CHAPTER V

AGITATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION:

Non fulfilment of basic human needs leads to discontentment. These needs are mainly economic and social security. If the economic needs of workers are not fulfilled, social security is not guaranteed. working condition is not satisfactory, opportunity for self-expression is not permitted, discontentment among the workers persists. If the conditions stated above are not fulfilled resulting poor standard living, a class consciousness among the workers cropsup which prompts the workers to organise and take group action. The working class has to put up stiff resistance against the onslaught on their standard of living. This resistance breaks out in the forms of strikes, industry-wise and regionwise general strikes, mass demonstrations and various other mass actions. In the State of Assam, agitation in various forms has been launched by the trade unions in various industries, commercial establishments, government and semi-government establishments, etc. It emerges from a common need to serve a common interest of the workers.
5.2 EARLY PHASE OF AGITATION IN ASSAM:

Though the workers of Assam did not have the right to indulge in trade union activity till 1926, still the unorganised workers either spontaneously or in an organised way lodged their protest against the unjust acts of the owners even before 1926. In the beginning, strikes were essentially protest demonstrations. Workers resorted to them as there was no other way by which they could attract attention to their demands and grievances.

The first protest struggle took place in Assam in the tea plantations in the forties of the nineteenth century. At that time the local tribals mostly the Kachari tribals of the Assam company had begun working in the gardens. But they were deprived of fair wages and other advantages. "It may rightly be observed that the tea plantation labourers were the most exploitable and exploited section of the people in the nineteenth century Assam."¹ The Kachari tribals were in no mood to submit to inhuman working conditions. These workers were the pioneers of the tea workers' struggle in Assam. The tribal workers went on agitation under the leadership of Madhuram Koch, a labour contractor. Therefore, Madhuram Koch may be regarded as the first labour leader of Assam.

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After that only minor localised struggles took place and the workers' protests against planters' brutality were sporadic and generally violent, inviting terrific repression upon them.

Labour unrest and spontaneous revolt or struggles were a continuous process since 1920. The main issues behind these were misbehaviour of the Managers, illegal import of labourers, supply of low quality food items in the name of ration and increase of wages, etc.

Condition of the workers became unbearable during and after the 1st World War. In 1920, Surama Valley Political Conference called for boycott of British gardens. "In the first week of May, 1921 thousands of coolies left the Chargola valley in Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet district in the Surama Valley. This exodus and the subsequent events at Chandpur concentrated public attention on tea gardens and a certain section of the Indian Press also brought to light the ill treatment accorded to tea garden coolies in Assam."²

The main cause of unrest was the non increase of daily wages. In a few days, 8,799 labourers out of a total of 20,250 in different gardens of the district left work.³

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3. Ibid, pp. 11.
After the enactment of the Trade Union Act, 1926, the workers got the right to form unions and the workers began to put up their grievances in organised way in the form of demonstrations, strikes, etc.

Simultaneously, with the tea labourers, the labourers of other industries went on agitation. The workers of Dhubri Match Factory went on strike for 57 days in 1928. A prolonged strike in this factory was again started in 1936. The strike of 1936 had a great significance in the trade union history of Assam. It got mass support from the people of Assam. The critical state of affairs was debated in the Assam Legislative Assembly also and for the first time the trade union movement of Assam got political significance.

"Another significance aspect of this strike is that the workers exhibited their solidarity as a class which itself is an achievement from the point of view of maturing labour consciousness."  

A remarkable and perhaps the most important strike in Assam which may be referred to as one of the earliest trade union movement in the State of pre-independence era took place in the year 1939 when the workers of Assam Oil Company Ltd., Digboi, went on strike.

The main issues of this strike were - unconditional recognition of the Assam Oil Company Labour Union, low wages, the retrenchment, security of services, good quarters to all workers with due regard to the number of family members, introduction of profit sharing bonus system, forty-four hours of work in a week for all workers including medical staff, sweepers, production department, chowkidars and Bungi servants, service rules with provisions for gratuity, old age pension, one month privilege leave, festival leave, casual leave and sick leave with full pay.5

Thousands of strikers gathered in front of the Refinery gate. The Assam Rifles started firing on the picketers. Three of the picketers—namely Chandi Ahir, Praneswar Choudhury, Satyendranath Chakravart—succumbed to the bullet injuries.

"Though the strike failed, it was remarkable in many respects. First, it was conducted in a highly organised way which received all India attention. Secondly, the strike attained complete solidarity uniting the workers irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and language. All fought for a common cause under the banner of the union

5. Report of the Court of Enquiry appointed by the Assam Government on 16th August 1938 under Section 3 of the Trade Disputes Act 1929, to enquire into the conditions of work of the employees of the Assam Oil Company Ltd., Digboi.
which was remarkable in the context of the all India communal politics of the period."^6

During the twelve years between 1928 and 1940 which included the period of deepest ever crises of capitalist economy, working class struggle became widespread in Assam. In 1939 alone 13,46,040 labour days were lost in Assam due to the workers' agitation.\(^7\)

The above mentioned struggles laid the basis of the organised Trade Union Movement in Assam.

5.3 AGITATION IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:

The development of trade union activities of Assam had been particularly rapid after independence. The economic conditions of workers did not improve even after independence. In Assam severe earthquake on 15th August 1950 followed by floods in important rice producing areas and a shortfall of procurement led to rising prices. The position became worse in 1951. The labour had to face with economic


7. Bhattacharyya, Achintya, Article on Trade Union Movement in Assam published at the Souvenir of State Bank of India Staff Association Zonal Conference held at Silchar on 22nd and 23rd August, 1987.
problem and under such circumstances they led their struggles. A news article was published in the newspaper Natun Asom on 9th January 1955, where it was stated that from 1950 to 1953 the workers of various industries resorted to a large number of strikes in this State. According to this news, the number of strikes during this period was as follows:

**TABLE - 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of strikes</th>
<th>Man days lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>70,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>3,77,711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these struggles the tea workers took the lead. They resorted to struggles to thwart the attack on their wages and ration and to protect their trade union rights.

The general index of wholesale prices for Assam (base 1960-100, raised by 82.4 percent during the period 1961-67 i.e. from 135.4 percent in 1961 to 247.0 in 1967.\textsuperscript{9}

In 1971 the economy of Assam was seriously affected by the aftermath of the India-Pakistan War and influx of refugees from Bangladesh. The general wholesale price index in Assam (base 1960-100) started at 237.3 in January increased gradually to 253.3 in May and then to 268.4 in September 1971.\textsuperscript{10}

The number of strikes in the various industries of Assam were reported to the Labour Commissioner Office, Guwahati, Assam, from 1965 upto 1974-75 were as follows:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
Year & Number of Strikes \\
\hline
1965-66 & 76 \\
1966-67 & 46 \\
1967-68 & 118 \\
1968-69 & 50 \\
1969-70 & 83 \\
1970-71 & 77 \\
1973-73 & 58 \\
1974-75 & 7 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Number of strikes from 1965 to 1975.\textsuperscript{11}}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{9} Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Nowgong District 1978, pp. 287.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, pp. 288.
\textsuperscript{11} General Administrative Report on Labour for respective years.
According to the Annual Report on labour for the year 1975-76, the only major strike during the period was in the Assam Match Factory, Dhubri, which lasted for 87 days (15.3.75 to 9.6.75). 1233 workers involved and 84,000 mandays lost in this strike.

Trade unions could not function normally during the period of emergency i.e. from June 1975 to February 1977 promulgated by the then Indira Government, because all the fundamental rights were curtailed.

The lifting of emergency and declaration of election in 1977 brought back the normal life of the people. People took part in election most enthusiastically and defeated the ruling Congress Party. Winning the election Janata Government restored all fundamental rights and such trade union also started functioning normally. From 1977 to the last part of 1979 trade union activities were intensified to a great extent in Assam. In the year 1977-78 and 1978-79, occurrence of 14 and 56 strikes respectively were reported to the Labour Commissioner Office, Guwahati, Assam by the various industries and other establishments.

Due to the foreigners movement in Assam from November 1979 to December 1985, though Trade Union movements experienced a set back
trade unions continued their activities. There were 68 strikes in 1980-81 and 18 in 1983-84.12

53 Strikes involving 42,283 workers did take place during the period 1986-87.13

5.4 INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES:

"An industrial dispute has been defined as any dispute or difference between the employers and employees, or between employers and workmen, or between workmen and workmen, which is connected with the employment or non-employment or the terms of employment or with the conditions of labour of any person."14

It appears from the definition that industrial dispute can be raised by a group or class of workmen. If a demand is made by or on behalf of the workers and the same is not granted by the management to the satisfaction of the former, the industrial disputes arise.

The industrial disputes generally lead to strikes and lock out. Statistics of industrial disputes resulting in work stoppages due to strikes and lockouts are as follows:

TABLE - 5.3

Industrial Disputes in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Disputes</th>
<th>Number of mandays lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>49,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9,967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the industrial disputes took place because of quantum of Bonus, wages and allowances, hours of work, retrenchment, etc.

5.5 AGITATIONS IN DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES:

Now we shall discuss the agitations of the workers of some of the industries separately.

5.5.1 AGITATION IN TEA INDUSTRY:

In the early years, the disputes between the employers and the employees in the tea gardens of Assam occurred in the form of assaults and riots. According to the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921, 141 cases of rioting occurred in the tea gardens of Assam between

15. Economic Survey Assam, 1974-75, pp.44
1904-05 and 1920-21. The principal causes of these frictions and disputes were economic.

After the formation of trade union organisations in the tea gardens, the workers had begun to fulfil their various demands under the banner of the unions. The trade unions started their functions in the tea industry from 1939 and since then the trade unions had taken up various grievances of the tea workers and tried to fulfil these through various agitational programmes.

Unions affiliated to All India Trade Union Congress had been demanding wages for the tea garden labourers at the rate of Rs.1.45 per day till 1943. Same demands of wage revision for tea labourers has raised by the Indian National Trade Union Congress since its inception. Daily wages of the tea labourers till 1952 were as follows.

In Assam valley a male labour used to get 0.49 paise, female labour 0.41, and child labour 0.23 p. In Cachar valley it was 0.42 paise, 0.38 p. and 0.23 p. for male, female and child workers respectively.16

Struggles broke out in tea gardens over the issue of wages. In 1948, 31 strikes took place in Assam valley and 2 in Cachar. At that time the total number of labourers was 5,23,610 in the Brahmaputra valley and 31 strikes took place losing 5 percent of one days' work of total number of labour. The total loss was 24,365 number of daily wage, Rs. 15,194.44 and 34,975 K.G. tea 2070 labourers were involved in 2 strikes in Surama valley and loss was of 6652 number of daily wage, Rs. 3,460.37 and 2,812 K.G. of tea.\(^\text{17}\)

In 1950 the conditions of the tea garden labourers deteriorated due to the economic condition of this State. The position became worse in 1951.

The quantum of rice ration of tea garden labourers was reduced. Prior to the introduction of the All India Scale of ration, adult tea labourers used to get 4\(\frac{1}{2}\) seers of rice a week (till 1950). With the implementation of All India Scale, this quantity was reduced to 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) seers.\(^\text{18}\)

Under such circumstances, the strikes broke out. Number of strikes was 22 in 1951 and 19047 workers joined these strikes. During


these three years i.e. during 1949-50 and 1951, the total mandays loss in the Assam valley was 21,270, 17,890 and 16,085 respectively. There were 4 strikes where 2226 workers participated and mandays loss was 1973 in 1949 in Cachar. In 1950 there were 8 strikes and 4,525 workers participated and mandays loss was 10336. In 1951 there were 6 strikes, 2418 workers' participation and mandays loss was 3722 in Cachar valley.20

Again the British owners created a crisis in 1952 in order to corner Indian Tea Industry in the world market. Many gardens were closed. In 1952 the policy of wage cut was adopted to save the tea industry from going out of business and the labourers had to suffer much.

In 1953, the prices of the tea registered a rising trend. On 8th December 1952 the rate of tea per pound was 0.99 paise, but on 12th January 1953 it was increased to Rs. 1.28 and again to Rs. 1.41 on 12th February of the same year.20 In 1953 when the prices of tea registered high and the employers began making huge profits, labour unrest precipitated against the policy of wage cut. The largest number of strikes took place in 1953. Out of 281 strikes in Assam, Darjeeling and Dooars, 225 related to wages and task (piece-rate). The following Table shows the figures of strikes in 1953.


20. Ibid, pp. 59


**TABLE - 5.4**

**Number of strikes in tea industry in Assam, Darjeeling and Dooars in 1953.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total labours in lakhs</th>
<th>Number of strikes involved</th>
<th>Mandays loss</th>
<th>Loss in wages</th>
<th>Loss in maunds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1,73,430</td>
<td>2,24,291</td>
<td>2,80,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22,316</td>
<td>26,930</td>
<td>23,077</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dooars</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45,842</td>
<td>1,26,463</td>
<td>1,48,004</td>
<td>11,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,203</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>281</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,42,791</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,77,711</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,58,463</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,178</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Table reveals that out of total 281 strikes in 1953 in Assam, Dooars, and Darjeeling, 227 occurred in Assam which involved a large number of workers.

One significant movement in the year 1954 was, 7 days' strike in the tea gardens of Mangaldai Sub-division. They fought against the reduction of working days in the tea gardens.

The working days in many tea gardens was reduced to 5 or 4 days from six days within the period of last part of 1952 and the early part of 1953. In some gardens workers were engaged in only 2 days' work. No wage or ration was given to the workers for the off days. The INTUC being the most representative organisation of the workers in the State, resorted to strike. In this regard 7 days' strike in the tea gardens of Mangaldai was most significant. It may be recalled that 70,000 workers from 22 tea gardens of Mangaldai sub-division took part in the strike.\(^2\)

The tea workers of Mangaldai struggled under Late Mahendra Nath Sarma, the General Secretary of INTUC, Assam Branch, in that period. He along with Dhanu Tanti and Debendra Nath Bordoloi, President and Secretary of Mangaldai district Chah Mazdoor Sangha respectively directed the strike.

Though, late, the Government of Assam had realised the grievances and demands of the tea garden workers and a Committee to examine the demands was constituted. Kamakhya Prasad Tripathy and Mohendra Nath Sarma represented the workers in the Committee. As per decision of the Committee, the system of 5 days work in a 6 days week for the workers was restored.

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After 1953-54 the number of strikes shows a declining trend which exhibits a position of peaceful environment in the industry. In 1961-62 there occurred 14 strikes and 18 in 1964-65. But the workers continued their struggle to fulfil their various demands so that their economic conditions could be improved.

Movements for Bonus, Provident Fund and for other facilities are also significant. For example, about 2,000 workers of Nambar Nadi Tea Estates of Karbi Along district resorted to strike from 21st August 1978 to 3rd September 1978 to press their demands in regard to refer to C.D.S. amount, payment of 20 percent Bonus, equal wages to both male and female workers, supply of medicines to the hospitals and school facility etc.

In the year 1980 almost all the tea gardens of Assam resorted to struggle for the higher percentage of Bonus. The Assam Government took measures to suppress the Bonus movement. They also started firing in some of the gardens.

In the year 1984 altogether 34 strikes took place in the tea gardens of Assam and among these 19 strikes took place for 20 percent bonus.

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As per the annual report of different year sent to the Labour Commissioner Office of Assam, Guwahati, the number of strikes from 1981 to 1986 were as follows:


Examining the causes of strikes it is found that the main reasons are non-payment of higher bonus, non-payment of wages in time, revision of wages, non-receipt of ration properly, to convert the services of temporary employees in to permanent cadre, against dismissal of workers implementation of Plantation Labour Act properly, extension of proper facilities to the schools, against the misbehaviour of management and so forth.

5.5.2 AGITATION IN THE PLYWOOD INDUSTRIES:

Since 1959 the plywood workers had been fighting incessantly with the owners to fulfil their various grievances. In 1979 the workers in various plywood industries undertook agitational programmes. In various industries token strike was observed as a result of which more workers those were working under contractors were made permanent.

During the period of Foreigners Movement in Assam, the movement in the plywood factories was also significant. The Assam Agitation affected the export of plywood in various ways because the agitators made it a point to block the movement of plywood as a mark of their
against the policy of the government in matters of expulsion of foreign nationals.

A public meeting held at Tinsukia under the auspices of seven political parties appealed to withdraw the blockade. In the meantime, lay off of Plywood Industry began from the month of July 1980 and many contractor labours were retrenched. Such a blockade had compelled some of the industrialists to close their industries. The Mill owners started closing their factories from 25th August 1980.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, Assam Branch had to launch movements against blockade. They staged demonstration, organised public meetings and went on strike.

About one thousand workers marched in procession on 24th October 1980 at Dibrugarh against the blockade and closure. The significant event was that a large number of women of Ledo joined this procession under the leadership of Maya Chakravarty, Secretary, Democratic women organisation of Ledo and subsequently they collected money to help the distressed plywood workers.

5.5.3 IN THE OIL INDUSTRY:

After the great strike of 1939, the Assam Oil Company Labour Union resorted to many agitational programme, but no call for a major
strike was given. The oil workers took the agitational programme to achieve the legitimate bonus, wages, better working conditions, reduction of working hours and for other facilities.

In the year 1955 about 8,000 workers staged a demonstration on 23rd January 1955 demanding bonus, quarters, permanent absorption of temporary workers, etc. It was published in the 6th February issue of 1955 in the newspaper Natun Asamia where it was stated that the workers marked in a procession which was about one mile in length.

In 1957 the A.O.C. Labour Union placed some demands before the Management of which the major demands were as follows:

1. 25 Percent increase on the minimum and maximum existing wages of the workers.
2. The amount of gratuity should be one month's basic salary in a completed year.
3. Suitable quarters, water, light and medical facility should be ensured.
4. Gradual abolition of contractors' labour.
5. Monthly wages for majority of workers.
6. Reduction of duty hours from 44 hours to 40 hours and less than 40 hours for the workers who are engaged in risky jobs.
Continuous negotiations were held between the management and the union in the months of May and June 1958. Negotiations did not yield any result and union staged processions and held public meetings.

After that the Assam Oil Company Labour Union took different agitational programmes from time to time to achieve their various demands.

The oil workers of Guwahati Refinery started movement to fulfill their various demands such as higher wages, bonus, better working facilities, medical, housing, school facilities, etc. The Bonus movement of 1974 was significant. The workers of the I.O.C. received 20 percent Bonus for the year 1972-73. But the profit of the Oil Corporation increased in the financial year of 1972-73 upto Rs. 50 crores from Rs. 15 crores. Yet the Management paid no attention to increase the Bonus of the labourers simultaneously with the increase of the profit when they could profit Rs. 15 crores, the labourers received 20 percent Bonus and at 50 crores, the labourers received the same Bonus. The labourers demanded the increment of their bonus from 20 percent. They put forward the argument that if the management was able to give 20 percent Bonus at Rs. 15 crores profit, why they were not able to give more than 20 percent in the case of Rs. 50 crores profit. When the Refinery authority paid no attention to their demands, they started movement. They called for hunger strike, procession and general meeting.
The Guwahati Refinery Workers' Union affiliated to INTUC gave a call for indefinite strike in the Refinery with effect from 27th January 1987. The major demand of the union is for removal of the qualification bar for promotion whereby even non-matriculates should be promoted as officers/engineers in departments like production, mechanical, electrical, civil, instrumentation, etc. According to the Management it was a very unreasonable demand and the strike on this issue was also illegal.

In an appeal on January 23rd, 1987, the General Manager P.M. Teckchandani appealed to the workers:

"Since the proposed strike would be against the interest of all concerned and the nation as a whole, I appeal to all the employees not to participate in the illegal strike." 25

The Assistant Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Guwahati, had also in his letter no 8(82)/86-G/A dated 23rd January 1987 advised the union not to precipitate any action.

Inspite of all the above appeals, the union called for strike on 27th January 1987. Ultimately the management came forward to make

settlement and accordingly one settlement was made on 8th February 1987. As a result of the settlement more than 200 workers were promoted in their services.

The workers of Oil India Ltd, Duliajan, O.N.G.C., Sibsagar-Bongaon Refinery also resorted movement from time to time to achieve their various demands.

5.5.4 RAILWAY STRIKE:

The first major railway strike at a national level took place in 1960. It was a five days' strike in which, besides the railway employees, employees of the Central Government and Post and Telegraph also participated. The 1960 strike fizzled out without achieving any positive results. Another strike was again launched in 1968. The main demands of the strike of 1968 were - increase of compensatory allowance and payment of need-based wages to the workers.

In comparison to these strikes, the strike of 1974 was quite formidable and prolonged one. The decision to launch an All India Railways strike was taken at the All India Railwaymen Federation National Convention held in October 1974. All India Railwaymens' Federation called for strike for the following demands:
1. Parity in wages with employees in public sector undertakings,
2. Bonus,
3. Rationalisation of the hours of work,
4. Job evaluation and reclassification of the workers.

The strike continued for twenty days. Police repression started against the striking workers from the day of the strike. Several railway workers' leaders including George Fernandes were arrested. About 50,000 railway workers had to lose their jobs after the strike in all over India.

In Assam the strike was complete. North East Railway Mazdoor Union under the All India Railway Mens' Federation conducted the strike in this State. A public meeting was held at Church Field, Guwahati to explain to the workers as well as to the public about the justification of the strike. Moreover meetings were organised in major railway centres like Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Mariani, Lumding, Guwahati and Bongaingaon. The meetings had far reaching effect. The families of railway workers and even the peasants extended help in the struggle of the railway workers.

Many railway workers were arrested in this state. Golap Borboran, the then President of North East Railway Mazdoor Union, was also arrested. Late Lalit Hazarika, a local Advocate, managed to get him released on bail. But after two days he was rearrested under MISA.
Some of the CITU leaders were also arrested as they were also the participants in the strike. Six leaders of CITU were arrested under MISA and about 30 were arrested under NSA.26

The present researcher took personal interview with Golap Borborah and he said that after the strike all the arrested leaders were released except Late Biswa Goswami and himself. They got released after six months by virtue of a High Court order against their writ petition.

Steps were taken to reinstate the dismissed workers immediately after the 1977 General Election in which Janata Government came to power at the Centre.

5.5.5 ASSAM GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' AGITATION:

From 1960 onwards the Assam Government Employees started movement demanding preservation of Constitutional rights and economic emancipation.

On the other hand, the ruling class began to use its whole machinery to crush the movements of Assam Ministerial Employees.

Association, Assam Government Fourth Grade Employees Association and specially the historic 43 days' continuous strike by Assam Secretariat Employees Association in 1965.

Pisush Kanti Hore and Bhagawan Das, President and General Secretary of the Assam Secretariat Employees Association were dismissed from their services under the Constitutional Provision No. 311. Many employees including these two were put in to the jail. Many employees were suspended from their services. Wives of dismissed and suspended employees and some women employees gheraoed the then Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha in his Chamber in Secretariat Campus for eight hours on 30th March 1965.27

It is worthwhile to mention about the Government Employees’ 13 days strike (from 18th December 1973 to 30th December 1973) which paralised all Government machineries throughout the State. The main demands were minimum salary to be fixed at Rs. 250/-, Dearness allowance, house rent allowance, reinstate of a few dismissed employees, etc. Government of Assam had accepted the recommendation of pay committee which had fixed the minimum salary at Rs. 180/-. Central Government had fixed it at Rs. 196/-. The Assam Government employees put forward their arguments that the cost of living in Assam was higher than in

any other State of India. From the point of view the fixation of minimum salary at Rs. 180. was not acceptable.

The strike was suspended temporarily on 30th December 1973 on receipt of a written assurance to resolve the demands through negotiations.

They again started movement in 1977 which was most significant in the trade union history of Assam. A convention of the workers and employees of the State Government was held in Guwahati on 24th April 1977. The Convention prepared a 14-point Charter of Demands and decided for one day token strike on 5th May 1977 in support of the demands. Token strike was observed successfully. Government came out with the proposal for talks. Government agreed upon the 14-point charter of demands and a bi-partite accord was signed.

But the Government broke the accord. Movement spreaded all over Assam protesting against Government's betrayal. Three days' token strike was observed successfully from 5th November 1977 to 7th November 1977. In the month of December they continued their strike for 17 days. The significant side of this movement was that of extension of support by students, peasants middle class, private and Central Government employees. The strike led by workers, employees and teachers' joint action committee turned to a mass movement after the support extended
by all the central trade union organisations i.e. Joint Council of Trade Unions (JCTU), CITU, AITUC, INTUC, UTUC, UTUC(ULS) B.M.S.

A public meeting was held at Judges Field, Guwahati on 2nd December 1977 at the call of AITUC, State Committee, and 13 other organisations affiliated to TUCC to express solidarity to the fighting Assam State Employees.

State Government Industrial Employees organisation also observed one day token strike in support of striking workers and employers. The solidarity actions were extended by the members of the Reserve Bank Association during the strike of the State Government Employees.

5.5.6 MOVEMENTS OF ASSAM PROVINCIAL BANKS EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION AND THE ASSOCIATION OF STATE BANK OF INDIA:

The movement on the issue of Assam Compensatory Allowance was the first organised movement of the Bank Employees in Assam. It took organised shape under the leadership of such prominent leaders as Gopinath Bordoloi, Hareswar Goswami, Hem Barua, Achintya Bhattacharjee, Gaurisankar Bhattacharjee, Phoni Bora, Sidhinath Sarma and Dhirenwar Kalita. They took keen interest in the movement and guided the Bank Employees in this issue. Assam Provincial Bank Employees Association
instead of bringing the general employees in to the path of struggle, shifted the issue to the court. But in the court also the issue was not fought seriously. This lack of commitment had its adverse impact.

In the month of February 1979 country wide strike was called by AIBEA on the issue of dearness allowance. But befooling the general bank employees the programme was withdrawn without any condition.

In Assam also a joint struggle by Bank and LIC employees was conducted.

Bank Employees Federation of India launched countrywide strike on 6th September 1983 on protest against bankers move of mechanisation through computerisation. In Assam also strong public opinion was created by the components of BEFI centering round these issues. Organised campaign by holding meeting, conventions, protest demonstration, etc., created an environment in favour of struggle against bankers' bid of mechanisation.

5.5.7 AGITATION OF THE EMPLOYEES OF STATE BANK OF INDIA:

State Bank of India is the largest bank of the nation and it has a good number of branches in Assam. Prior to nationalisation on
the year 1955, it was known as Imperial Bank of India won by the Britishers. The union of this Bank was formed in the year 1920 in Calcutta. A Circle Committee under the banner of State Bank of India Staff Association, North Eastern Circle, was functioning in this region.

This union went into strike for twenty one days in 1960 starting from 4th March demanding revision of pay scale.

After the strike was withdrawn, the Government of India declared the formation of National Industrial Tribunal (Bank Disputes) and appointed K.I. Desai to preside over the Tribunal. The Award of the Tribunal was published in Gazettee of India, Extraordinary, dated 30th June, 1962.

Besides several modification in service conditions of employees, this Award recognised the bi-partite forum to settle the unsettled issues including salary revision. The first bi-partite agreement was signed in the year 1967.

5.5.8 AGITATION IN MISCELLANEOUS INDUSTRIES AND UNDERTAKINGS:

An addition to the movements of the workers of the major industries, undertakings and State Government Employees as described above, the workers of the coal mine of Assam, match factory, motor
transport workers, electricity workers, P&T workers, workers of the Namrup Fertilizer Corporation and workers of some other small industries also launched agitational programmes to fulfil their various demands.

5.5.9 MOVEMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE:

The agitations by the industrial workers, Government employees and undertakings gave impetus to the employees of educational institutes in the country including Assam. Amongst them the strike exhibited by the All Assam College Teachers' Association was the most significant. They even boycotted the Pre-University Examination held in the month of June 1975 for pressing the State Government to concede their demands for granting the University Grant Commission pay scales.

5.5.10 AGITATION AGAINST CLOSURE AND LOCK OUT:

Trade unions have been fighting against the closure and lock out. Anti lock out movement of Brahmaputra Jute Mill which continued for eight months in the year 1982 is the most significant. Instead of settling the demands of workers the owner of the mill suddenly declared lock out. Workers under the leadership of Centre of Indian Trade Unions, Assam Branch, fought against this lock out. Other trade union organisations under the banner of Joint Council of Trade Unions also helped the agitating workers in continuing their agitation. Ultimately lock out had to be lifted.
Another significant movement against lockout was at Kamrup Paper Mill in the year 1981. Agitational programme was initiated by CITU. Most important side of this movement was the support of the local residents of the locality to this movement. Thousands of signatures were collected from these residents in the memorandum which was sent to the Central and the State Governments. Ultimately mill was opened.

There are instances of lockout in the tea gardens, plywood factories, etc. According to Government statistics four tea gardens were declared lockout in the year 1981 and seven in 1987. Of course these lockouts had to be lifted in the face of agitation by the workers.

5.6 ROLE OF JOINT COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS IN AGITATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE WORKERS:

J.C.T.U. have been playing an important role in creating an environment of democratic labour movement in Assam. J.C.T.U. has been supporting the movements launched by various trade union organisations. Notable among the movements are State Government Employees' movement of 1977, Railway workers movement of 1974 and movements against closure, lock out, etc. A big procession leading to Dispur for submission of

a memorandum with 71,000 signatures against closure and lockout in the State on 28th September 1985 was most remarkable event for J.C.T.U. 29

JOINT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT OF THE CENTRAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATIONS:

It is a matter of hope that as in other parts of the country, the united labour movements are growing in Assam also. A trade union convention against the government policy, closure of factories was held on 6th May 1978 in Guwahati at the call of Kamrup District Committee of CITU. Besides four central trade union organisations, viz., CITU, AITUC, UTUC, BMS, other representatives of Trade Union Organisations like Insurance, Post and Telegraph, State Government Employees, Railway, etc. also participated in this convention.

5.7. NATIONAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE AND JOINT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT:

In 1980 when the Indira Congress regained power, the policies of the Government initiated more attacks on workers' rights. Strikes were banned by enacting Essential Service Maintenance Act (ESMA). A common platform was formed with Central Trade Unions and Federations, viz., CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS, UTUC, UTUC(LS) and INTUC (Dara Group). 29. Ibid, pp. 27.
to resist these laws. This joint platform was named as National Campaign Committee (NCC). Thus the organised joint movement got its shape.

An agitation programme in the forms of black badge wearing, protest demonstration, rally and procession, was observed by the entire working class of the country on 17th August 1981 at the call of the NCC. This programme was also observed in Assam in a big way.

Participation of about ten lakh workers in the March to Parliament on 13th November, 1981 at New Delhi was a significant event in the Indian Trade Union history. Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union, a peasant organisation also joined in the March.

More than 500 representatives from Assam joined this rally.28

Call for Industrial strike on 19th January, 1982 given from this Delhi platform was a historic event for the country. Approximately more than 50 percent of the organised workers participated in this strike. For the first time such a strike was observed by the workers of bank, insurance, plywood, engineering industries, tea gardens, Guwahati Refinery, ONGC in Assam.

On 20th January, 1987 one day token strike was called by the National Campaign Committee which got the support of the major trade
unions including AITUC, CITU, BMS and HMS. The INTUC had, however, stayed away from it. They observed this strike to demand the implementation of a 14-point charter of demand that included the stopping of privatisation of government undertakings.

In Assam one day token strike was observed by many departments. One news item was published in the Assam Tribune dated 22nd January 1987 in the following lines:

"All units of All India Bank Employees' Association in Assam observed the strike in support of their demands for restructuring public banks, immediate take over of all private banks, and nationalisation of foreign banks." 31

The Reserve Bank Employees, Railway and Post and Telegraph employees, employees of LIC, ONGC workers, Coal workers etc. extended solidarity with the public sector workers.

Thus we find that strikes or labour disturbances take place for a variety of issues affecting the workers and the employees. These issues are about the increase of wages and allowances, improvement of working conditions, bonus, unfair treatment, closure, lock out.

31. The Assam Tribune, the English daily, dated 22nd January 1987.
retrenchment, etc. It may also be mentioned that in spite of the above mentioned issues, a wrong policy pursued by the management and the government is also responsible for conflicts and labour unrest. "Workers and employers are directly involved in strikes; but there is a third party which is also affected by them. It is the society, and government is expected to safeguard its interests. As industries develop and become more and more interdependent and integrated, the interests of the society become more and more affected by a strike in any sector of the economy. A strike ceases to be a private quarrel between the employers and his workers and becomes a matter of public, and sometimes event he national importance." 32