the Congress to favour the INTUC, in a not inconsiderable number of cases, counter-forces prevail.

Has the INTUC been able to influence government policy? There is little evidence to indicate that the government takes much notice of INTUC in matters of

\[1\] IW, 16 October 1952, p. 2.
\[2\] IW, 13 April 1959, p. 14.
\[3\] N. K. Bhatt, in interview, New Delhi, June 1964.
\[4\] Menon says that he favoured maintaining a single union for defence workers but he refused to go into details on questions relating to his period in office. Interview, Bombay, December 1964.
general economic policy or political questions. On labour legislation the INTUC claims to have had some influence.¹

On legislation relating to industrial relations the INTUC and the government have often found common interests and at times the INTUC has appeared to influence the government.

Industrial relations legislation in Bombay state prior to independence was very definitely influenced by members of the Textile Labour Association in Ahmedabad. The minister who drew up the legislation in 1938 was also the Association's secretary, Gulzarilal Nanda. The Bombay Industrial Relations Act contained an emphasis on settling disputes by relying on the decision of a neutral third party, and also contained provisions giving favourable treatment to representative unions which were expected to behave much as the TLA behaved.

The Central Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 was more a growth out of wartime experience in controlling unions than a result of pressure from Congress trade unionists. Nevertheless it was at first supported by INTUC although it was not long before INTUC began to be dissatisfied with the Act. Hariharnath Shastri in his presidential address to INTUC in 1949 said:

I have repeatedly expressed the view that the present Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 can no longer meet the situation and that it must be completely overhauled much delay.²

Thus when the Labour Relations Bill was introduced in 1950, INTUC expressed support. Writing in 1950, Shastri said:

... our organization has been in favour of the basic principle of the Bill, namely to bring about settlement of disputes, through collective bargaining between Trade Unions and the employers, and failing that by arbitration.¹

¹ Dr. G.S. Melkote, president of INTUC, says that INTUC has influenced labour legislation but he laments the unfortunate tendency of the government not to implement legislation even after it has been passed. Interview, Hyderabad, January 1965.

² INTUC, President Address, 1949, p. 6.
However, the bill was opposed by the employers, the opposition trade unions, and most important, by a number of ministers in the cabinet who were responsible for the employment of most government employees. The result was that the bill was dropped. Although this major bill lapsed, another bill was passed in 1950 amending the Industrial Disputes Act to provide for an all-India Appellate Tribunal which would hear appeals from the lower courts.

When this body (Appellate Tribunal) was going to be instituted by the Government under the Industrial Disputes Act, we were opposed to it. Our protest was however paid no heed to and the Appellate Tribunal machinery was created by the Government.\(^2\)

When V. V. Giri became Labour Minister in 1952 he put more emphasis on collective bargaining than INTUC was prepared for. In 1953 INTUC referred to 'serious difficulties' in industrial relations.

One of the factors responsible for such a position was the then approach of the Government in placing too much emphasis on unfettered collective bargaining. . . . Serious difficulties were experienced by the attitude of a section of employers and some of the State Governments who taking shelter of the labour policy of the Central Government ignored the interests of workers and by refusing to refer disputes to adjudication gave a free handle to employers to crush the workers where they were weak.\(^3\)

In opposing 'unfettered collective bargaining' INTUC was supported by the other trade union organizations and Giri was forced to modify his policies.

After Giri's resignation and the appointment of Bhandubhai Desai, INTUC must have had more influence on policy. In industrial relations legislation the first sign of this was the abolition of the Labour Appellate Tribunal in 1956, a change that

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\(^1\) INTUC, Annual Report, 1950, pp. 9-10.
\(^3\) INTUC, Annual Report, 1953, p. 208.
had the support of all the trade unions. It seems reasonable to believe that in this case a major cause of the abolition of the Tribunal was pressure from INTUC. Another example of apparently successful INTUC pressure followed the five-day strike by central government employees in 1960. After the strike, the government proposed to ban strikes in the railways, the posts and telegraphs, defence industries and other essential services. INTUC vigorously opposed the proposal and Khandubhai Desai spoke in Parliament against it. The proposal was eventually dropped. Of course it could be argued that various practical difficulties may have prevented the introduction of the legislation. It could have provoked the non-INTUC unions into mass agitations. However, the fact remains that the government proposed the legislation, the INTUC opposed it and the legislation was never introduced.

In general INTUC seems satisfied with the present industrial relations machinery. Their main criticism is on the question of appeals to the High Courts and the Supreme Court against decisions by lower tribunals. When the Appellate Tribunal was abolished, employers simply substituted the higher courts, appeals to which are even more time-consuming and costly than appeals to the Appellate Tribunal were. At one stage the INTUC suggested the creation of a Labour Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court consisting of judges with a special knowledge of labour questions who would have to come to their decision within a specified time-limit.\(^1\) This proposal has not been taken up by the government.

INTUC also advocates greater emphasis on voluntary arbitration as against compulsory adjudication. On one occasion Michael John,

urged the Government to give legal sanction to the method of voluntary arbitration making it compulsory for the labour and employer to submit their disputes to arbitration.\(^2\)

However, the Government has not yet been able to discover a method by which voluntary arbitration can be made ‘compulsory.’

\(^1\) INTUC, Report, 1960, p. 17.
\(^2\) INTUC, Report, 1962, p. 36.
In general it could be said that INTUC's 'special relationship' with Congress governments sometimes results in it receiving favours and sometimes allows it to influence the governments' policy although the main examples of influence have been rather negative in that they have only resulted in the government not doing something that INTUC regarded as harmful.

In return for these benefits the INTUC has at times to defend the government's policies in circumstances that are most unfavourable and which may lead to a weakening of INTUC's organisation.¹ INTUC's policy on rationalization in the early 1950's, and its restraint on wages and strikes, while helping the government may also harm INTUC. In 1963 the INTUC went to heroic lengths in its defence of a government policy which the government itself later abandoned. Following the Chinese attack on India in late 1962 it became necessary for the Finance Minister to present a severe, defence-oriented budget in March 1963. One of his most controversial proposals from the point of view of the working class was the Compulsory Deposits Scheme (CDS), which took the form of a long-term ban to the government which was to be collected in the way that income taxes were collected. For the worker it was in effect another income tax which even applied to persons whose incomes were half that of the lowest level of income for income taxation purposes. The opposition parties and trade unions naturally condemned and agitated against this extremely unpopular measure. INTUC supported the government. In parliament, Khandubhai Desai, praised the Finance Minister for his 'socialist, rationalist, objective approach.'² The INTUC general secretary supported the building up of defence and industry in the new circumstances. According to his report:

¹ Referring to the bank dispute of the early 1950's, Ornati wrote 'suffice it to say that the INTUC approved seriatim the bank workers' demands, the Sen award, the Sastry award, the LAT, the government decision setting aside the LAT decision (although it grumbled editorially about the wisdom of interfering with the existing machinery), and the Gajendragadkar Commission, and ended by fulminating against the bank workers and alleged Communist intervention' Oscar A. Ornati, 'Problems of Indian Trade Unionism' in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, March 1957, p. 154.
This aspect is very well understood by the working class and therefore without any hesitation they have welcomed the proposals of the Finance Minister, inspite of the fact that the brunt of increased taxation will have to be borne by the poorer sections of the society.¹

Although the workers may have accepted the budget proposals without hesitation, INTUC leaders from West Bengal had reservations. Mrs. Maitreyee Bose, in her presidential address to INTUC said:

We welcome Morarjibhai's budget because it tries to help defence efforts. But the definition of defence must also be seriously considered. The modern conception of Defence is not only guns but also butter. We shall be glad if Morarjibhai pays attention to that aspect of things. To orient the tax conception with traditional defence of guns only is to say the least suicidal.²

The West Bengal branch of the INTUC passed a resolution opposing the CDS³ and joined with other federations including the AITUC in a delegation to the West Bengal Labour Minister conveying to him their opposition to CDS in conditions of heavy inflation.⁴

In western India INTUC continued to support the CDS in the face of large-scale protests organized by the opposition, including a one-day general strike in Bombay. N. K. Bhatt, assistant secretary of INTUC, admits that the organization's support to CDS led to a decline in its strength but he adds that INTUC is not interested in achieving 'cheap popularity.'⁵ Despite their enthusiastic support for the principles behind CDS, the INTUC did not protest when it was withdrawn by the government.

The Indian National Trade Union Congress is a federation of trade unions that is characterized by geographical and ideological diversity. In general it could be said

² INTUC, Presidential Address, 1963, pp. 3-4. ('Morarjibhai is Morarji Desai).
⁴ Trade Union Record, 20 July 1963, p. 4.
⁵ N. K. Bhatt, in interview, New Delhi, June 1964.
that INTUC is stronger, less militant, and closer to the government in western India whereas in the east INTUC is faced with strong competition from the Communist Party, which forces it to adopt a more militant posture in order to have some chance of staying in the competition.

INTUC is distinguished from other federations by its tendency to take a 'national' outlook on many issues even when the sectional interests of the working class are obviously harmed. But because it is prepared to risk unpopularity for causes supported by the government, the government continues to help INTUC, the degree of help depending on a variety of local factors.

The question that will determine the future of INTUC is the extent to which governmental support is a sufficient compensation to the INTUC for the lack of working class support because of its 'responsible' attitudes and policies. According to the provisional statistics from the Ministry of Labour, INTUC had a membership of 38,92,011 in 2002.¹

¹ According to the provision statistics from the Ministry of the Labour, 2002 as shown in the table.