Workers, the newly emerged wage earning class can not be studied in isolation by keeping away their employers and the Government, the supreme authority of the country. So, it is necessary to study the class consciousness of the workers in relation to capital and the erstwhile colonial Government. The proletariat who were working in the textile mills for wages struggled for quite a long time by sending representations to both the capitalists and the Government and by organizing strikes, processions, demonstrations and 'Satyagraha' for better wages and for better working and living conditions. On the other hand, in most of the cases the class consciousness was suppressed by dismissing union activists, intimidating the strikers and reducing their wages during the strike period. At the same time, the colonial state, the believer of Laissez-Faire policy, in most of the cases supported the capitalists by suppressing the strikes of the workers to stabilize their position. The Congress Ministry which assumed power in 1937, despite its commitment to the welfare of the masses, did not want to take a firm stand in favour of the working classes. They, infact, adopted a dual policy of assisting the mill owners with police-force and at the same time inducing them for negotiations. The Congress ideology or more specifically the Gandhian ideology emphasized on arbitration and negotiation
in order to avoid labour disputes. The Congress did not believe in a class struggle of the workers against the capitalists. This broad policy could be noticed in the actions of the Madras Provincial Government under the Congress during 1937-39.

After the resignation of the Congress Ministry in 1939, the labour consciousness was very much suppressed by preventing strikes, processions and unauthorized assemblings of workers. Again, during the period from 1939 to 1946, lathicharge, firing and mass arrests were quite common. Another interesting aspect during the colonial period of the mill history of Coimbatore was the emergence of politically supported labour unions. Further, the Coimbatore Mill Workers' Union which was following Communist ideology criticised the capitalists and the Government in relation with labour, till Germany attacked Russia in 1942. Soon after, as a tactical retreat it supported the capitalists as well as the Government till the end of the Great War. In this chapter, attention is focused on the various demands of the proletariat, their struggles to fulfill their grievances, the role of the labour unions, capitalists and the state in the arena of labour consciousness and the role of labour in the nationalist movement.
Organized Working Class Movement

The election to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1937 gave a new turn to the labour movement of the Coimbatore district. At the time of election, six seats were set aside for the labourers to represent in the Assembly, in which, one was allotted to the textile workers of Coimbatore and Malabar.¹ This was the first time, the Coimbatore textile workers got representation in the legislature and the election was held on 16 February 1937.² Basudev was supported not only by majority of the mill-owners, but also by the Justice party. On the other hand, Ramaswamy Naidu drew his support from vast sections of the working class and the Coimbatore District Congress Committee, which was also supported by a small section of the mill-owners.³ This gave labourers an opportunity to express their grievances through their recognized representative. Moreover, he had to be accepted as a recognized labour leader by the mill-owners. Indeed, with his election, the trade unionism attained a new shape in Coimbatore while the textile labourers of Madras and Madurai were led by the outsiders.⁴ Again, with the ascendency of the Congress in power, the workers also

¹ C. Govindan, Tyagy, N.G. Ramaswamy (Tamil), Coimbatore, 1969, p. 19.
³ Ibid.; C. Govindan, Tyagy, pp. 18-21.
⁴ Eamom Murphy, Union In Conflict: A Comparative study of Four South Indian Textile Centres, 1918-1939, New Delhi, 1931, pp. 223-231.
expected more from the Government through their representative. Ramaswamy Naidu was basically a believer in the socialist ideology, which was gaining momentum at that time. So, immediately after the election he joined the Coimbatore Socialist Textile Workers’ Union, which was started on 19 August 1936 by the socialist group of the Coimbatore Labour Union and he became the vice-president of it.\(^5\) In the meantime, Basudev revived the Coimbatore Labour Union and got it re-registered on 1 June 1936.\(^6\) Though Basudev was defeated by Ramaswamy Naidu in the election to the Madras Legislative Assembly, his union worked parallel to the Socialist Textile Workers’ Union for the betterment of the workers. However it did not last long because of the emergence of rival unions for the mill-hands and lost its hold among the labourers by 1940.\(^7\)

Immediately after Ramaswamy Naidu joined the Socialist Textile Workers’ Union, he worked to strengthen the union by admitting more and more members and by starting branches in different places.\(^8\) Even though Ramaswamy Naidu along with other Congress workers joined the socialist union, indeed he could not change the socialist and extremist ideology of the union workers. Another interesting thing is that as a true

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6. The registration of the Coimbatore Labour Union was cancelled on 1 June 1936; C. Govindan, *Tyagy*, pp. 9-14; Letter, Basudev, CLU to the Court of Enquiry, 23 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2711 (Ns), Dev. 6 Dec. 1937.
8. Ibid., pp. 23 and 28.
follower of Gandhi, Ramaswamy Naidu had a strong faith in Congress. But he was a socialist and remained a fervent nationalist and socialist until his death in 1943. His socialist way of working for the cause of the labourers was evidenced from the very beginning. For example, in the Coimbatore Taluk Conference which was held at Peelamedu, the outskirt of Coimbatore on 11 July 1937, Ramaswamy Naidu explained the grievances of the workers and criticized the mill-owners for their indifference towards welfare measures and hostile towards trade unions. As a result, the District Congress Committee moved a no-confidence motion against him and his associates who were considered to be as union activists. Thus, the power struggle was between three groups, the Congress Socialists who stood by Ramaswamy Naidu, the Conservative Coimbatore District Congress Committee and the newly emerging group of the Communists.

As days went on, the sympathizers of Communism developed a strong hold in the Socialist Textile Workers' Union. Moreover, the communist sympathizers were more extremists than Congress sympathizers in relation with labour, capital and the state. In this situation, on 31 October 1937, the Communist sympathizers called the general body meeting of the Socialist Textile Workers' Union at Odayampalayam in Coimbatore. In that meeting the new office bearers of the Socialist Textile Workers' Union were elected.

While a doctor named Krishnaswami from Erode was elected its president, Ramaswamy Naidu and P. Jeevanandam* were elected as vice-presidents.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the communists got the control over the whole union and they got involved to get it registered. Moreover, as the registrar objected the word 'socialist' they changed the name of the union into Coimbatore Mill Workers' Union (hereafter Mill Workers' Union) and got it registered on 6 April 1938.\textsuperscript{12}

Not satisfied with the activities of the communists, workers of the Congress sympathizers, particularly workers of Cambodia, Radhakrishna, Rangavilas and Pioneer mills organised a meeting under the leadership of Ramaswamy Naidu on 1 December 1937.\textsuperscript{13} In the meeting, the workers vehemently criticised the decision of 31 October 1937 of the general body meeting of the Socialist Textile Workers' Union, organised another meeting at Odayampalayam on 12 December 1937 and established a rival union called the Coimbatore District Textile Workers' Union (hereafter Textile Workers' Union).

\* P. Jeevanandam was a communist sympathizer and the President of the Madras Provincial Trade Union Congress, which was established in 1936. He was also the secretary of the Madras Provincial Congress Socialist Part.

\textsuperscript{11} C. Govindan, Tyagy, pp. 50-51, Copy of the report, IPC to DMC, 1 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937; K. Baladandayutham, \textit{Jeeva Valkkai Varalaru} (Tamil), Madras, 1987, p.42.
\textsuperscript{13} C. Govindan, \textit{Tyagy}, p. 54.
Union) under the leadership of Ramaswamy Naidu and got it registered on 17 October 1938. From this date both the Mill Workers' Union and Textile Workers' Union worked as two different poles for the betterment of the mill-hands. Moreover, the Textile Workers' Union had its headquarters at Singanallur, the sub-urban mill centre of Coimbatore. It established its branches not only in the towns like Udumalpet and Tirupur, it also established its branches in villages where there were substantial concentration of mill-hands.

The long pending grievances of the mill workers of Coimbatore were poor pay, bad working and living conditions, the tyranny and abuse of jobbers, the victimization of union activists, the evasion of factory regulations and the refusal of the mill-owners to increase the wages to match the increased profits which the mills were making. Again, during the election campaign the Congress promised that it would pursue the interests of industrial labour. To realise their long pending grievances, after the formation of the Congress Ministry there were large-scale outburst of unrest in almost all the mills of Coimbatore which paved the way for the appointment of Court of Enquiry to enquire the condition of workers in the textile mills of Coimbatore district. At first the labourers in the Lakshmi Mills struck work and later it spread to other mills.

15. E.A. Ramaswamy, The Worker and His Union, p. 36.
Consequences of Mechanisation

The strike in the Lakshmi Mills was commenced on 21 September 1937 and ended by an agreement on 23 September. But renewed it again from the night of 24 September and was finally ended on 12 October 1937. On 16 September 1937, thirty-five workers including those who refused to look after two sides of the spinning frame which was an innovation introduced about three months ago and the workers who refused to clean the machine while it was in motion were sent out. By referring the existing grievances of the workers and the drawback of the introduction of new system which had to reduce the workers of the spinning department into 50 per cent, in the next day on 17 September the secretary of the Socialist Textile Worker's Union wrote to the Managing Agent that the labourers found it very difficult to look after both sides and so he demanded that they should be allowed to look after only one side. Since no reply was received till the evening of 20 September, the thirty-five workers struck work at 1.30 p.m on 21 September and the number increased on 22 and 23 September. On 22 September the Managing Agent sent a reply to the Union that he was
prepared to meet the representatives to arrive at an amicable settlement. However, with the intervention of the District Magistrate, both the management and the union made an agreement on 23 September that (i) no victimization of workers, (ii) written apology not to be demanded from anybody, oral apology would be given by the thirty-five people and (iii) workers of the spinning would resume work only on one side and if on an increase of wages labourers agree that they could do it at their free will. On the basis of the agreement the strikers resumed work on 24 morning.

But, the workers as a whole did not satisfy with the agreement since their grievances were numerous. Hence, by protesting against the compulsion of the management on workers to clean the machines while they were in motion, reduction of workers in the carding department and ill-treatment of maistries and by demanding to the increase in wages, in the night of 24 September 1937, the workers of the Lakshmi Mills except a few loyal workers again struck work. The number was much more increased while the day workers joined in the strike on 25 September. But the mill was working with the meagre loyal workers and also with a few workers who were newly recruited. Seeing the situation

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
becoming worse on 25 September the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Coimbatore met C.P. Subbiah, M.L.A., and Ramaswamy Naidu to settle the strike. As a true Congress man, Ramaswamy Naidu did not like to disturb so much both the Congress capitalists as well as the Congress Government and commented that if the strikers would not return to duty at once, it would be better to ignore them and let them remain outside for a couple of days. However, in the same evening Ramaswamy Naidu met both the strikers and the management and brought out the following settlement.

(i) all the strikers should be taken back and be declared eligible for the annual bonus, but no wages for the days on strike,
(ii) the labourers should not be asked to do work on both sides of the spinning frame and
(iii) the workers who were cleaning the machines should be asked to do only such work as was being done by similar workers in other mills in Coimbatore.

Since 26 September was Sunday, Ramaswamy Naidu promised to address the workers on Monday the 27 September morning and to direct the strikers to resume the work on 27 September. But the managing agent suggested that the workers could be asked to resume work from the night shift of 27 September as the meeting of the Board of Directors was fixed for 4 p.m. in the same day. However, the strikers did not resume work at

25. Ibid.
the night shift of 27 September. So, the management did a large-scale new recruitments to run the mill. Although an agreement was signed, the mill-owners themselves violated it on flimsy ground by resorting to fresh recruitments. This naturally led to the wrecking of the support-base of Ramaswamy Naidu. In the meantime, the communist sympathizers of the Union did not satisfy the role of Ramaswamy Naidu, formed a strike committee and decided to continue the strike. The strike committee undertook relief measures by collecting relief fund. Workers of various mills like Rangavilas, Radhakrishna, Pioneer, Janardhana, Saroja and also various public institutions liberally contributed towards the relief fund and within fifteen days it reached to Rs. 1,441-8-6. Moreover, the strike committee prepared a list of demands and communicated it to the management for early redressal. They were (i) no retaliatory measures against strikers, (ii) discontinuance of the practice of compelling workers to look after two sides of the spinning frame, (iii) a formal permission to the women workers to leave five minutes before the closing time of the day shift, (iv) six weeks leave with pay to pregnant women, (v) workers should not be compelled to clean the machines while running, (vi) higher wages should be paid to the workers who were

26. Ibid.
27. C. Govindan, Tvasy, p.33.
28. Ibid, p.34.
looking after higher counts of yarn, (vii) the doffers* should be paid their wages from the day of their joining the work, (viii) labourers who look after others' work during the absence of other labourers should be paid the corresponding higher wage for the period, (ix) the management should not compel the half siders to look after three-fourth and three-fourth to full side, (x) labourers should not be compelled to work more than nine hours and (xi) every department should be provided with a clock.29

The class consciousness was much developed during this strike though several strikes occurred in Coimbatore mills in the early phase of the mill floatation. On 28 September, Jeevanandam arrived at Coimbatore with the invitation of the communists.30 In the evening, the Union arranged a meeting which was attended by about 1,000 workers. In the meeting, Jeevanandam asked the strikers not to resume the work unless all their demands were agreed by the management while Ramaswamy Naidu advised them to resume the work31. Since the Union was opposing the new recruitments, the managing agent

* The expression - doffer boys is widely used in the documents. The Tamil expression Ariya boys (ignorant boys) is also used. This devotes mainly to unskilled child labour.

directed their maistries to get workers by persuasion. On the other hand, the strikers were doing peaceful propaganda to prevent labourers from going to the mills.\textsuperscript{32}

**Increasing Base of the Communists**

At this juncture, indeed, the communists were trying to establish a strong hold in the Union by organizing frequent meetings in different areas. On 29 September, the communists arranged a meeting at Pappanaickenpalayam in which Jeevanandam and Jaganathan of Tirupur addressed the strikers to continue the strike and strengthen the Union by joining in the same. They also advised the strikers not to resume work till their demands were fulfilled.\textsuperscript{33} Again, on 30 September evening there were two meetings at Ramanathapuram and Puliakulam in which Jeevanandam, Jaganathan and Krishnaswamy, the president of the Union addressed and insisted that all the labourers should remain united to strengthen the Union.\textsuperscript{34} On 1 October 1937 morning three young boys who were found picketing along the Puliakulam road were taken to the mill by the car driver of the mill manager and chastised.\textsuperscript{35} As a result, picketing started in an intensive manner from 2 October 1937 morning. On 3 October 1937 evening there was a public demonstration and procession by the strikers and it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Copy of the report, IPC town to DMC, 2 Oct. 1937, G.O. 2352 (Ms), Dev., 19 Oct. 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Copy of the report, IPC town to DMC, 4 Oct. 1937, G.O. 2352 (Ms), Dev., 19 Oct. 1937.
\end{itemize}
was also attended by the workers of other mills. On the night of 4 October Ramawswamy Naidu was assaulted by the hooligans of the management after he was returning from a labour meeting at Puliakulam though he was a moderate. This incident again intensified picketing from the next day. Being afraid of the strikers, the management was using motor car to transport the workers from the village to the mills. In one occasion, the pickets including women pulled out the blacklegs from the motor car and damaged it. Seeing the violent turn, the management declared a lock-out on 5 October evening itself.

Giri's Intervention

Since the situation became critical, V.V. Giri, the Minister for Industries and Labour, Madras tried to settle the matter. Because of V.V. Giri's involvement, 11 October 1937, the following settlement was arrived at between the labourers and the management of the Lakshmi Mills. Accordingly, (i) all the labours involved in the strike were to be taken back and no victimization on any account,

36. Ibid.
(ii) the strikers would not get any pay during the strike period, but they would get bonus for regular attendance for both the months of September and October as a special case, (iii) workers on the spinning would resume work only on one side and if on increase of wages labourers agree, they could do it at their own free will, (iv) machinery should be cleaned only according to the Factory Act, (v) number of doffers who were working on 1 February 1937 should be engaged and the cleaning should be carried on as before without infringing the Factory Act. (vii) spittoons should be placed at convenient intervals within the departmental area, (vii) in the reeling department, the strength of the workers on the eve of the strike should be maintained, (viii) in the fresh recruitment, preference should be given to those workers who were sent out on the introduction of the two sides attending system, (ix) when and if any annual bonus was given, it must be distributed to all labourers regardless of strike. All one year service people also should be given the bonus, (x) those women workers taking maternity leave should be taken back when they return to work after maternity, (xi) in the roving department those working in the machine must clean once in the forenoon and in the afternoon. They should not be asked to clean in the interval, (xii) the mill authorities should always be courteous in their dealings with the labourers and (xiii) the management should recognize the labour union when properly registered and recognized by the Government.
In the same evening, Giri addressed a public meeting of the workers, explained the terms of the settlement and requested them to resume duty immediately. As a result, the strikers resumed work on 12 October, though they organized a meeting at 6.30 a.m and marched to the mills in a procession headed by the red flag. 41

Towards a General Strike

The success of workers in the Lakshmi Mills gave an enthusiasm to the labour movement of Coimbatore. By showing one or other reasons the workers of various mills struck work in the later months of 1937 to fulfill their various long standing demands. As a result, the Government of Madras appointed a Court of Enquiry to enquire the conditions of labour in the textile mills of Coimbatore. As a first step, by demanding annual bonus payment which was not paid from the beginning, the workers of Sarada Mills which started its production on 9 May 1935 struck work on 27 October 1937. 42

Moreover, the strikers presented a list of grievances in writing like a demand for increased wages, complaint against irregular hours of working and complaint against overtime

work without a corresponding increase in the wages. The strikers assembled near the mill and it was attended by both Ramaswamy Naidu and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Coimbatore. In the meeting the latter advised the strikers to resume the work immediately and if their grievances were not considered within the next fourteen days they had the liberty to resort to strike again. The advice of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate was strongly protested by Jaganathan and advised the strikers not to resume work until their demands were satisfied. Ramaswamy Naidu had also equally advised the strikers not to resume work till the funds already collected during the strike at the Lakshmi Mills exhausted. In spite of that, the mill was working with a very less number of loyal workers. It is interesting to note here that the strikers were fed by the management within the mill due to the vigorous picketing out side the mill. However, after an agreement between the labourers and the management the strikers resumed work on 1 November 1937.

By demanding annual bonus, the workers of the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills struck work on 28 October 1937. The leading force behind this strike was communists. Since the mill was working with loyal workers, in the midst of police bundobust peaceful picketing was done by the strikers

44. Note, SDMC to DMC, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937.
45. Copy of the letter, SDMC to DMC, 1 Nov. 1937, Letter, DMC to LCM, 1 Nov 1937, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937.
from 29 October morning. On the same day the strikers organized a procession and they went about the town in large numbers by shouting out slogans. By claiming Deepavali bonus and the increase in wages, the workers of the Kaleeswarar Mills struck work on 29 October 1937. The strikers organized a meeting in front of the mill and Jaganathan addressed them not to resume work until their demands were fulfilled.

Like the workers of the Sarada Mills, Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills and Kaleeswarar Mills by demanding Deepavali bonus, the workers of Radhakrishna Mills also struck work on 29 October 1937. Moreover, there was discontentment among the workers from the visit of Rajaji, then Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency on 19 October to Coimbatore. The workers were refused leave on that date. Though peaceful picketing was in order, the strikers were intimidated by the police constables who were posted

there. However, the mill was closed from 5.45 p.m on 30 October 1937 until further orders.

To fulfill the long standing grievances, the workers of the Janardhana Mills struck work on 30 October 1937 morning. Though, Ramaswamy Naidu and his supporters actively participated in the strike, the leading force behind this strike was communists who were led by Jaganathan. Since, most of the labourers were on strike, the management announced that they had to close the mill from the afternoon of 30 October 1937 till further orders.

By protesting against the disciplinary action which was taken by the management against three labourers who protested against the disciplinary action which was taken by the management against their co-worker, the workers of the Murugan Mills struck work in the morning of 30 October 1937. The strikers held meetings and demonstrations in the form of processions through the main streets of the city. The leading force behind this strike was the communist sympathizers of the Socialist Textile Workers' Union

54. Letter, DNC to LCM, 1 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937.
56. Letter, DNC to LCM, 1 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937.
like Jaganathan, T.P. Ramaswamy and Ramu. The strikers carried red flag with the hammer and sickle as emblem.

By demanding bonus, the night shift workers of the Vasantha Mills struck work at 12.45 a.m on 31 October 1937, sat in the spinning room and left the premises after sometime. But, the strikers along with the workers of other mills picketed the day time workers who came to the mill in the early morning. Nevertheless, some workers entered and the mill was working with a minimum of hands. However, the management stopped the work for the afternoon shift and closed the mill until further orders. It is interesting to note here that though this mill was stared seven years back no bonus was paid till then and no demand was from the labour side.

Since the capitalists were not kind towards the fighting working class, V.V. Giri the Labour Minister of Madras came to Coimbatore on 1 November and talked with both the capitalists and the labour leaders. Not yielding to the mediation of labour minister, the capitalists blamed that the Congress Government was solely responsible for the strike. They further argued that the strikes were organized due to the extravagant promises made by the Congress during the 1937

58. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
election to the Assembly. The labourers thought that any demand which might be put forward by them would meet with response. On the other hand the Government was very much interested to be in the good books of both the capitalists as well as the labourers. It is evidenced from the following statement of the Congress Ministry which was published on 22 October 1937. The Government stated that the labour strike without prior intimation gave a way for the criticism from the capitalists. If the strikers strike work without informing their grievances and discuss the matter with the capitalists it would affect the welfare of the workers. It was not the aim of the Government to suppress the rights of the workers. Yet if they strike work without using all other ways, the Government would not support it. It was desirable to settle the matter within the mill without the involvement of outsiders. On the other hand, while the workers struck work the mill managements stated that if the workers would fail to resume work, the management would not hear the words of Government or the labourers. However, in this situation the Labour Minister promised that by consulting the labour leaders and after analysing the situation, the Government would take action to redress the long standing grievances of the workers and he asked them to resume the work. In the meantime, the capitalists assured the Minister that they would not victimize the strikers while they resume work.

63. Ibid, p. 42.
Further, the Minister assured the leaders that if the problem was not solved it would be handed over to the decision of the Court of Enquiry. 64

While Ramaswamy Naidu and his associates accepted the Minister's suggestion, the communists did not accept it. They stated that they would resume work only after the capitalists accepted for one month wage as bonus and the increase of 50 per cent wage. 65 On 2 November V.V. Giri addressed the labour meetings which were organized in different places like Singanallur, Oadayampalayam, Peelemedu, Coimbatore Coronation park, Chinnipalayam and Kurichi. 66 In the meetings he expressed the policies of the Government and asked the strikers to resume work immediately. On the basis of the suggestion of the Minister, along with T.S. Avanashilingam Chettiar and Subri, Ramaswamy Naidu visited all the mills, persuaded the capitalists to open the mills and persuaded the labourers to resume work 67. As a result, on 4 November in seven mills out of eleven mills, the strikers resumed work. Before that, in one mill the strikers resumed work since the management yielded to the demands of the workers. While Ramaswamy Naidu and his associates were campaigning to resume the work, the communists were campaigning to continue the strike. In this

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p.43.
situation, the workers of the Lakshmi Mills also struck work, since the management prevented their workers to wear red flag on November day. So, the Southern India Mill-Owners' Association criticized that the attitude of the workers of the Kaleeswarar, Somasundaram, Lakshmi and Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills were unreasonable in view of the advice of the Minister that the workmen should resume work unconditionally. Further, they requested, the Government to give adequate protection to the workers who were willing to work as well as to the mill authorities. Again, they requested the Government to declare all stay-in strikes picketings to be illegal. Because of the involvement of Ramaswamy Naidu, the problem was solved and the strikers of the Lakshmi Mills resumed work on 10 November. Again V.V. Giri visited Coimbatore on 12 November and stayed there to settle the problem. But Jeevanandam stated that strike would be continued. However, the strikers of the above mentioned three mills resumed work on 13 and 14 November. In the meantime Avanashilingam Chettiar discussed about the bonus issue with the mill managements. As a result, the managements of Radhakrishna, Janardhana, Vasantha and Coimbatore Cotton Mills accepted to give bonus.

68. Proceedings of SIMA, 10 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2560 (Ms), Dev., 16 Nov. 1937.
69. C. Govindan, Tyagy, p.44
70. Ibid., p.45.
71. Ibid.
In the meantime, on the basis of its assurance, the Government decided to appoint a Court of Enquiry under section 3 of the Trade Disputes Act, to investigate and to give findings on the points in dispute. The District Magistrate of Coimbatore was requested to obtain memoranda of grievances from the workers and statements by way of replies from the managements of the mills and reduce them to specific issues and submit them to Government which would finally formulate them for findings by the Court of Enquiry. Accordingly, a list of grievances was called for from the labourers before 25 November 1937 and the copies of the list of grievances received from the labourers were sent to the Mill-Owners' Association on 26 November. The Coimbatore Labour Union, then the only registered union submitted its memorandum of grievances to the Court of Enquiry on 23 November 1937 through the District Magistrate. The memorandum included the recognition of the union, abolition of the multiple shift system by introducing 9 hours continuous work in a day with the interval of an hour and the minimum wage of Rs. 25 to the male worker, Rs. 20 to the female worker and Rs. 15 to the boys.

74. Letter, Basudev, President, CLU to the Court of Enquiry, 23 Nov. 1937, G.O. 2711 (Ms), Dev., 6 Dec. 1937.
The District Magistrate was requested to submit his report as early as possible. On 29 December 1937, M. Venkataramayya was appointed to enquire about the above dispute. The Court was directed to hold the enquiry and submit its findings on the following issues: (i) whether the demands mentioned in the different memoranda by textile workers just and reasonable and if so, what should be the recommendations, (ii) whether the representations made by the mill-owners are just and reasonable, and if so, what should be the nature of the recommendations and (iii) other recommendations, if any, by the Court regarding the textile industry of Coimbatore as a whole. The first sitting of the Court was held on 7 January 1938. On behalf of the workers, the three organizations, viz., the Coimbatore Labour Union, the Mill Workers' Union and the Coimbatore District Congress Committee represented. The mill-owners questioned the presence of the District Congress Committee in the enquiry on behalf of workers on the ground that it had on its rolls not only the workers but also some of the mill-owners. They even questioned the competence of the Mill-Workers' Union and the Coimbatore Labour Union. However, the Court called upon the representatives of the District Congress Committee like P.S. Sitharama Ayyar and C. Subramanyan to file a declaration that they had been authorized by the mill

75. G.O. 2483 (Ms), Pub. (special), 29 December, 1937; M. Venkataramayya, Court of Enquiry, p. 2
76. M. Venkataramayya, Court of Enquiry, p. 2.
77. Ibid.
employee members of the Congress Committee to represent labour.\textsuperscript{78}

Then Court framed as many as twenty-six issues and examined them under the following major heads, viz., welfare schemes, hours of work and shifts, trade unions, wages and condition of service. After a careful investigation, the Court submitted its report on 9 April 1938 in favour of the workers.\textsuperscript{79} It did not accept the contention of the mill-owners that the workers had really no grievances. The Court argued that the strikes were the culmination of an already existing struggle. It further, emphasized that the main cause of the strike was the lack of contact and understanding between the employers and their workers.\textsuperscript{80} It indicated that the non-recognition of the trade unions by the mill-owners was the major cause of all labour troubles. It again emphasized that the mill-owners had no right to impose any condition whatsoever for the recognition of the union. (In fact, it recommended the early recognition of the Coimbatore Labour Union and the Mill-Workers' Union).

The Court recommended that the best wage system was to have a basic pay to each worker plus a commission paid every day or every week or even every month depending upon the productivity of the worker. Taking into account, the

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., Appendix A and A1, pp. 114-115; The Hindu, 8, 19 and 29 Jan. 1938.
\textsuperscript{79} C. Govindan, Tyagy, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{80} M. Venkataramayya, Court of Enquiry, pp. 27-37.
Court recommended to give increase in wages with effect from 1 June 1938. Thus, the more important recommendations of the Court were the reduction of working hours from 9 to 8, the abolition of multiple shifts and various increases in wages estimated to add 27% to the wage bill of the industry. The Court also gave its opinion that 24 hours notice before a strike or lock-out was adequate.\(^{81}\) All the three Unions in Coimbatore accepted the findings and recommendations of the Court of Enquiry. But the Mill-Workers' Union did not satisfy with the recommended enhanced rate of wage. In its meeting the executive committee of the Mill-Workers' Union stated that in view of the general prosperity of the textile industry, the strong financial position and the abnormal fall in the price of cotton without a corresponding fall in the price of yarn, the increase in wages recommended were inadequate. Regarding other recommendations, the Union was satisfied and urged the mill-owners to implement the recommendations in consultation with the Union before 1 August 1938.\(^{82}\) Expressing satisfaction on the recommendations of the Court with special reference to the wages, the Coimbatore Labour Union thanked V.V. Giri for his sympathetic attitude towards the workers.\(^{83}\) Eventhough the Textile Workers' Union was not satisfied with the

\(^{81}\) Report for the Second half of May 1938, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1938.

\(^{82}\) Resolution, Executive Committee, MWU, 29 May 1938, G.O. 2059, (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938.

\(^{83}\) Letter, CLU to V.V. Giri, 24 June 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938.
recommendations, it advised the workers to accept them as the Congress Government had endorsed them.\textsuperscript{84}

On the other hand, the Mill-Owners' Association expressed dissatisfaction over the wage increase and considered that it was excessive. Their major arguments were that (i) the calculation relating to the cost of production was incorrect, (ii) the drop in the wages earned by the reelers was mainly due to the irregular attendance and inefficiency, (iii) a comparison of the standard wages prevailing in Madurai, Madras and Coimbatore was unfair on account of the size of the industries and financial conditions, (iv) the Court did not give due consideration to the future of the industry, rather it had based its findings on the present conditions which were only a temporary phase and (v) the date from which the proposed increases had to take effect from 1 June allowed mills insufficient time to consider.\textsuperscript{85} However, the Mill-Owners' Association recommended its member mills to give an increase in wages as follows (1) 12% increase subject to a maximum of twelve rupees for those earning below Rs. 12 per month, (ii) 7% increase subject to a maximum of twenty rupees for those earning twelve to twenty-five rupees per month, (iii) 5% increase

\textsuperscript{84} Memorandum, TWU to V.V. Giri, 24 June 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938.
\textsuperscript{85} Proceedings, SIMA, 28 May 1938, G.O. 1621 (Ms), Dev., 5 July 1938; Letter, SIMA to V.V. Giri, 25 June 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938; Welcome address, Chairman, SIMA in its annual meeting, 15 May 1939, G.O. 1501 (Ms), Dev., 10 June 1939.
subject to a maximum of thirty rupees for those earning
from twenty to thirty rupees per month, (iv) no increase for those
who were earning over thirty rupees and (v) 12% increase for
reelers. The Association also requested the Government of
Madras to appoint a committee immediately consisting of
representatives of employers and workers under the
chairmanship of a suitable Government officer to recommend
the standardization of wages.

The mill-owners further argued that the night shift was
started with a view to reduce the overhead charges, though
the efficiency of the workers was less during nights, the
production was lesser and the attendance was more irregular.
According to them, the reduction of working hours to eight
during the night and a further increase in wages for night
shift would result in the closure of all the mills during
night. Therefore they held that the stoppage of night work
would mean throwing approximately 50% of the workers without
employment. Thus, the mill-owners indirectly threatened not
only the workers but also the Government. The stoppage of
power during the night shifts would lead to the loss of
revenue to the Government. However, the mill-owners
expressed their willingness to recognize the trade unions
provided the unions should be properly constituted and

86. Letter, SINA, to V.V. Giri, 25 June 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms),
Dev. 23 Aug. 1938.
87. Proceedings, SIMA, 28 May 1938, G.O. 1621 (Ms), Dev., 5
July 1938.
represented with members who could understand and appreciate all the aspects of the question under discussion.\footnote{88}

In the meantime, by demanding to reinstate the dismissed workers who participated in the strike of October 1937 and to continue 21 hours of work in the mill rather than the management's proposal of 22 hours of work in a day, the workers of Rangavilas Mills struck work on 1 January 1938.\footnote{89}

The prime force behind this strike was N.G. Ramaswamy Naidu and his associates. On 5 January, the strikers were assaulted by the rowdies of the mill management while they were coming after attending a meeting at Souripalayam in Coimbatore which was addressed by Ramaswamy Naidu.\footnote{90}

Moreover, the mill management also hindered the union activities by preventing the untouchables who were announcing about labour meetings by beating drums.\footnote{91} Yet the strikers were very active by organizing frequent processions and meetings. Seeing the situation which becoming so worse, the management closed the mill on 7 January.\footnote{92} However, the mill was reopened and the strikers resumed work on 14 January 1938 by the following agreement: \footnote{93} (i) restoration of the shifts

\footnotesize

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{88}{Letter, SIMA to Rajagopalachari, 1 July 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938.}
  \item \footnote{89}{Trade disputes in progress in the week ending 14 Jan. 1938, G.O. 86 (Ms), Dev. 10 Jan. 1939.}
  \item \footnote{90}{Report, IPC rural to DMC, 6 Jan. 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938, C. Govindan, Tyagy, p. 76.}
  \item \footnote{91}{C. Govindan, Tyagy, p. 77.}
  \item \footnote{92}{Trade disputes in progress in the week ending 14 Jan. 1938, G.O. 86 (Ms), Dev., 10 Jan 1938; Report IPC rural to DMC, 4 Jan 1938, Report, IPC rural to DMC, 6 Jan. 1938, Letter, DMC to Sec., Dev., GoM, 6 Jan 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.}
  \item \footnote{93}{Trade disputes in progress in the week ending 14 Jan. 1938, G.O. 86(Ms), Dev., 10 Jan. 1939.}
\end{itemize}
covering 21 hours in a day, (ii) provision for women workers in the spinning or any other section excepting reeling for their 9 hours a day work at Rs. 12/- per month or 6 hours a day work at Rs. 11/- per month and (iii) re-entertainment of eleven discharged workers.

Again, the workers of the Lakshmi Mills struck work on 8 November 1937 and ended on 13 November. But the mill was reopened on 15 November and the strikers were taken back by receiving apologies. On 5 December, four labourers of the Lakshmi Mills wrote to the District Magistrate, Coimbatore that if the Coimbatore mill-owners do not agree the below written conditions, the labourers would follow the footsteps of Gandhiji and "fast" till they receive the remedy. They were (i) the written terms and conditions taken from the labourers against the Government Communique must be returned and cancelled, (ii) there should be no victimization and (iii) the owner of the Lakshmi Mill must agree the settlement made before the Labour Minister on 12 October 1937. Since the mill-owner did not listen to the demands, hunger strike was organized in the next day at the Rangammal temple near Pappanaicken Palayam village and most of the

participants were the workers of the Lakshmi Mills. Started with twenty-four members it reached thirty-two including three women on 7 December 1937. However, on 11 December, the hunger strike was withdrawn because the management agreed to take back all but two.

Likewise, the workers of the Saroja Mills struck work on 4 January 1938 by protesting against the introduction of ten hours work each day during five days and four hours on the sixth day. However, the strikers resumed work on 17 January by the term of settlement between the strikers and the management. Accordingly, the management agreed to introduce 22 hours shift system, the readmission of eleven persons who were previously dismissed, leave for Sundays and free tea to the night shift workers. But, again about 200 workers of the same mill struck work on 15 February 1938 by protesting against the dismissal of fifteen boys. But the real reason for the strike was said to be the failure of the mill management to withdraw the complaint of defamation.

100. G.O. 86 (Ms), Dev., 10 Jan. 1939.
101. Ibid.
which was charged against some labourers and Ramaswamy Naidu for the remark of Ramaswamy Naidu in the Legislative Assembly at the time of the previous strike.\textsuperscript{104} This was a peculiar type of strike which was the one observed during the 1920s. Though the workers struck work at 10 a.m., they were not willing to leave the mill premises and were forced to vacate the premises by the police at 5.15 p.m.\textsuperscript{105} Not satisfied with the activities of the mill management and the police, the strikers sat on the main road by blocking it.\textsuperscript{106} At 8 p.m. a lorry and three carts which were carrying goods to the mills were obstructed and stoned.\textsuperscript{107} Again, the strikers, assaulted the boy who was carrying food in jutka to the loyal workers. However, the police became active and dispersed the crowd by lathi charge.\textsuperscript{108} Seeing the situation becoming worse, the management locked out the mill on 17 February 1938.\textsuperscript{109} However, the management decided to run the mill by the workers who were willing to work and the mill was reopened on 28 February 1938.\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the management announced that it was prepared to take back all labourers

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.; Report for the second half of Feb. 1938, FNR, 1938.
\textsuperscript{105} Letter, DMC to LCM, 16 Feb. 1938, G.O. 957 (Ms), Pub. (Confid1), 8 June, 1938.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.; Report, Dy SP, Coimbatore 15 Feb. 1938, 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{107} Letter, DMC to LCM, 16 February 1938, G.O. 957 (Ms), Pub. (Confid1), 8 June 1938.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Report, LCM to Sec., LD, GoI, 23 Feb. 1938, G.O. 86 (Ms), Dev., 10 January 1939.
\textsuperscript{110} Report, IPC rural to DMC, 10 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
who did not take any active part in the strike and if they would not turn up before 5 March, fresh recruitment would be done.\(^{111}\) Since most of the strikers did not respond to the notice of the management, they brought particularly untouchables from the different villages of Coimbatore like Singanallur, Vellalore, Irugur and Neelikonampalayam.\(^{112}\) In return, the strikers organized a large-scale picketing. On 8 March in the early morning, the strikers organized a large-scale picketing by collecting the workers of Rangavilas, Lakshmi and Rajalakshmi Mills who were returning after the night shift.\(^{113}\)

On 19 March morning, the picketing turned into a violent one and the pickets threw stone and earth on the loyal workers who were coming to the mills in batches. In the name of law and order, the police who were on bandobust duty lathi-charged the mob.\(^{114}\) In this situation, a 'maistry' while he was bringing workers for the mills from Vellalore village had been assaulted on 19 evening by some persons including two mill-hands from Vasantha and Coimbatore cotton mills.\(^{115}\) However, the strike had been settled on 23 March 1938 and the terms of settlement were that i) all mill-hands

\(^{111}\) Notice (Tamil), Managing Director, Saroja Mills, 2 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
\(^{112}\) C. Govindan, Tyagy, p. 80.
\(^{113}\) Report, IPC rural to DMC, 10 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
\(^{114}\) Copy of the report, IPC rural to DSP, Coimbatore, 19 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
\(^{115}\) Letter, SDMC to DMC, 21 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
except 100 old hands had to be re-entertained within fifteen
days, (ii) 10 mill-hands whom the management had serious
complaints, the matter would be settled by K. Subramaniya
Ayyar, Ramaswamy Naidu and M. Venkataramayya by joint enquiry
and (iii) in future, the vacancies would be filled by
employing preferably the old hands if they come.\textsuperscript{116}

The management of the Sarada mills stopped night shift
in the weaving department from 1 February 1938 owing to a
large stock of cloth and the poor demand for it from December
1937.\textsuperscript{117} By opposing this, the workers struck work on 11
February 1938.\textsuperscript{118} The mill management stood firm and
recruited new hands. Though the mill was reopened after
some days, the strikers about one hundred were not taken
back.\textsuperscript{119} However about fifteen of them got work in the Lotus
Mills.\textsuperscript{120} The management of the Sarada Mills assured the
workers that the night work in the weaving section would be
started as soon as much of the unsold cloth had been disposed
off.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{116} Letter, DMC to LCM, 23 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev.,
11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{117} Letter, DMC to LCM, 14 Feb. 1938, Letter, Managing
Agent, Sarada Mills to DMC, 14 February 1938, G.O. 989
(Ms), Dev., 11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{118} Letter, DMC to LCM, 14 February 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms),
Dev., 11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{119} Letter, SDMC to DMC, 6 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev.,
11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{120} Letter, SDMC to DMC, 18 Feb. 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev.,
11 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{121} Letter, SDMC to DMC, 6 March 1938, G.O. 989 (Ms), Dev.,
11 April 1938.
By condemning the strike of the Sarada Mills, on 17 February 1938, the Southern India Mill Owner's Association resolved that the managements of the individual mills had the full liberty to curtail their production and or otherwise to work their mills according to their market conditions and trade demands. They also requested the member mills not to negotiate directly or indirectly with Ramaswamy Naidu with a view to the settlement of the labour troubles. 122

Condition after General Strike

Moreover, after the general strike of 1937, a large-scale victimization was done in pretext of indiscipline on the workers those who were active in the strikes as well as union activities. In July 1938, the management of the Radhakrishna Mills dismissed twenty-seven night shift workers who were responsible for the clash among the labourers within the mill in the previous night. 123 The majority of the dismissed workers were members of the mill committee of the Textile Workers' Union and later the victimization reached to forty-five. 124 Since the management was quite adamant, the Union sent an ultimatum on 20 July to the management to take back all the dismissed workers on or before 12 noon on 21 July. The union again threatened that if the management fail to take back the dismissed workers, all the workers of the

mill would strike work from the same afternoon. As per their decision the workers except 215 out of 1,071 day workers struck work at 12 noon on 21 July 1938. As a result, night work was cancelled. In the same day T.S. Avanashilingam Chettair, M.L.A who was also the president of the District Congress Committee announced that he would be willing to act any Arbitration Board to be set up if the both parties agree to refer the disputes to such a board. So, on 22 July the Union wrote to the mill management that if the mill management was willing to refer the disputes to the Arbitration board consisting of Avanashilingam Chettiar and Subramaniam alias Subri, the Chairman of the Coimbatore Municipality, the Union would call off the strike on the condition that no worker would be victimized for his participation in the strike. However, the management run the mill by new recruitment of workers. In addition to this, the management collected labourers from the other mills particularly the depressed class of the Pankaja and Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills. These workers were taken to the mill by cars and they were fed by the management within the mill due to the fear of pickets.

So, the strikers conducted a large-scale picketing at loyal workers' houses since the police bandobust was severe in the mill. The interruption of the police extended to prevent the labour meeting which was arranged at Peelamedu on 24 evening. Since the situation was becoming so worse, the Union requested the Labour Minister to settle the problem. However, on 27 July evening the strikers turned violent by pelting stones on the loyal workers when they were returning to home after work. The police force was equally active and arrested the culprits. In the next day morning the pickets assaulted the depressed class workers at their residential areas. However, the strike was called off on 30 July 1938 in accordance with the decision arrived at between the mill-owners and the workers to refer the points at dispute to private arbitrators like M. Venkataramayya and C. Subramanya Gounder and the strikers resumed work on 1 August 1938. The private arbitrators published their decision on 31 August 1938. As per their decision, they recommended the management to take back all the strikers except six.

Likewise, some of the senior labourers of the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills were also dismissed. By protesting against this, the executive committee of the Coimbatore Labour Union passed a resolution on 22 July 1938 and threatened the management that if all the dismissed workers were not reinstated before 12 noon of Sunday the 24 July, a strike would be declared in the next day at 7 a.m.\textsuperscript{136} By explaining the irregularities of the dismissed workers, the management replied to the Union that there were no possibilities to reinstate them.\textsuperscript{137} Since the management was stubborn, the labourers struck work on 25 July 1938 morning.\textsuperscript{138} As the management of both Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills and the Radhakrishna Mills were same it was doubted that the workers struck work to show their sympathy to the strikers of the Radhakrishna Mills.\textsuperscript{139} Though picketing was organized in the next day the strike was called off on 28 July 1938.\textsuperscript{140}

Again, the workers of the spinning department of the 'A' mill of Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills struck work on 3 January 1939 by demanding leave with pay for 5 January, the

\textsuperscript{136} Letter, Basudev, President,CLU to the Managing Director, CSW Mills, 23 July 1938, G.O. 2532 (Ms), Dev., 12 Oct. 1938.
\textsuperscript{139} Letter, DMC to V.V. Giri, MILM, 27 July 1938, G.O. 2532 (Ms), Dev., 12 Oct. 1938.
'Arudradarisanam' day for which the management wanted to give leave without pay. So, the management declared a lock-out at 10.30 p.m. in the same night. It is interesting to note here that the weaving department of the 'A' mill and the other mill (B) of the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills was working without disturbance.

**Standardization of Wages**

On the basis of the request of the Southern India Mill-Owners' Association and the mill-hands' Unions, the Government of Madras directed D.N. Strathie, then the Commissioner of Labour, Madras to proceed to Coimbatore to conduct a detailed study not only on the question of standardization of wages but also other questions arising out of the other recommendations of the Court of Enquiry. Further, he was also asked to submit a report with his recommendations to the Government as to how matters could be adjusted satisfactorily between the mill-owners and the workers. After a careful investigation, Strathie stated that the recommendations of the Court of Enquiry could not be fully accepted as in many cases it was quite impracticable. They were to some extent due to incorrect information supplied by the mill-owners' and partly to an incorrect

141. Copy of the letter, Director, CSW mills to DMC, 3 Jan. 1939, G.O. 208 (Ms), Dev., 24 Jan. 1939.
method of calculation. According to him, the Court of Enquiry's idea of the profits earned by the industry was not correct. Because, there had been a great deal of "company-promoting", and the published balance sheets had been cooked up to attract share-holders. The capital which had been borrowed privately by the Managing Agents was not shown among the liabilities and the dividends had been declared before profits were earned. Again he stated that the Court of Enquiry's recommendation of an increase of 20 per cent wages to the night shift workers could not be possibly carried into effect. Because, the mill-owners were unanimous in declaring that if that was forced upon them they would stop night work which would throw about 50 per cent of the workers out of employment. So he recommended the average wage of Rs. 16 for spinners irrespective of day or night shift on the assumption that workers would work night and day shifts on alternative weeks.145

Likewise, Strathie criticized the minimum wage of Rs. 11 for an adult unskilled worker which was recommended by the Court of Enquiry. He argued that the waste-pickers who were a group of unskilled workers available in plenty. They were the old women who sat on the floor cleaned waste cotton. He argued that if the workers and Government insist the managements to pay Rs. 11, they would be dismissed. So he suggested Rs. 7-8-0 as minimum as a standard wage which was

already paid by the Cambodia Mills to their waste pickers. Further, he opined that the strikes were ultimately due to the inadequacy of the existing wages and the delay in raising them and that once the wage question was decided things would settle down.\textsuperscript{146} On the basis of the Court of Enquiry's recommendations as well as the Strathie's report the Government of Madras recommended the standardized wage for adoption by covering practically all well-defined classes of workers which were common to all the mills.\textsuperscript{147}

**National Movement and the Labour**

The lack of labour consciousness and an organized labour movement kept aloof the mill-hands of Coimbatore for so many years from the National Movement. Yet, the involvement of Gandhi in the Nationalist struggle influenced the labour movement of Coimbatore. As a result, the Coimbatore Labour Union was founded and the labour strikes were organized the same way as the Nationalist Movement. Moreover, in the early years of labour movement, the labour leaders of Coimbatore were much worrying about the pathetic condition of workers rather than the Nation. Even after they got legal representation in the Madras Legislative Assembly, the labour leaders wanted to redress their grievances completely through an organized leadership. Though the labourers about

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Press Communique, Dev., GoM., 6 Aug. 1938, G.O. 2059 (Ms), Dev., 23 Aug. 1938.
90,000 of Bombay struck work on 2 October 1939 by protesting against the war, the labourers of Coimbatore kept silent. However, the mill-hands of Coimbatore involved in the Nationalist Movement since the beginning of the 'Quit India' movement. It is interesting to note here that only the workers who were controlled by the Textile Workers' Union involved. On the other hand the 'Mill Workers' Union actively supported the war effort since Russia was attacked by Germany.

As mentioned above, the Textile Workers' Union played an active role from the beginning of "Quit India' movement in 1942. On 8 August 1942 under the leadership of Gandhi, the All India Congress Committee met at Bombay and drafted a resolution by asking the British to 'Quit India' and asked the industrial workers and peasants to join in the Movement. But on the next day early morning, Gandhiji and all the members of the Working Committee in Bombay were arrested. The Indian National Congress and its affiliated organisations were declared unlawful. Then arrest followed all over India and a large number of Congressmen

were thrown into the prison. Opposing the illegal arrest of the leaders, on 9 August evening a meeting was organized under the leadership of N.G. Ramaswamy Naidu. Moreover, on 12 August prominent trade union leaders of Coimbatore like N.G. Ramaswamy Naidu, K.P. Thiruvenkidam and leading Congressmen like Avanashilingam Chettiar met at Ondiputhur to decide the future course of action. In the meeting, they decided to derail a military train carrying ammunitions, destroying aerodromes and breaking jails to release the prisoners. But, on 13 August N.G. Ramaswamy was arrested. This led to the great havoc in the textile industry of Coimbatore. By protesting against his arrest, the workers of the textile mills of Singanallur and Peelamedu struck work in the same evening. The Southern India Mill-Owners Association opined that the Textile Workers' Union was fully responsible for the strike, passed a resolution in the same day and requested the District Magistrate, Coimbatore to take necessary action against the union leaders and also recommended to declare the union an unlawful body. However, the strikers resumed work on 16 August.

As a first step against the colonial Government, in the early hours of the 14 August, the mill-hands who were on

153. C. Govindan, Tyagy, pp 224-228.
154. Ibid., pp. 228-229.
strike in the Singanallur area derailed a special train which was carrying ammunitions from Aravankadu ordnance factory in between Podanur and Singanallur railway stations in Coimbatore. The damage caused was estimated as about Rs. 80,000. Among the workers who involved in the derailment, the workers of the Vasantha Mills were largely responsible. The police did large scale arrests and charged case. However, to compensate the damages, the District Magistrate, Coimbatore proposed to impose the collective fine of Rs. 80,000 in the proportion of Rs. 28,000 to the mill workers of Vasantha Mills which was having 2340 workers, Rs. 26,000 to the nine other mills of Singanallur area and the remaining Rs. 26,000 to the inhabitants of the ten villages. But the District Magistrate proposed to exempt the Muslims who were the registered land holders of the villages but not the Muslim workers in the mills concerned, Indian Christians, Adi Dravidas except Pallars, Village Officers, Civic Guards, Superior and office mill staff who did not go on strike and other persons who were actively supporting the Government.

It is interesting to note here that the divide and rule policy of the colonial Government was very much exposed even

160. Ibid.
during the highest peak of the freedom movement by exempting a particular sect of people from the collective fine. Among the sixty people accused, four were given life imprisonment, three of them were sentenced to transportation and forty were given two years imprisonment. Among the accused, except three, all others were workers who were working in the different mills at Singanallur.

In this situation, by demanding twenty-five per cent increase in wages, twenty-five per cent wages as war allowance and six months wages as bonus to meet their rising cost of living and to share the profit of the capitalists with labourers, all the workers of the Pankaja Mills including 500 women struck work on 22 August. But this led to lathi-charge and firing by the police. As a result two persons were killed and several injured. Though the demands of the workers were turned down by the mill-owner and the strike was suppressed by the police force, for the same demands as well as against the police firing, the workers of the nine mills of Singanallur and Ondiputhur struck work in the night of 24 August. The strikers equally involved in

161. Copy of the judgement for the derailment of the train, 21 Dec. 1942 (Collections of P. Subramanian, freedom fighter, Coimbatore (hereinafter PS Collections); Report for the second half of December 1942, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1942.

162. Copy of the judgement for the derailment of the train, 21 Dec. 1942 (PS Collections).


the Nationalist Movement in the same night by setting on fire to toddy shops at Singanallur, Irugur and Pallapalayam.\footnote{165} Total accused in the Irugur case itself were thirty-three. Among them, life imprisonment was given to six people.\footnote{166} All the accused were mill workers and some of them were the office bearers of the Textile Workers' Union.\footnote{167}

However, the Government was very much interested to run the mill in order to meet the war requirements. So the District Magistrate declared the strike illegal and issued a notice under the Defence of India Rules calling on the workers to rejoin duty by 7 a.m. on 26 August 1942 and pointed out the penalty under the Rules.\footnote{168} Moreover, some of the mill-owners suggested that the workers should be penalized by cutting off six days' wages at least from their wages for the month of August for the wilful misconduct.\footnote{169} Again, the representatives of the mill-owners met the District Magistrate at 12 noon on 26 Aug. and they suggested that (i) a few workers in each mill should be charged under the defence of India Rules for having caused the illegal strike, (ii) action should be taken against all

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{165}{Copy of the judgement for set on fire to toddy shops, 12 Sept. 1944 (PS Collections); Report for the Second half of Aug. 1942, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1942.}
\footnotetext{166}{Copy of the judgement for set on fire to toddy shops, 12 Sept. 1944 (PS Collections).}
\footnotetext{167}{Copy of the Enquiry report of M. Venkatachalapathy Mudaliar, II Magistrate, Palladam, related to Irugur case (PS Collections).}
\footnotetext{168}{Copy of the letter, COC to LCM, 25 Aug., 1942, Letter, DMC to Sec., PWL, 28 Aug. 1942, G.O. 3476 (MS), PWL (Confid), 25 Sept. 1942.}
\footnotetext{169}{Copy of the letter, COC to LCM, 25 Aug., 1942, G.O. 3476 (Ms), PWL (Confid), 25 Sept. 1942.}
\end{footnotes}
the union officials who were instrumental in causing the strike, (iii) arrest and detention of those persons other than the union officials and the workers who were instrumental to this strike, for example, shop keepers and others at Singanallur, (iv) to declare the Textile Workers' Union as an unlawful assembly and (v) the mill managers should be allowed a free hand in reinstating the 'rowdy'* workers and in the matter of granting bonus. 170

In 1942, the colonial Government, the capitalists and the wage earners were equally active. The colonial Government was very much worried about the production of the mills in order to meet the war requirements as well as the civilian needs since the import was stopped and also very much involved in the maintenance of law and order situation since the freedom movement was in its peak. The capitalists were also equally interested like the Government in the increased production. Because, in 1942 the textile industry was earning more profit than the previous years in its history. On the other hand, the workers felt that it was the time to demand the increase of wages, for the bonus as well as dearness allowances to meet the rising cost of living (see table no. 7) and also they felt that it was the ideal time to encounter the Colonial Government along with the rest of India.

* The term 'Rowdy' was normally used for the agitating workers.
Table No. 7 shows prices of foodstuffs and other goods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Details of foodstuffs</th>
<th>Wt. or Qty</th>
<th>Price in Aug. 1939</th>
<th>Price in Jun. 1942</th>
<th>Enhancement in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6 measures</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Dhal</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5 measures</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18 measures</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Chillies</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12 measures</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Tamarind</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>1 maund</td>
<td>1/4 maund</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Condiments</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10 measures</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>per rupee</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4½ measures</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>measures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Coconut Oil</td>
<td>per vise</td>
<td>0 3 0</td>
<td>0 9 0</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>per vise</td>
<td>0 4 6</td>
<td>0 9 6</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs. A. P.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>per bottle</td>
<td>0 2 0</td>
<td>0 6 0</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Dhoti</td>
<td>4 cubits</td>
<td>0 8 0</td>
<td>1 4 0</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Matches</td>
<td>per box</td>
<td>0 0 3</td>
<td>0 0 6</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>for 10 lb</td>
<td>0 14 0</td>
<td>2 4 0</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Arecanut</td>
<td>per Maund</td>
<td>7 0 0</td>
<td>20 0 0</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Coconut</td>
<td>for one</td>
<td>0 0 6</td>
<td>0 1 6</td>
<td>200</td>
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Towards a Violent Course

On 26 August night the strikers attacked Sulur Aerodrome, set on fire to the thatched sheds, gutted twenty-two lorries which had recently arrived, set in flames 100 gallons of petrol and three of the lorry drivers who were sleeping in a shed were also burnt to death. The estimated damage was Rs. 1,00,000. Police investigation showed that people those who involved were from Kannampalayam and Irugur villages and mill-hands from Singanallur and its neighbourhood. Among the mill-hands, majority were from the Cambodia Mills. In retaliation, the police arrested the people who were involved in this incident. Moreover, the District Magistrate proposed a collective fine of Rs.1,00,000 upon the following classes of persons. (i) the registered land-holders of the two villages of Kannampalayam and Irugur at the rate of Rs. 5,000 from each village, (ii) since most of the workers were from Cambodia Mills, they had to pay Rs. 50,000 and (iii) the mill workers in the other 9 mills of Singanallur and its neighbourhood had to pay Rs. 40,000. In this case also the classes who were exempted from the train derailment case exempted from the collective fine. The total accused in this case was one hundred and

173. Ibid.
two. Among them two were given two years imprisonment, forty were given seven years imprisonment, four were given life imprisonment of twenty years and the remaining were released.174

Economic Demands of the Workers

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the mill hands were reeling under a high cost of living. In fact, on the eve of the war textile industry of India in general and Coimbatore in particular faced depression due to the large-scale import of cotton goods from Japan. This created a serious problem to the wage earning class. In order to reduce the burden of the mill-owners, they proposed to reduce the production by abolishing the night shift. On 15 July 1939, the Southern India Mill-Owners' Association decided to reduce their production of yarn by fifty per cent either by the abolition of the night shift or by the reduction of working hours. In pursuance of this decision fifteen mills notified their intention to abolish the night shift from 1 August 1939.175 So, the president of the Textile Workers' Union and the secretary of the Mill Workers' Union informed the mill managements that they did not believe in the depression and they would call a general strike in the event of the Mill-Owners' Association giving effect to their

174. Copy of the judgement of the Sulur Aerodrome case, 10 May 1943 (PS Collections).
175. Letter, LCM to Sec., Dev., GoM, 3 Aug. 1939, G.O. 2287 (Ms), Dev. (Confid1), 19 Sept. 1939.
resolution to abolish the night shift. However, the Labour Minister discussed with both the representatives of the Mill-Owners' Association and the Labour Unions on 28 and 29 July respectively. As a result, the representatives of the Mill-Owners' Association agreed to curtail one-third of the production and to postpone the closure of the night shift to 7 August 1939. 176

Criticising the proposal of the curtailment of production from 7 August, a meeting of about 10,000 workers of the various mills of Coimbatore was organized on 6 August evening under the auspices of the Mill Workers' Union and presided over by P. Jeevanandam. 177 He argued that the idea of trade depression advanced by the mill-owners for closing night shifts was an attempt to deprive the workers from the benefit of the increase in wages recommended by the Court of Enquiry. In the meeting, P. Ramamurthi, the secretary of the Provincial Trade Union Congress criticised the proposal of the curtailment of production and threatened that if the proposal was not removed, the workers would strike work. 178 Not yielding to the opposition of the workers, the reduction was effected from 7 August 1939 by reducing the working hours and the shift arrangements. However, they resumed the normal production from 3 September 1939. 179

176. Ibid.; The Hindu, 4 Aug. 1939.
178. The Hindu, 8 Aug. 1939.
179. Letter, SIMA to MILM, GoM, 7 Aug. 1939, G.O. 2287 (Ms), Dev. (Confidl), 19 Sept. 1939; G.O. 1483 (Ms), PW, 18 June 1941.
The Second World War brought out the continued rise in the cost of living of workers. Further, all the cotton Spinning and Weaving mills of Coimbatore which involved in the war effort were exempted from the provisions relating to hours of employment. As per the notification of the Government of India, the normal working hours per week was raised from 54 to 60 and for the extra six hours over fifty-four overtime was payable at the usual rate of one and a quarter time the ordinary rate.\(^{180}\) As a result, the workers had to undergo multiple shifts and longer hours work. But, the mill-owners refused to give rise in wages in order to meet the rising cost of living. So, as a first step, the workers of all the three mills in Tirupur struck work from 12 July 1941 by demanding a dearness allowance of 25\% of their wages.\(^{181}\) As the workers' processions were causing obstructions, orders were promulgated by prohibiting labour procession within the Municipal limits of Tirupur for one month. On the advice of the Labour Commissioner, Madras, the mills were reopened on 28 July with police protection. But a less than 5\% of the labourers resumed the work.\(^{182}\) However, on 21 August 1941 all the mills began to work at full strength.\(^{183}\)

\(^{180}\) Letter, Sec., GoI, to SIMA, 3 Dec. 1941, G.O. 1353 (Ms), PW, 15 May 1942.


\(^{182}\) Ibid.

\(^{183}\) Letters, DMC to Sec., PWLW, GoM, 21 Aug. 1941, G.O. 2109 (Ms), PW, 29 Aug. 1941.
The strike which started at Tirupur spread to other mills in other parts of Coimbatore district. On 5 July 1941, the Textile Workers' Union intimated the mill-owners of the intention of the mill workers of Coimbatore town and suburbs to launch a general strike if the mill-owners would not grant 30% dearness allowance by the end of July 1941. As a result of the discussions with the Labour Commissioner, Madras, the urban mill-owners of the Coimbatore district proposed to offer the following concessions to their workers:\(^{184}\) (i) a dearness allowance of 10% subject to a minimum of one rupee per month per worker for the full number of working days in a month with effect from 1 July 1941 and to continue so long as the need exists, (ii) prosperity bonus for the year 1941 only of a month's wages or 8 1/3% of the total wages drawn by a worker during the year and would be paid before the Deepavali day of 1941 to workers in service on that day and (iii) the recommendations of the Government in respect of the findings of the Court of Enquiry including the grant of 13 days casual and sick leave with pay effect from 1 July 1941. The Government of Madras published a Communique on 31 July 1941 by advising the mill workers to accept the offer 10% as dearness allowance with effect from 1 July 1941 and prosperity bonus for this year equivalent to a month's wages.\(^{185}\)

\(^{184}\) Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, GoM, 11 Sept. 1941, Letter, 2323 (Ms), PW, 24 Sept. 1941.

But, the workers wanted the dearness allowance of 10% to be granted with effect from 1 April 1941 which was not acceptable by the mill-owners.\(^{186}\) So, on the basis of the decision which was taken in the meeting at Singanallur on 4 August evening, the workers of a majority of the mills struck work on 5 August 1941.\(^{187}\) While the workers of the seven mills like Vasantha, Saroja, Janardhana, Kothari, Kasthuri, Murugan and Cambodia went on strike, six other mills like Kamala, Coimbatore Cotton, Rajalakshmi, Balasubramania, Sarada and Pankaja were on partial strike from the morning of 5 August.\(^{188}\) Since police guard watched at each mill, a large scale picketing was done in the villages to prevent the loyal workers to keep away from work.\(^{189}\) So, an additional reserve police was brought from Trichy District and the police patrolling was introduced in the workers' residential areas.\(^{190}\) Further, orders were promulgated by prohibiting the strikers from holding meetings, processions and causing obstruction to the loyal workers.\(^{191}\) However, the labourers

\(^{186}\) Letter, LCM to Sec., PWD, GoM., 11 Sept. 1941, Letter, 2323 (Ms), PW, 24 Sept. 1941.

\(^{187}\) Ibid.; The Hindu, 6 Aug. 1941.


\(^{190}\) Letter, DMC to Sec., PWL, 7 Aug. 1941, G.O. 2109 (Ms), PW, 29 Aug. 1941; Letter, DMC to Sec., Pub., GoM, 15 Aug. 1941, G.O. 2014 (Ms), Pub. (Gen), (Confid1), 16 Sept. 1941

\(^{191}\) Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, GoM, 11 Sept. 1941, Letter, 2323 (Ms), PW, 24 Sept. 1941.
Lotus and Vysia Mills struck work on 7 August and there was a partial strike in the Lakshmi Mills too. According to the Textile Workers' Union, by 10 August there was a complete strike in sixteen mills and partial strike in six or seven mills. On 18 August morning, the District Magistrate went round to some of the villages and as a result some of the labourers volunteered to attend the mills as they had been kept in the dark. The Labour Commissioner also endeavoured to bring about a settlement. The mill-owners, on the further intervention of the Labour Commissioner agreed to grant the quantum of compensation demanded by the workers. Accordingly, all the urban mill-owners agreed to give full effect to the recommendations of the Government in adoption of standard rates of wages except with regard to adult -doffying boys and they also sanctioned the dearness allowance of 121/2% and a prosperity bonus of the one month's wages. As a result, on 23 August the Union called off the strike.

It is interesting to note here that the Mill Workers' Union did not participate in the strike. During the strike, the Mill Workers' Union held meetings to condemn the strike and

192. Letter DMC to Sec., PWL, GoM, 7 Aug. 1941, G.O. 2109 (Ms), PWD, 29 Aug. 1941;
197. Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, GoM, 22 Nov. 1941, G.O. 1041 (Ms), PWD, 6 April 1942; Proceedings, TWU, 5 June 1942, G.O. 2742 (Ms), PW, 3 Aug. 1942.
to dissuade its members from participating in the strike which had been started at the instance of the Textile Workers' Union.\textsuperscript{199}

At the same time, the mill-owners of Udumalpet where there were three mills reluctant to give the enhanced wage which was recommended by the Government to the labourers. They argued that the workers who were working in the mills were untrained, recruited locally from the agriculturists. Because of their rough handling of the machines, the loss incurred by way of breakages and waste made them were too much and the same reflected upon the prosperity of the mills.\textsuperscript{200} Further, the Managing Agent of the Gnanambika Mills, one of the rural mills of Coimbatore also pleaded for a different standard of rates for the rural mills. So, the Labour Commissioner recommended a reduction of 10 to 15\% below the schedule fixed for Coimbatore for the three rural mills viz., Gnanambika, Kumaran and Palmalai Ranganthan and the three mills of Udumalpet.\textsuperscript{201} Replying to this, the Government of Madras said that the rate recommended for the district was very low and they were not prepared to recommend anything lower for the rural mills.\textsuperscript{202}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{199} Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, GoM, 11 Sept. 1941, Letter, 2323 (Ms), PW, 24 Sept. 1941.
\textsuperscript{200} Extract of the representation by R. Guruswami Naidu to the Governor of Madras (no date), G.O. 1041 (Ms), PW, 6 April 1942.
\textsuperscript{201} Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, 22 Nov. 1941, G.O. 1041 (Ms), PW, 6 April 1942.
\textsuperscript{202} Letter, PW, GoM to LCM, 26 Feb. 1942, G.O. 1041 (Ms), PW, 6 April 1942.
\end{flushleft}
Government notified that the question of proper wages for the doffing boys and waste pickers would be investigated by the Labour Commissioner and the Government would give a decision thereon. 203

Since the cost of living was increasing day by day due to the war, the Mill-Owners of Coimbatore raised the dearness allowance from $12\frac{1}{2}$ to 18 3/4% from 1 May 1942. Not satisfied with the existing amount and also due to the increase in the prices of foodstuffs, the Textile Workers' Union resolved to request the mill-owners to come to the rescue of the workers by granting six months' wages as bonus and 50% allowance with effect from 1 June 1942. 204

As a result, the Mill-Owners' Association resolved to increase the dearness allowance to 25% with effect from 1 June 1942. 205 However, the condition of the workers had been steadily deteriorating due to the steady increase of cost of living since January 1943. 206 Further the mill workers of Coimbatore were severely attacked by plague. As a result hundreds of workers died. 207 The panic stricken

205. Resolution, SIMA, 30 June 1942, G.O. 2742 (Ms), PW, 3 Aug. 1942; Report for the first half of July 1942, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1942.
206. Letter, General Secretary, MWU, to SIMA, 26 Sept. 1943, G.O. 140 (Ms), PW, 18 Jan. 1944.
207. Letter, LCM to Sec., PW, GoM, 7 Feb. 1944, G.O. 1179 (Ms), PW, 24 April ---
workers began to migrate. This led to large-scale absenteeism in the mills. To keep the workers in work the mill-owners raised the dearness allowance to 75%. But again the mill-owners faced scarcity of labour in the beginning of the year 1944 due to great demand of labourers to the military works. Several workers had to leave their permanent employment in the mill in order to work under military contracts who were offering higher wages. So to keep the labourers intact the Mill-Owners' Association proposed to increase the allowance of another 35% of the basic wages. In spite of that, the Textile Workers' Union demanded the grant of 3 months bonus, increase of basic pay, observance of Sundays as holidays, introduction of Provident Fund Scheme and better housing facilities. As a first step the Mill-Owners' Association decided to pay a bonus equivalent to 3 month's basic wages.

Labour during the Post World War

The condition of workers after the war was intolerable. The mill-owners were still maintaining the same basic wage which was prevailing on the eve of the Second World War.

208. Extract of the report for the second half of March 1944 by DMC, G.O. 64 (Ms), PW, 6 Jan. 1945.
209. Report for the second half of March 1944, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1944.
210. Report for the second half of July 1944, LCM to Adviser to the Governor of Madras, G.O. 64 (Ms), PW, 6 Jan. 1945.
211. Report for the second half of Sept. 1944, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1944.
In most of the cases, the mills which increased their working hours from 54 to 60 did not reduce it. Though the mill-owners were about to abolish the multiple shift system because of the recommendatin of the Court of Enquiry of 1938, the Second World War facilitated them to continue it with a view to increase its production. But, they were continuing the same system even after the war. Further, the work load assigned to workers during the war was continued even after the war. The scarcity of labour, the textile industry of Coimbatore faced during the war either due to plague or due to high demand of labour force for the military works was compensated by getting more work from the available workers by giving more and more dearnesss allowance. But after the war, the mill-owners run the mill with the existing labour force without changing their basic wages. So, in 1946, the workers everywhere in Coimbatore were demanding for increase of wages, definition of duties of each worker, reduction of work, increase of workers and fixation of the strength of workers for each kind of work.212

Further, after the Second World War, the communists were organizing the labourers in a united front against the Congress and it led to clashes among the labourers. The clashes culminated in the murder of a communist at Singanallur and a Congress worker at Tirupur.213 Hence,

213. Report for the first half of June 1946, GoM to GoI, FNR, 1946.
V.V. Giri, the Minister for Industries and Labour in the newly formed Congress Ministry of Madras visited Coimbatore on 6 and 7 June 1946 and advised the workers to maintain peace. In spite of that, as a protest against the recruitment of non-communist workers in the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills, the workers of the same mill struck work and the management declared a lock-out on 12 September 1946. However, the management reopened the mill on 1 November 1946 with police protection. Since, the management demanded undertaking from the labourers that they would work properly inside the mills, the communists continued the strike. On 11 November 1946, they organized a violent picketing by using stones and soda water bottles. The workers of the Kaleeswarar and Somasundaram Mills also joined in the picketing. So police did lathi-change to disperse the crowd.

Since it proved ineffective, they opened fire. As a result, seven people were killed, more than twenty injured and the District Magistrate passed curfew orders from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. in the industrial area around Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills for fifteen days from 11 November 1946. As a protest against the police firing, the workers of the

Dhanalakshmi and Asher Textiles struck work on 30 November 1946 and resumed work on 2 December 1946.216

In the meantime, the Government of Madras appointed a Court of Enquiry in July 1946, to examine the conditions of service of labour in the textile industry of this Province.217 The Court recommended for the substantial increase in the basic wages of the textile workers of Coimbatore which was in most of the cases over 80% of the existing wages. Though the Court recommended to increase the basic wages with retrospective effect from 1 October 1946, it satisfied with the bonus of 3 months basic wages. The recommendation was accepted by both the Government as well as Mill-Owners.218 But the Textile Workers' Union persisted in their original demand for the payment of six months wages as bonus and threatened that if they were not paid, the workers would go on strike from 13 January 1947.219 Since the Chief Minister of Madras discussed with the representatives of the workers, the strike had been postponed. But the negotiations failed. The Textile Workers' Union issued fresh notices to all mills by threatening a strike from 12 February 1947.220

On that basis, except Gnanambika, Dhanalakshmi and Asher Textiles, the workers of the all the mills of Coimbatore went on strike from 12 February 1947. However, the strike was called off on 21 February and all the mills in the district resumed work on 24 February 1947. As a result, the Mill-Owners' Association resolved on 16 March 1947 to recommend its member mills in the district to pay an additional bonus of 2 months basic wages earned for the year 1946 on or before 25 March 1947.

Thus, when we view the triangular relationship between the colonial State, mill-owners and the mill-hands, new vistas are opened to our understanding of the problem. A general picture of a strong class-conscious working class emerges from our study. The workers were mobilized at two levels. One, under the influence of the Nationalist ideology of the Congress and the other under the rising Communist ideology. The influence of these two forces and strands of ideology made the Coimbatore worker not only class-conscious but also politically active.