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V.V. GIRI NATIONAL LABOUR INSTITUTE

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Evolution of Trade Unions in India

Trade union movement, as we see it today, is the result of Industrial Revolution which took place in Great Britain between 1750 and 1850. The revolution brought about a drastic changes in the socio-economic sphere. The outstanding effect was the introduction of factory system of production. As a result, the scope of small scale and cottage industry system was reduced and the relationship of the workers with their employers became indirect and impersonal.

The development of trade unionism in India, was influenced by several factors. In other countries too, the rise of unionism and its gradual evolution has been the result of the collective operation of various factors to bring about the much needed improvement in the then prevalent socio-economic conditions in the industrial world. Efforts were also made through organised action to give expression to the needs, wishes, aspirations and expectations of the workers.

A number of large-scale industries started coming up from 1850 onwards, employing a large number of workers in factories without the requisite and congenial work environment. The conditions of workers prevailing at that time were characterised by: Abysmally low wages; Long Working Hours; No job security; Absence of Social Security; Engagement of women and children in large number in the factories; Indifferent, inhuman and insensitive authorities; Unsympathetic public; Vast illiteracy; Backwardness and Traditionalism etc.

Despite the appalling conditions prevailing in the industries during the early times, the working people were not the first to organise themselves owing mainly to the lack of awareness and the importance of being organised. Surprisingly, the employers were the first to organise themselves and to form a joint front to protect their interests. Workmen's Breach of Contract Act was passed in 1860 according to which workers could be prosecuted for leaving their jobs without the employer's consent by a summary trail.

The Early Efforts

Textile mills in Bombay started functioning from 1851 onwards and Jute mills in Calcutta from 1854. A network of factories started coming up-employing a large number of workers, including women and children.



The social workers, philanthropists and the religious leaders were first to take interest in organising these factory workers. They could be considered as the early worker educators whose efforts provided at least a platform for the workers to exchange their agonising experiences. As early as in 1855, Sorabjee Shahpurjee Bengali, a social reformer, led a movement in Bombay for legislative measures against the miserable plight and predicament of the workers in factories which was said to have formed the nucleus of the labour movement in India. But the progress was very slow.

In 1872, Shri C.P. Majumdar, a Brahmo Preacher from Calcutta, established eight night schools in Bombay. In 1878, the Brahmo Samaj established the 'Working Men's Mission' in Calcutta. It organised night classes to eradicate illiteracy from amongst the workers and to instil in them the habit of cleanliness and thrift. Almost the same time, Shri Sasipad Bannerjee, laid foundation of 'Bara Bazar Organisation' for the education and welfare of the workers in Jute Mills.

All these efforts to educate and to bring together the workers indirectly helped in inculcating the feeling and consciousness of 'collective action' and agitation, though in a rudimentary form. It is significant that some labour unrest manifested itself in one or the other form and even some workers' unions appeared on the scene. There is for instance a record of a strike at Nagpur Empress Mill in 1877, which is supposed to be the workers' first strike in India.

Emergence of a Leader

The pressure from the social reformers like Shri Sorabji Shahpurjee Bengali and an external pressure from the traders of Lancashire (a Textile Centre in England) compelled the Government to move and on the basis of the report of a Factories Commission, set up in 1879, the First Indian Factories Act was enacted in 1881. The Act proved to be inadequate and caused a great disappointment. The failure of the Act to regulate women labour and its inhuman and insufficient provisions for child labour, raised demand for its amendment and an atmosphere of agitation was created.

Narayan Meghaji Lokhandey emerged as the first labour leader in India. He was influenced by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule of Maharashtra and he took initiative in organising protests against the conditions prevailing in factories.



He had served in railways and the post office before taking up employment as a storekeeper in a textile mill and devoted his whole life to the cause of labour movement. In the meantime, the government appointed another factory commission in 1884. Lokhandey organised a conference of workers in Bombay and drew up a memorandum signed by 5300 workers which was presented to the factory commission. It contained the following demands:

- a. Complete day of rest after a week;
- b. Work should begin at 6.30 a.m. and end at sun-set;
- c. 1/2 hour rest at noon;
- d. Payment of wages not later than 15th day after the due date;
- e. Payment of wages for the period of employment injury

Formation of First Labour Organisation

Shri Lokhandey rendered valuable assistance to the commission. The commission also considered the workers memorandum and made certain recommendations but the government did not take any action. Lokhandey continued the agitation for the above demands. He organised a mass meeting of factory workers numbering about 10,000 on April 24, 1890. Two women workers also addressed the meeting and complained of being forced to work on Sundays. A memorandum demanding a weekly holiday was also drawn and sent to the Bombay Millowner's Association. The Association accepted the demand on June 10, 1890. Encouraged by this success Lokhandey formed an association of Bombay Mill Workers in the same year, i.e. 1890. It was called the Bombay Mill Hands Association, which is often referred to as the starting point of Indian Labour Movement.

It was first labour organisation in India. Lokhandey also started a journal called 'Dinbandhu'. Another paper named 'Indian Workers' was also published from Calcutta.

It is interesting to note that the Bombay Mill Hands Association had no funds, no rules and no constitution. Therefore, it could not be considered as a trade union in the real sense of the term, as we understand it today, yet this association was the first continuously working organisation for a group of workers in India and had been mainly responsible for the agitation which led to the amendment of the Factories Act.



Indian Factory Commission, 1890

While the recommendations of the Indian Factory Commission of 1884 - were still under consideration, several factors resulted in appointment of another Factory Commission in 1890. The members of the Commission (Sorabjee Shahpurjee Bengali was one of them) were assisted in their enquiry in each of the provinces by selected representatives of the mill hands of that province. Bombay Mill-hands Association, led by Lokhandey presented a petition reiterating the previous demands. This was followed by a bigger petition signed by about 17000 workers. Based on the recommendations of this Factory Commission, the Indian Factories Act of 1891 was passed. The important provisions of the Act were, the regulation of hours of work for women labour to 11 hours a day with rest interval for one and half hours and the raising of the minimum age of children to be engaged for work in factories to 9 hours.

Resort to Direct Action

The period before and after the above amendment witnessed a chain of strikes in all the major industries in the country. The Ahmedabad Weavers declared a strike in 1895. There were strikes in Jute Mills in Calcutta in 1896; In Bombay also mill workers struck work in 1897; The Madras Press workers went on strike in 1903; and so on. Many of these strikes succeeded in forcing the employers to concede to at least some of their demands. But there was no stable working force in industries. Industrial employment was not the exclusive source of income for most of the workers. There was also no legal or moral sanction for trade union activities. Hence the unions were neither continuous nor stable, rather they functioned like ad-hoc committees.

The labour movement had very slow pace during the decade following the enactment of Factories Act, 1891. The Bombay Mill Hands Association became also defunct after some time. The only notable organisation formed in 1897 for Railwaymen was the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma. The membership of the society was limited to Anglo-Indian and European employees of railways. The society was more of the nature of a friendly society or mutual benefit society than a trade union. With this, the first phase of labour movement came to an end. The main achievements were to get some legal regulations for women and children working in industries as well as initiation of collective consciousness among workers.



DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

By the turn of the century, the trade union movement was almost wedded with the national freedom movement in the country. With the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, new ideas and hopes enveloped the environment. During this new upsurge, the national leaders realised that for the achievement of freedom they would have to take along with them the workers in industries. Political leaders of that time knew that the organised workers would be an asset to the freedom movement. Labour movement on the other hand got a chain of the most dedicated and matured leadership which was a missing factor till then. Leaders like Lokmanya Tilak, Annie Beasant, Mahatma Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Rai nurtured the sappling in the initial stages so well that it blossomed to full maturity before long.

Subsequently, some more important trade unions were formed. The Printers union was established in Calcutta in 1905 and Bombay Postal Union in 1907. In 1910, a comparatively better organised union of Bombay factory workers was formed which was called Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha. This organisation made efforts to settle many disputes and also sent petition to the Government for regulating hours of work, for payment of compensation in case of accidents and for improving the living and working conditions of the workers. It also started a weekly labour journal namely 'Kamgar Samachar'. Also in 1910, another organisation with the name 'Social League' was formed. But these organisations though more functional as compared to the workers combination existing before 1890, did not last long and they could not also claim of having done any systematic or continuous work.

Awakening of New Consciousness

During this period, a new movement appeared in the national life of our country. The Swadeshi movement and the agitation against the partition of Bengal provided a favourable atmosphere for the growth of trade union movement. The six days' political strike by the workers of Bombay in 1908 against the judgement sentencing Lokmanya Tilak to six years imprisonment, was considered a landmark in our labour movement. A new consciousness started developing among the workers.



Third Factories Act, 1911

The commercial interests of the mill owners of Lancashire in England compelled them to espouse the cause of Indian Workers and they vigorously supported workers demand for reducing hours of work, which were increased owing to introduction of electricity in Bombay factories. As a result of constant efforts, the third Factories Act was passed in 1911, regulating working hours of adult males in textile factories to 12 hours a day. The working hours of children were also limited to six hours a day.

First World War

The out-break of the first world war in 1914 gave great impetus to industrialisation and the Indian Mill Owners lost no opportunity to take full advantage of the increased demand for Indian goods. The prices soared high and there was shortage of food and other consumer goods. The whole burden of economic crises fell upon the unprotected shoulders of the workers, and dissatisfaction and resentment developed in their ranks. A protest began to take shape and out of that protest, the trade union movement was born which was more stabilised and continuous. Further, there was mass awakening, especially among the industrial workers, due to some events connected with the world war. Many Indian soldiers who had been abroad and had seen the workers there leading comfortable life, brought back with them “the ideas of social equality, and aspiration for a better life. They were now having the first hand information of good labour conditions and were equipped with knowledge of industrial relations which made them capable to lead the movement in their home-land. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which held out hopes of emancipation for all oppressed people, also had an impact on our trade union movement.

Resort to Direct Action Again

The result was that the strike wave which began in 1918 swept the country in 1919 and 1920 with overwhelming intensity. The textile workers of Ahmedabad waged a prolonged strike in 1918 demanding 50% raise in wages. During the winter of 1919-20 about 1.5 lakh of textile workers of Bombay struck Work demanding among other things, reduction in working hours and protection from victimisation at the hands of the jobbers. During 1921 alone there were 396 strikes involving 6 lakh workers. Many of these strikes were successful to the extent that the employers were forced to make some concessions.



Epoch-Making Period

The period of 1918-21 was an epoch-making period in the history of the Indian Labour Movement. The non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi launched in 1919-21 and his teaching of identification of the leadership with the masses, provided willing leadership to labour movement. Thus, the working class who could not become vocal for want of good leadership got the right type of men to guide them. Also it was during this period that the industrial workers learnt to wage mass struggle over a large area and the general awakening among workers led to the formation of a number of good unions. The under mentioned two were the most important unions, formed during the period.

Textile Labour Association

The struggle of Textile Workers of Ahmedabad to secure an increase in wages, was conducted under the leadership of Ansuyaben in 1917. The famous strike of these workers led also by Mahatma Gandhi and the formation of the textile labour association of Ahmedabad in 1918, were significant events. This Association, also called Mazdoor Mahajan nurtured and nourished by Gandhiji, Ansuyaben and Banker has, ever since its inception, been a model of sound and devoted trade unionism.

Madras Labour Union

During 1918 the Madras Labour Union, the first union in India to be formed on modern lines, was established under the leadership of B.P. Wadia, with the objective of ventilating the grievances of workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic mills. He was an ardent supporter of the Home Rule Movement but was initially attracted to trade union work out of sympathy for the Indian Workers receiving mal-treatment at the hands of the European Officers in the Mills. Madras Labour Union was the first systematic trade union with regular membership and a relief fund. Shri Wadia also organised the textile workers at Choolai, in Madras in 1918 and within a year the number of unions rose to four with 20,000 members. However, because of a judgement of Madras High Court, considering a trade union as an illegal conspiracy, Shri B.D. Wadia and other leaders agreed to sever their connections with the unions and the movement received a set-back.



Formation of ILO

In 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) came into existence, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, based on the belief that universal and lasting peace can be ensured only if it is based on social justice. The areas of improvement listed in the Preamble of Constitution of ILO such as, the regulation of working time and labour supply, the prevention of unemployment and the provision of an adequate living wage, social protection of workers, children, young persons and women remain relevant even at present. The Preamble also recognizes a number of key principles, for example equal remuneration for work of equal value and freedom of association and highlights, among others, the importance of vocational and technical education. N.M. Joshi, a veteran social activist of that time, was sent as representative of labourers by Indian Government in the Washington Summit of I.L.O. in the year 1919. Subsequently, in the International Labour Conference held in 1927, Shri V.V. Giri also represented the Indian working class.

Since its inception, the ILO has framed a number of conventions and recommendations concerning various aspects of working conditions, employer-employee relations, labour welfare and social security etc. One of the earlier and most important conventions of the ILO is the '*Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No.98), 1949*'. This convention sets out rules for the freedom of unionisation and collective bargaining, principles that belong to the core values of the ILO. The Convention ensures workers protection from discrimination for their membership or engagement in union activities.

AITUC: The First Central Trade Union Organisation

The year 1920 was of crucial importance in the history of Indian trade union movement. By this time efforts to organise trade unions all over India bore fruit and a large number of unions were started. The same year the first Central Trade Union was organised. The past experience as well as the disorderly conditions in the movement convinced the leaders that an All India Organisation was an essential need of the time.

Some external factors also hastened the process. The Government of India Act 1914 provided for representation by nomination in the Central Legislature for industrial labour. It was understood that the Government



would consult the leaders of the organised labour movement before making the nomination. Secondly, the establishment of International Labour Organisation in the same year i.e. in 1919, produced a very similar situation because a representative of the Indian working people was to be nominated in the delegation to the International Body. Initiative was taken by the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was constituted in a conference of trade union representatives in Bombay in October, 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai, a veteran congress leader from Punjab, was the President of the first session. Also associated were leaders like, Dewan Chaman Lal, N.M. Joshi, Motilal Nehru and Annie Beasant. 64 unions with a total membership of 1,40,854 were affiliated to it. All India Railwaymen's Federation was also formed in 1922 and practically all the Unions in the Railway's were affiliated to it. Other organisations like the Bengal Trade Unionist Federation and the Central Labour Board, Bombay were also formed almost the same time.

Law of Trade Unions

The right to form trade unions was afforded by law to Indian workers comparatively very late. Rather, the trade union movement was severally handicapped by adverse statutes. The labour organisations were subject to common law of the land, and there was no particular law regulating their operation and protecting them from legal disabilities. The court order in 1921 against B.P. Wadia, leader of Madras Labour Union, directing him to pay Rs. 75,000/- as damages to the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills for his role in a strike was an eye opener to the trade union leaders. The management agreed not to insist on payment of damages subject to the condition that Wadia should sever his connections with the union which he did, having no other alternative. As a reaction a demand was made in the Central Legislature asking the Government to bring forward an appropriate legislation on the subject.

That the union leaders were liable for such penalty for Association for *bonafide* trade union activities was a severe blow to the idea of freedom of association which was strongly endorsed by International Labour Organisation. The pressure thus exerted resulted first in the repeal of Breach of Contract Act in 1924 and enactment of Trade Unions Act, in 1926. This Act is considered a landmark in the history of trade union movement in India. For the first time, the Act provided for the registration of trade



unions and to define law relating to the registered trade unions. Much later, the Constitution of India also conferred on all citizens a fundamental right to form associations or unions. The right to form trade union thus assumed importance in India as it is expressly recognised by both the Constitution and an Act of the legislature. Another important legislation of this period was the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923.

The Struggle for Supremacy

The period after 1926, is the story of struggle for supremacy in the trade union movement by various interest groups, supporting and conflicting ideologies. The leftists, steadily started gaining hold on the movement. In 1927, they also formed a Mazdoor and Kisan Party with the objective of bringing within its fold the workers organisations. A period of industrial conflict followed. After a prolonged strike in the textile industry in Bombay, the 'Girni Kamgar Union' was formed in 1928. Its membership rose to 70,000 by the end of the year and also it, collected substantial sum for its activities. The movement saw a period of disorder and strikes. To quote a few there was Bombay Cotton Textile strike for about six months, the Oil workers' strike and the strike of G.I.P. Railway workers. In 1928 alone there were 203 strikes involving more than 5 lakhs workers.

Royal Commission on Labour, 1929

The Government pursued a policy of reform and repression. In 1929, the Royal Commission on Labour was appointed with J.H. Whitley as the Chairman and N.M. Joshi and Dewan Chaman Lal as members. The terms of reference to the Commission were: To enquire into and report on the existence of labour in industrial undertakings and plantations in British India, on the health, efficiency and the standard of living of the workers, and on the relations between employers and to make recommendations.

The report of the Royal Commission was considered a monumental work. It was published in 1931. Although the recommendations of the Royal Commission were generally progressive, nothing immediate could be done to give effect to them in view of the prevailing circumstances at that time.

The Trade Dispute Act, 1929

Another measure taken by the government was to put an important legislation on the statute book i.e. the Trade Dispute Act of 1929. The Act



provided a machinery for investigation and settlement of Industrial disputes for the first time. So far government was treating industrial disputes mostly as a law and order problem. It, however, did not intervene to solve the disputes itself with the result that labour had to suffer all the time.

Meerut Trial

On the other hand, in the meantime the Government initiated criminal prosecution cases against the radicals, which came to be known as Meerut Conspiracy Case, the four years long proceedings were popularly known as 'Meerut Trial'. Many leaders were sentenced to long term imprisonment.

First Major Rift

The first major rift in AITUC came to the forefront in its tenth annual session held at Nagpur in 1929, under the president ship of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. There were two controversial issues: a) Affiliation of AITUC to the 3rd International, dominated by socialist ideology and its relation to ILO and ii) Boycott of Royal Commission on Labour. The leftists, having enjoyed a narrow majority in the conference, were successful in getting the above resolutions passed. As a result, the moderates led by N.M. Joshi walked out and formed another Central Organisation called All India Trade Union Federation.

Further Split

The effects of the worldwide economic crisis were felt in India as well during 1929-33. The period was not favourable to the growth of trade unions. The employers tried to pass on the burden of the crisis to workers by resorting to retrenchments and wage cuts. Another adverse factor was that the prominent leftists who were active in the trade union field were rendered inactive mainly as a consequence of the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The moderates following Gandhi ji also disappeared from the field due to the civil disobedience movement. Many political leaders were arrested. The result was that in 1931 at its annual session in Calcutta, the AITUC faced a further split and a section led by S. V. Deshpande and B. T. Randive formed the All India Red Trade Union Congress.

Efforts for Unity

Thus, at the critical time of the great economic depression of the thirties when the industrial workers faced great hardships owing to rationalisation



and wage-cuts, the division in the Indian Labour Movement was proving very detrimental for the working people. Under the circumstances unity in the labour movement was very essential. J.N. Mitra, the President of twelfth session of AITUC, made a fervent appeal for the trade union unity. In 1939, a session of AITUC was conducted under the president ship of Pandit Hari Har Nath Shastri and it was decided to merge the All India Red Trade Union Congress with AITUC.

National Trade Union Federation

The All India Railwaymen's Federation was also eager to take positive steps to restore unity in the Labour Movement as a whole. It had the confidence of both the AITUC and the AITUF because it had maintained strict neutrality in dealing with them. With this background, the AIRF convened a conference during 1931-32 to discuss and formulate proposals for bringing the different factions together. The conference envisaged the creation of a new body into which the two existing Central Organisations were proposed to merge. Thus, while the AITUC and AITUF were deliberating over the merger issue, a new all India body called the National Trade Union Federation came into existence. The NTUF was strengthened by the merger into it of AITUF and the railway unions affiliated to AIRF. The AITUC decided to remain where it was. So by 1935, there were again two central organisations viz., the AITUC and NTUF. In the same year, a ginger group within the congress party called the Congress Socialist Party also joined AITUC.

Achievement of Unity

In the session of the AITUC held in Bombay in 1936, the climate was generally in favour of unity in the ranks of labour with a view to strengthen the working force. Efforts were therefore set a foot to unity of the trade union movement in the country by bringing back NTUF. It was in 1938, through the efforts of Shri V. V. Giri, that path of unity between the AITUC and NTUF was laid down when the AITUC finally decided to accept the conditions for merger as laid down by the NTUF. One of the main conditions related to the decision of political questions by two-third majority. Thus, the unity was finally achieved in 1940 at the annual session of AITUC at Nagpur. N.M. Joshi was elected the General Secretary.

By 1934, the economic depression was practically over and the trade unions started gaining strength both in terms of structure and functions.



During the three years of 1937, 1938 and 1939, a number of strikes were organised, these strikes, however, in a sense were only a reflection of the greater strength acquired by the trade unions. At the same time, the strikes themselves attracted the workers to join the unions in large numbers.

Factors for Growth of Workers' Organisations

Some of the additional factors that contributed to the tremendous growth of workers' organisations during this period were:

- 1) The introduction of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935 and the assumption of power by the popular ministries. Many of the new ministers were trade unionists themselves or were closely associated with workers' movement. They were of some help to the movement.
- 2) Labour constituencies were provided for by the Government of India Act, 1935. Trade Union could contest seats for the provincial legislatures from such constituencies if they had been really handling trade union functions for a continuous period of two years. This immensely raised the prestige of the unions.
- 3) The changed attitude of the employers also helped the growth of trade unions. Employers had realised the inevitability of the trade unions.
- 4) The Royal Commission on Labour in India also called attention of the employers towards improvement in human relationship in large scale industries. The ILO in their report stressed the necessity of a strong trade union movement in India.

One of the important legislative measures adopted during this period was: the Payment of Wages Act, 1936. In addition, in Bombay Presidency, an act called the Bombay Conciliation Act, 1934 was enacted which was subsequently replaced by the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act of 1938.

During the period, the other important events were the formation of the Bengal Labour Association in Calcutta, the birth of the Socialist Party at Patna led by Shri Jai Prakash Narayan in 1934 and the foundation of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh as a labour advisory body associated with the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association in the same year.

Impact of War

The Second World War brought in its wake, several problems. During the war years there was a big increase in industrial production. When the



demands of war increased and it became progressively more difficult to rely on imports, the government had no other alternative but to encourage the growth of various type of industries. Emergency was declared throughout the country. The activities of trade unions were greatly affected by the emergency regulations on the plea that the war efforts should not be jeopardised. There was a large increase in the number of employed workers.

The number grew from 17,51,137 in 1939 to 26,42,977 in 1945 while the individual trade unions were growing in numbers to put forward demands of their members, the trade union movement as a whole was not developing and growing stronger in the same proportion. This was mainly due to the inability of the movement to develop as an independent force and its limping behind the national movement. That's why it failed to take a firm and clear stand on the momentous issue of the period. Another important reason was the split which took place as a result of uncertainty and indecision.

Attitude towards War

The AITUC, which was at the time of the beginning of the war the only united Central Organisation of the movement, could not adopt a clear and firm stand on its attitude towards war and war efforts. Moreover, it was bound by the commitment that political resolutions would not be passed except by two-third majority. One group represented by Royists regarded the War as anti-Fascist while on the other extreme were the committed leaders who viewed it as an imperialist war. In between two were leaders like N. M. Joshi who adopted a neutral stand.

M. N. Roy formed the Indian Federation of Labour through which he extended vigorous support to the War. The Government in turn, was alleged to have assisted the IFL financially and otherwise for the purpose of carrying on propaganda among the workers in favour of War. The Government ceased to recognise the representative character of AITUC and instead that status was now accorded to IFL. Both these organisations were sent to International Labour Organisation on alternative year to represent the Indian Workers.

Quit India Movement

The India National Congress decided to launch a decisive movement known as 'Quit India Movement' in August 1942, under the leadership of



Mahatma Gandhi. The Quit India Movement was an open though non-violent rebellion against the government. Gandhiji wanted everyone to join this final struggle. The leadership of AITUC also joined the struggle. However, after the entry of Soviet Union in the War, the Communists generally took an attitude of supporting war efforts of the Government and they disassociated themselves from the 'Quit India Movement'.

Government Action to Check Unrest

Another impact of the Second World War on workers and trade unions was the rise in prices and the scarcity of essential commodities. The prices of food grains and other essential goods registered steep rise and many commodities became scarce in the market. Consequently signs of labour unrest were visible everywhere and there were scattered strikes at some places.

The Government acted swiftly in order to avert stoppage of production. The first step was taken by the Government of Bombay which appointed a Conciliation Board in 1940 to go into the demand for dearness allowance raised by the textile workers. The railway workers also demanded dearness allowance and the Committee was constituted to deal with this demand.

Essential Service (Maintenance) Ordinance, promulgated in 1941, prohibited dismissal of workers in certain notified industries. This gave the unions an opportunity to carry on trade union activities without being afraid of victimisation. The Government started the practice of compulsorily referring disputes to Conciliation Boards or to Arbitration Courts. The power of referring disputes to conciliation or arbitration was to be exercised at the discretion of the Government. The Government was empowered to intervene in industrial disputes under the provisions of rule 81 (A) of the Defence of India Rules which also gave powers to the Government to pass orders prohibiting strikes and lockouts or referring disputes for compulsory Conciliation or Adjudication. The Government was also empowered to enforce the decision of the adjudicator.

Tripartite Consultations

In the year 1942, the Government decided to set up a tripartite machinery as a national counterpart of the International Labour Organisation for discussion on labour matters. In the beginning separate conferences were held with representatives of organisations of employers and employees.



Later, it was decided to have a Joint Conference of the representatives of the Government, employees and employers. The first Indian Labour Conference was held in New Delhi in August 1942. It consisted of 22 representatives of Central and Provincial Governments and 11 representatives each of Employers and Workers Organisations. It was decided that the Conference should meet once every year and a Standing Labour Committee was also set up consisting of 10 representatives of Government and 5 representatives each of workers and employers.

Post-War Developments

In the period that followed the termination of the war, the country as a whole was in an unsettled condition and there was uncertainty in all aspects of life. The years of War were years of high prices and acute scarcities. But, the years that followed were far more difficult especially for the workers, as the prices rose higher and food-grains and other essential commodities became scarcer. The decline in real wages that took place would be better understood if it could be remembered that the index of real earnings fell to 73.2 in 1946 and 78.4 in 1947 from 100 in 1939.

In these circumstances, it was but natural that there was intense discontent amongst workers and that it had manifested itself in strikes. While in 1944, the number of disputes was 658, number of workers involved 5,50,015 and number of man days lost 34,47,306. The number of stoppages in 1946 and 1947 rose to 1629 and 1811 respectively. The number of workers involved rose to 19,61,948 and 18,40,784 and of man-days lost to 1,27,17,762 to 1,65,62,666. However, the number of registered unions also rose during the period. In 1946-47, the number of unions rose to 1225 and of their members, that is of those which submitted returns, to 13,31,962. In the next year, the figures rose to 2766 and 16,62,929 respectively. In 1945-46 the number of unions was only 1007 and of their members 8,64,031. That means that in 1946-47 there was over 50 per cent rise in membership, while in 1947-48 the rise was a little less than 100 percent. Another notable feature of this period was the manifestation of unrest by the non-industrial workers and middle class employees of the Railways, Post and Telegraph Department, Government Departments, Banks and Commercial Establishments. Unionism grew in all these organisations.

In 1946, the Government conducted verification of the membership of the two Central Organisations in AITUC and IFL and it was found that AITUC



was the most representative Central Organisation thus AITUC regained its lost grounds.

In the field of Labour Legislation, Indian Trade Union (Amendment) Act, 1947, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946, and Industrial Disputes Bill, were the most important measures from the trade union point of view.

The trade unions by the end of War had no doubt became comparatively stronger, stable and more conscious of their rights and privileges. When compelled by circumstances they organised Workers' Struggle more resolutely.

EVE OF INDEPENDENCE AND MAJOR CHALLENGES BEFORE TRADE UNIONS

On the eve of independence, the most difficult problem that workers had to face was the problem of unemployment. A large number of Soldiers, Sailors and Civilian employees of the Defence Department were demobilized and they swelled the ranks of the unemployed. Besides, a number of establishments that had developed during War years closed down as Government Orders for goods stopped. Also the War had prevented the normal replacement of worn-out machineries in the manufacturing industries as well as in the railways. All in all, there was a significant fall in the number of jobs that had its effect on the workers' struggle.

Political and economic conditions in the country were disturbed, there was only one thing for the labour to do and that was to build a powerful trade union movement to raise wages and to secure other benefits. The intense trade union activity led by nationalist leaders as a part of renewed political agitation on the eve of independence helped serve this objective.

By this time, trade union movement had already two Central Organisations, the IFL and the AITUC. A rivalry developed between the two. On the demand of AITUC, the Government decided to hold an enquiry into the membership of the two organisations. The enquiry revealed that AITUC had a membership of 6,96,555 while IFL had a membership of 3,13,807 and the Government accepted the verdict and granted the right of naming the members of delegation to International Bodies to AITUC.



Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh

In August 1946, the Working Committee of Indian National Congress adopted a resolution advising Congressmen engaged in Labour Work to follow the lead that may be given from time to time by the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh. The Mazdoor Sevak Sangh tried for some time to persuade the AITUC to accept its principles and act accordingly. By a resolution adopted on 17th November, 1946 it directed all unions with which it was connected to affiliate themselves with AITUC. The association, however, lasted for only six months. The Sangh felt that it was not possible to persuade the AITUC to change its policies. The parting of ways then became inevitable.

Birth of INTUC

On April 18, 1947 the Secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh wrote to all the trade unions and among other things proposed to hold a meeting on May 3-4, 1947 at New Delhi for an appraisal of the existing situation and for taking the necessary steps to protect and promote the interest of both the workers and the country.

The Conference had a two day session presided over by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, President of the Central Board of HMSS. The Conference was attended by representatives of over 200 unions of many trades, occupations and services. The membership that they represented was about 6 lakh. On 3rd May, 1947, a new Central Organisation, the Indian National Trade Union Congress was born. The INTUC was soon recognised by the Government as the most representative organisation of workers and since 1948 it represented the workers in ILO excepting few years.

As a result of the general ferment in the country, more and more trade unions were established and a large number of trade union, struggles were also developed. The struggle was a natural reaction to the rising prices and to the general worsening conditions of life. There was an attempt to hold the ground, to resist the downward pull. To push ahead, to work for positive improvement, workers, however, had to wait a while until a new period opened after the attainment of National Independence.

The important legislation of the period was the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.



After Independence

All sections of the people welcomed the advent of independence on 15th August, 1947. Workers and their trade unions enthusiastically participated to celebrate this great event. However, the post partition communal riots and the large-scale movement of refugees, paralysed the normal life in many parts of India for quite some time.

Among the three Central Trade Union organisations of the time, AITUC, IFL and INTUC, the IFL was worst affected by the partition as it had a significant following in Punjab, Sind and East Bengal. The IFL also lost one of its big constituent union in Calcutta, the Bengal Chamber of Labour with membership of over one lakh, as most of the active workers were Muslims and they migrated to Pakistan. The Nation soon settled down for its reconstruction and development.

Industrial Truce Resolution

Immediately after Independence, the Industrial Truce Resolution (1947) was adopted with a view to enlist the co-operation of employers and trade unions to maintain industrial peace so as not to disrupt production. It also recognised the role of labour in Industry. The resolution reads: *the employers must recognise the proper role of labour in Industry and the need to secure for labour fair wages and working conditions; labour for its part must give equal recognition to its duty in contributing to the increase of the national income - Mutual discussion of all problems common to both and the determination to settle all disputes without recourse to interruption in or slowing down of production should be the common aim of employers and labour. It required management and labour to agree to maintain industrial peace and prevent any work stoppages during the next 3 years to promote industrial growth.*

Constitution of India

The People of India were now free to choose a political, social and economic set up for the country. They gave themselves the Constitution, the Preamble of which enumerated the basic national objectives and goals. The main objective of the Constitution is to secure to all citizens of India:



JUSTICE: Social, Economic and Political

LIBERTY: of Thought, Expression, belief, faith and worship.

EQUALITY: of Status and opportunity.

With the adoption of the Constitution on 26th January, 1950: India became a free democratic country. The Constitution recognised the dignity of individual and freedom of association, one of the most valued human rights in every democracy. This includes: the right of workers to organise for collective bargaining for realising the trade union objectives. *The Constitution also provides the specific right to form associations or unions(Article 19(1)(c)).* However, the Constitution does not confer an unrestricted freedom of association. Article 19(4) gives right to the State, to put reasonable restrictions on the exercise of this right in the interest of public order or morality.

This power to restrict the rights was exercised by the Government during Emergency in 1975-76. Restrictions were put on the unions and strikes were banned. Many trade union activists were arrested under MISA and put behind bars. In the year 1979, the then Janata Party Government took away the authority of the State to suspend the rights by 44th Constitutional Amendment. However, the 59th Amendment, 1988 now enables the President to suspend the enforcement of the right relating to life and personal liberty conferred by Article 21 of the Constitution during emergency. This was done in context of the then prevailing situation in Punjab and some other places.

Economic Development

The Government introduced Economic Planning for economic development and the First Five Year Plan commenced in the year 1951. The Second Five Year Plan gave emphasis on rapid industrialisation. The industrialisation was envisaged in both private and public sector. The Government thus adopted the mixed-economy pattern with the ultimate objective of ushering in a socialistic pattern' of society. The Public Sector was expected to assume commanding heights.

With impetus to industrialisation, a number of new units emerged in different industries like engineering, chemical, pharmaceuticals, oil and natural gas, fertilizers etc. The Port and Docks were expanding. Transport



industry, road, rail and air saw phenomenal growth during this period. The communication industry and the service industries started developing. The labour force in such organised industries was increasing rapidly. This opened up great possibilities of organising workers and a number of trade unions were formed. The expectations of workers for better life were rising. The new units had generally a greater capacity to pay. Trade unions could negotiate and extract better wages and facilities through collective bargaining. As a result, a number of strong trade unions emerged in different industries. A continuous increasing trend was observed in registered trade unions. The increase being 625 percent between 1951 and 1979.

Industrial unrest was intense in 1950s, which could be related to rationalisation, retrenchment, lay-offs etc. There was large scale rationalisation in cotton textile industry which caused mass unemployment of workers. The Government amended Industrial Disputes Act to include lay-off and retrenchment compensation. State intervention became a feature of industrial policy after independence. This policy helped in promoting the trade union movement to certain extent.

Pandit Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India while making speech in Lok Sabha, 1963 expressed that one thing that distressed him very greatly was that although he was convinced that the great majority of our population had bettered their economic condition a little, with more calories and more clothes, yet there was a good number of people, in India who had not profited by planning, and whose poverty was abysmal and most painful. He further expressed that there was a need that some method should be found to remedy the situation. (Labour Law in India- Volume I, Butterworths, GB Pai, 2001)

Public Sector

The public sector was expanding rapidly and it was expected that public sector managements would act as model employers and workers would feel more secure to make demands and would have to struggle less to achieve them. However, the workers in the public sector had also to struggle hard to improve their working and Living conditions. Their struggles gave a boost to the trade union movement. The practice of collective bargaining got strengthened.



White Collar Workers

The period of Second World War followed by independence saw the rise and expansion of trade union activities in industries like banking, insurance etc., whose employees come under the category of white collar workers. After independence, the government employees also started organising into associations as they were banned from forming trade unions. They also started utilising trade union methods like strikes. The major Central Government employees strike took place in the year 1960. Government employees of some of the states also resorted to strike as a method to achieve their demands. The State government employees all over the country organised a strike on 5th Jan 1967. The teachers in schools, colleges and nurses in hospitals formed their own unions. Later on technicians, engineers, research workers and other employees of such categories also joined trade unions. Comparatively well-paid employees like air pilots also formed trade unions. White collar workers built many strong unions in different industries. With changing technology the nature of work also changed and the distinction between blue collar workers and white collar workers slowly narrowed down.

Women Workers

Women coming under the category of blue collar workers had played a significant part in the early trade union movement. However, there was gradual decline in the number of women in these industries. After independence the number of white collar women workers increased and they joined the trade union movement in large numbers. They actively participated in trade union struggles. However, women workers have additional responsibilities of work at home and they find it difficult to spare time for other activities. Very few women assumed positions in unions. However, in professions like nursing where they are in majority, women lead the organisations.

In this context, it is pertinent to make a mention of the role of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which was founded in 1972 by Gandhian and civil rights leader Ela Bhatt as a branch of Textile Labour Association (TLA), a labour union founded by Gandhi ji in 1918. SEWA is a trade union based in Ahmedabad, engaged in promoting the rights of low-income, and independently employed female workers. Over the years, the organization has grown at a fast pace, with around 30,000 members in 1996, to 318,527



in 2000, to 1,919,676 in 2013. Currently, around 1.8 million participating women, SEWA is the largest organization of informal workers in the world (Annual Report, Self-Employed Women's Association, 2013).

Workers in the Unorganised and Small Scale Sector

After independence, the trade union activities of workers in the unorganised and small-scale sector gathered momentum. Trade unions of workers in shops and establishments were formed. Workers, in unorganised sector like, Bidi making organised at different centres. The construction workers formed their unions. Notable among workers in the unorganised sector were the mathadi workers in Bombay and other places. Even though the movement has reached workers in the unorganised and small scale sector, many of the workers are either not properly organised or are still outside the movement. Efforts made in organising workers in power loom industry at different centres in Maharashtra have not succeeded in building strong unions of these workers.

Trade unions and politics

India became a democratic country after independence. People were given the right to elect their representatives to form government at the central and provincial levels. Periodical elections are held. This situation gave rise to the formation of different political parties, each following a particular ideology of its own. The objective of each political party is to win elections and come to power. Each political party was naturally interested in securing the support of organised working class. The parties, therefore, made efforts to have a foot hold in the trade union movement. Many active workers of the parties took initiative in forming trade unions. Political activists owing allegiance to a particular party found it convenient to work together. This gave an impetus to the formation of new central trade union organisations. They received support of their respective political parties. INTUC was already formed with the backing of the National Congress. Others followed suit and a number of central organisations or federations were formed. Most splits at the national level have been politically inspired. Even regional parties like the Shiv Sena backed the formation of trade unions which were not affiliated to any central organisation.

In a democracy, trade unions have to be concerned with economic and social policies. They cannot be non-political. The question is whether the



unions are in a position to influence the policies of a political party or it is the party which influences union policies. It is observed that many times unions had to shape their policies to suit the, convenience of the party. On many occasions it was seen that the stand which a union took on major issues depended on whether the party was in power or in opposition. There have been some exceptions. Trade unions would even support a strike if it would help the party politically. This was using trade unions for political purposes and allowing political considerations to dominate trade unionism.

The central organisations have now started recognising the need of distancing from political parties. Workers also do not want political rivalries to weaken their unions. Many unions have succeeded in keeping out political considerations while deciding their policies. Activists with conflicting political loyalties are working in the same union. There are situations where the majority members support one party but the leader is from quite another. Rival unions at unit level are coming together to launch a struggle or sign a settlement. The need for a free and independent trade union movement is gathering support and momentum.

Split in the movement

There had been splits in the movement in the colonial era. However, at that time there was always an inclination to come together. This was because all agreed with the main objective of attaining freedom. The situation changed immediately before and after independence.

The INTUC was formed in 1947. In December 1948, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha was formed by the Congress Socialists who after their break with the National Congress came to be known as socialists. The socialists after leaving the AITUC had formed Hind Mazdoor Panchayat. Later there was a merger of the Panchayat and the IFL and the new organisation, HMS was born.

The Sabha kept the objective of distancing from political parties. However, this organisation also witnessed a split when the Sanyukta Socialist Party activists formed Hind Mazdoor Panchayat (HMP) in 1965.

In the year 1949, some splinter groups from AITUC and HMS organised an all India conference at Calcutta and decided to form a separate organisation known as United Trade Union Congress (UTUC).



For about three decades, the four central trade union organisations namely AITUC, INTUC, HMS and UTUC were recognised by the Government for the purpose of representation at National and International Conferences & for periodical consultations. With the emergence of Jan sangh, the Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) was formed in the year 1955, by Shri Dattopant Thengadi, a veteran social activist and trade union leader, as its founder President. The BMS is at present, is one of the largest trade union federations having its presence in almost each every nook and corner of the country.

Based on the ideology of Labourism, Democratic, Socialism, Dravidian Politics, Social Justice, Secularism and Social Democracy, the Labour Progressive Federation (LPF), was formed as a trade union federation in Tamil Nadu in 1969 by Late Shri M. Karunanidhi. As per the provisional statistics from the Ministry of Labour, LPF had a membership of 611,506 in 2002.

The National Federation of Indian Trade Union (NFITU) was also formed in 1969. After the split in the Communist party, some of the marxists differed from the dominant communists (CPI) group in AITUC and formed another organisation called the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) in 1970. The Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad and some other trade unions in Gujarat came together to form the National Labour Organisation (NLO) in November 1971. A split in the UTUC led to the formation of United Trade Union Congress (Lenin Sarani) in 1972.

Other Organisations/ Federations

There are many industry-wise federations. The public sector undertakings like the Railways, Post and Telegraph, Defence Establishments have strong federations. The Port and Dock workers have their federations. There are federations of unions in Banking, Insurance industries. The Central government and State government employees have federations. The textile, engineering and metal and other industries have federations of trade unions. In most of the industries there are more than one federation because of the split in the movement. In many industries collective bargaining takes place at federation levels.

Efforts for unity

The Central Trade Union Organisations are alive to the need for a common approach on issues affecting labour. They have on different occasions come



together and put up a united stand. Co-ordination committees or Action committees have been formed. Like minded organisations have made efforts to come together and find out modalities for working together or merging together. There were talks going on between HMS and AITUC as well as between CITU and AITUC.

Multiplicity of unions

More than one trade union in an industry or a unit is a rule rather than exception in the trade union movement of our country. This is a post-independence development. It is a curse to the trade union movement. This not only affects the bargaining capacity of trade unions but also creates industrial problems. Many a violent incidents occur because of rivalry amongst trade unions. The absence of one strong central trade union centre has contributed to multiplicity. Multiplicity is also found because of groupings in workers, one group goes to one leader while the other group invites another.

Leadership in the movement

Outside leadership in the trade Unions has a historical background. Illiteracy, backwardness and fatalism in Indian workers contributed to their dependence on outside leadership. It can even be said that but for the outside leadership, workers would have found it extremely difficult to organise in the early years of the movement. The growth of trade union movement in our country is attributed to the inspiring role of outside leadership.

It was expected that the position would change in due course and leadership from rank and file would emerge. However, outside leadership has lingered on long after independence even though the profile of workers has changed. Even the white collar workers depended on the support of outsiders to build up their unions. Employers' preference to outsiders and their reluctance to give their employees equal status contributed to this position. In our country, unfortunately, there is a feeling in workers in general that only a charismatic leader can keep them together.

The trade union leadership continues to come largely from middle class. In the early years, outsiders joined the movement as they were inspired by some ideology. In recent years the ideology has remained in the background.



However, there is a visible trend that second level leadership is equipping itself to stand independently of outsiders. The need for outside leadership is declining in large industries. The unions perhaps need the help of outsiders as advisers. The unorganised workers, however, still depend largely on outsiders.

Unscrupulous outside leadership is sometimes charged of exploiting the weaknesses of workers. On the other hand, it is also said that organised workers have become sharp enough and sometimes even exploit the leaders. They move from one leader to another. This situation has arisen, as democratic processes have not been strengthened in many unions.

National Labour Commissions: Post Independence

Several National Labour Commissions have been set up by the Government of India after independence primarily *inter alia* with the objective of enquiring into the employment relations and the prevailing conditions of labour, status of labour welfare and social security in various sectors and sub-sectors of the economy and to make suitable recommendations to the government for betterment. The trade unions have played an extremely important role as worker representatives and advisors in all these commissions. The brief details concerning these Commissions are as follows:

- i. The first National Commission on Labour (NCL I) was set up on 24 December, 1966 under the Chairmanship of Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar. The Commission submitted its report in August, 1969 after detailed examination of all aspects of labour problems, both in the organised and unorganised sectors.
- ii. The National Commission for Rural Labour (NCRL) was constituted on 11 August, 1987 under the Chairmanship of C.H. Hanumantha Rao to study the problems of rural labour and make recommendations thereon. The Commission submitted its reports to the Government on 31 July, 1991.
- iii. The Second National Commission on Labour (NCL II) was set up on 15 October, 1999 under the chairmanship of Ravindra Varma which submitted its report to the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on 29 June, 2002.
- iv. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) is a national body commissioned by the Indian government to address was set up in 2004 under the chairmanship of Dr. Arjun Sengupta to act as an advisory board for matters regarding the informal employment sector.



Workers' Education

The trade unions realise the need of educating workers to raise their trade union consciousness. However, in the early years their financial position and resources did not permit them to undertake such activities formally. Later on when strong trade unions with sound financial position emerged, they started workers education programmes for their workers. However, very few unions could undertake this responsibility. Some unions have started their own institutions to conduct education programmes.

I. Dattopant Thengadi National Board for Workers Education and Development (DTNBWED)

With the initiation of economic planning in the country, the Government realised the important role, the trade unions can play in influencing the attitudes and actions of workers. The need for strong and more effective trade unions was felt. It was realised that strong trade unions would develop through better trained officials and more enlightened members. There was also the need for developing and promoting the leadership from rank and file. It was also necessary to promote the growth of democratic processes within trade unions and their organisation & administration.

In this background, the Central Government sponsored the Workers' Education Scheme in the year 1958 to educate rank and file workers through worker teachers drawn from amongst workers themselves. The scheme was implemented throughout the country by establishing the Central Board for Workers Education (CBWE), currently known as Dattopant Thengadi National Board for Workers Education and Development (DTNBWED). The scheme also covers rural workers. Many of the active workers of most of the trade unions have been trained under the scheme. Some worker-teachers have assumed leadership in trade unions. The DTNBWED also encourages trade unions to conduct workers education programmes and gives them grants-in-aid. A number of unions have availed the grants. The DTNBWED is playing an active and effective role in the growth of trade union movement in India.

II. V.V. Giri National Labour Institute

To strengthen these efforts further, the government set up the National Labour Institute in 1974 (re-named as, VV Giri National Labour Institute in 1995), as an autonomous organisation of Ministry of Labour and



Employment. The key functions of the Institute, in addition to conducting leadership development programmes include: conducting training for Labour Enforcement Officials and Labour Administrators from the Central and State Labour Departments; Research and publication in various areas of Labour, Advocacy and conducting Seminars/Webinars, Workshops etc. for various stakeholders.

III. State Labour Institutes

In addition to the above-mentioned National level Government organisations, *inter alia* engaged in education and empowerment of workers and their trade unions in terms of leadership qualities, legal awareness etc., there are also various state level government labour institutions. These include: Late Narayan Meghaji Maharashtra Institute of Labour Studies, Mumbai (1947); Mahatma Gandhi Labour Institute, Ahmedabad (1979); Kerala Institute of Labour & Employment(1978); Tamil Nadu Institute of Labour Studies(1979); Karnataka State Labour Institute; West Bengal State Labour Institute(1966); State Labour Institute, Odisha(1995).

Economism

The period after independence is marked by the advance of the trade union movement. A number of strong trade unions emerged. Larger sections of workers improved their working and living conditions. However, with collective bargaining agreements giving substantial, benefits to workers, the ideological base of trade unions started losing its importance. Workers now tend to forget that trade unions are institutions for social transformation. There is a tendency to look to trade unions as agencies to get more. The demands for better wages and facilities continue to dominate at the expense of other considerations. In other words, economism dominates the trade union scene.

Ideologists in the movement do not approve of this pure bread and butter approach of trade unions. However, they have to live in the age of competition amongst unions due to multiplicity. Workers back unions which make higher demands and achieve them. All trade unions have to fall in the line. Non-monetary issues get neglected. Some trade unions care more for the interest of their members and less for the interests of the working class as a whole.



Workers' co-operatives

A number of industrial units are becoming sick and many are closing down. In many cases the owners do not show interest in reviving the loss making units. There have been instances where trade unions have come forward and asked the employers to hand over the sick units to co-operatives of workers. In a few cases like the Kamanis Company at Bombay, the workers co-operative took over and revived the sick units. This showed another direction of development of trade union activities.

New Economic Policy

The trade union movement, though divided, saw constant growth in the background of accelerated industrialisation during about three decades after the introduction of economic planning in the country. However, the country witnessed a period of stagnation of economy after 1970s. During this period the poverty of the country was increasing, the industrial growth rate had slowed down, many of the public sector undertakings were making losses with consequent burden on the government, many industrial units were becoming sick, export was stagnated while import was increasing and there was a crisis in balance of payment situation. In order to meet this situation, the Government of India adopted the New Economic Policy in the year 1991. The main feature of the policy was the gradual adoption of free market economy. With this in view, the policy 'stresses liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation. Trade unions had many apprehensions about the policy. Such as: increase in unemployment, surplus labour, sickness in industries and less protection from legislation

Exit policy

The government subsequently followed the exit policy and a number of units were closed down. The trade unions started coming together to face the situation in spite of the wide differences among them. There were also protests against the policy. The advocates of the policy, however, held the view that in the global situation as it was, there was no other way not to boost economic development and reduce poverty. It was believed that there may be some initial hardships but the unemployment situation will improve once the economy picks up and there was more and more demand for goods and services.



There was a common perception that trade unions, in general, tended to overemphasise the 'danger' part of the policy and did not show the willingness to recognise the 'challenge' part of it. In this context, what late S.A. Dange, the veteran communist leader had said about the tasks of the trade unions in the Second Plan is relevant. Of course, the changing global economic and political scenario has to be taken into consideration. After severely criticizing the Second Five Year Plan he said, "Mere denunciation of the whole plan as a conspiracy of the capitalists will not serve the purpose-Trade unions must educate the mass of workers about their responsibility towards making the plan successful-They must defend the plan against the activities of the foreign and Indian monopolies. They must demand nationalisation of foreign monopolists to curb their power severely-They should guard the property of the state sector and remain vigilant about the activities of the racketeers-Trade unions must learn the financial and technical aspects of industry to participate vigilantly in the management through works committees in the state sector. Every attempt to reduce the standard of living of the workers must be resisted." (From synopses of lectures delivered before Teacher-Administrators of CBWE - 1958: Page - 367)

Trends in the movement

The trade union movement has continuously expanded after independence. However, the split and multiplicity has affected its strength. We have many strong trade unions but a weak trade union movement. A large number of unions and federations are working independently of the central organisations. Some efforts are being made towards unity. A large section of workers are outside the movement. Organised workers and their trade unions have still to make serious efforts or to render necessary help to organise the unorganised. Many trade unions tend to care more for monetary demands than for discharging their social responsibilities. Their functions have remained confined to making demands and achieving them.

The National Commission on Labour in this context, rightly pointed out in their report that *"We believe that real progress in trade union functioning, in the Unions ability to assume social responsibilities and in their capacity to reconcile the responsibilities to their members with those to the community can come only through the building up of the internal strength of the unions. It will be the task of the trade union leadership to improve the range of their services as much as the method of operation with these ends in view."* (20.39)



Major Trade Union Organizations and Current Challenges

The trade unions in India are involved in the implementation of programmes and projects both at the national and state levels, on a wide range of labour-related issues. They promote and protect the interest of workers in both the formal and informal economy. In India, 12 major unions are recognized as central trade union organizations and operate in many states: Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) ; Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) ; All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) ; Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) ; Centre of India Trade Unions (CITU) ; All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC) – formerly UTUC (LS); Trade Union Co-ordination Centre (TUCC) ; Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA); All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU); Labour Progressive Federation (LPF) ; United Trade Union Congress (UTUC); and National Front of Indian Trade Unions – Dhanbad (NFITU-DHN) . HMS, INTUC and SEWA are members of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). AITUC is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

Apart from the above-mentioned Central Trade Unions Organizations' there are many more industry/sector specific and regional unions in the country, such as: Akhil Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, All India Bank Employees Association, All India Insurance Workers Union, All India Bank Officers' Confederation, All India Defence Employees Federation, National Federation of Postal Employees, All India Railwaymen's Federation, All India Federation of Trade Unions, All India Workers Trade Union, Andhra Pradesh Federation of Trade Unions, Anna Thozhil Sanga Peravai, Archaeological Survey of India Workers Union, Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, Bharatiya Khadya Nigam Karamchari Sangh, Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha, Bihar-Jharkhand Sales Representatives' Union, Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat, Indian Confederation of Labour, Indian Federation of Trade Unions, Indian National Trinamool Trade Union Congress, Kerala Trade Union Congress, Maharashtra General Kamgar Union, Marumalarchi Labour Front, Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate, Nirman Mazdoor Sangh, Rajdhani Nirman Mazdoor Kalyan Sangh, Raigad Shramik Aekta Sangh, Rashtrawadi Mathadi and General Labour Union, Socialist Trade Union Centre, and Swatantra Thozhilali Union, etc.



As it has been mentioned above, there are a large number of trade unions in the country. The figures in Table below show that the number of trade unions in the country is consistently increasing. For example, the number of unions which was 76,649 in 2003, rose to 95,783 in 2007. However, in the subsequent years, the number shows a declining trend, which could be mainly due to the fact that many trade unions did not submit returns.

Number of Trade Unions (Workers and Employers)

Year	No. of registered Trade Unions	Memberships of Trade Unions submitting returns (in 000)
2003	74649	6272
2004	74403	3397
2005	78465	8719
2006	88440	8960
2007	95783	7877
2008	84642	9574
2009	22284*	6480
2010	19376*	5097
2011	10264*	7421
2012	16768*	9182
2013	11556*	3237

**Data pertains to responding States only.*

Source: Government of India (2017) *Indian Labour Year Book: 2015*, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Labour Bureau, Shimla/Chandigarh

Conclusion

The trade unions in the country have been in the forefront in terms of organizing the workers and educating them thereby enhancing their human resource capabilities. Their continuous efforts have been instrumental in creating an ambience of harmony and thus helpful in the country's economic development. Many of the Trade Union leaders have also played an extremely important role as Members of Central Legislative Assembly and Provincial Legislative Assemblies in the pre-independence India and as Members of Parliament and various State Legislative Assemblies in moving the proposals for many of the Labour Legislations and Labour Law Amendments. Further, many of them have also been associated as editors



and regular contributors of articles on important labour and industrial relation issues for number of daily, weekly, fortnightly, and monthly newspapers, magazines and journals etc. and contributed immensely in raising the working class consciousness, spreading awareness and promoting the understanding on various labour issues. Further, many of the trade union leaders have also authored remarkably outstanding books on various labour issues, most of which are relevant even today and thus have rendered valuable contribution in highlighting the importance and development of trade unionism in the country. To sum up, despite the apprehension that trade unions have been weakened after the process of Industrialization, Privatization and Globalization, the trade unions continue to make their presence felt in the country.

However, the unions in India are currently facing a number of challenges such as, the growth of informal employment and contract workers, promoting the right to organize and bargain collectively, protection of migrant workers (both inter-state and international migrants), gender equality, lack of social security, and workers' safety and security. Inadequate job creation, particularly of decent work, and the uneven distribution of the benefits of economic growth are key challenges. In addition, they also have the challenge of protecting the interest of the newly emerging categories of workers such as the platform workers and gig workers.



Publications of Prominent Trade Union Leaders

1. A.K. Gopalan- My Life Story; Kerala: Past & Present; Mystery of Peasant Movement in India; My Diary (Books)
2. A.B. Bardhan- Trade Union Education, Outline History of AITUC (Books)
3. Bagaram Tulpule- Admist Heat and Noise, 1981 (Book)
4. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar- Janta (Newspaper-Fortnightly); Prabuddh Bharat (Weekly Newspaper)
5. Dattopant Thengadi- National Charter of Demands of Indian Labour; Labour Policy (Books)
6. George Fernandes- George Fernandes Speaks, 1992 (Book); The Other Side (Weekly)
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8. Indrajit Gupta- Capital & Labour in Jute Industry, 1953 (Book)
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Prominent Trade Union Leaders in Legislature and Executive

1. Vengal Chakkarai Chettiar, AITUC, Member Tamil Nadu Legislative Council.
2. N.M. Joshi, AITUC, Labour Representative in Central Legislative Assembly.
3. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Member, Constituent Assembly of India, First Law Minister in Pt. Nehru's Cabinet, Member, Rajya Sabha from Bombay.
4. V.V. Giri, AITUC, First time elected as Member of Central Legislative Assembly in 1935, Member of the Rajaji Cabinet and subsequently Prakasam Cabinet, Madras Province, Elected as Member of Parliament in 1952, Labour Minister in Pt. Nehru's Cabinet (1952-54), Served as Governor of Uttar Pradesh (1957-1960), Kerala (1960-1965) and Karnataka (1965-1967), Elected as Vice President of India (1967), Served as President of India (1969-74).
5. Guljari Lal Nanda, 'Majoor Mahajan' (Textile Labour Association), Elected as Member of Bombay Legislative Assembly (1937), Served as Cabinet Minister for Planning (1951 onwards) and Cabinet Minister for Labour (1957 onwards), Also served as Home Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and as Acting Prime Minister on two occasions (1964 & 1966).
6. Shripad Amrit Dange, AITUC, Member, Mumbai Legislative Assembly (1938 & 1946), Elected as Member of Lok Sabha from Central Mumbai Parliamentary Constituency.
7. A.K. Gopalan, President, Akhil Bhartiya Kisan Sabha, Elected as Member of Parliament (1952, 1957, 1962 and 1971) from Kerala.
8. G.D. Ambekar, INTUC, Member Bombay Legislative Council.
9. Basawan Sinha, HMS, Elected as Member of State Legislative Assembly from Dehri Legislative Constituency in Bihar (1952 and 1977), Also served as Minister of Labour, Industry and Planning in Bihar.
10. Anthony Pillai S.C.C., Madras Labour Union and HMS, Elected as Member of State Legislative Assembly from Tamil Nadu (1952) and as Member of Parliament (1957).
11. Jyoti Basu, CITU, Elected as Member, Bengal Legislative Assembly from Railway Constituency (1946) and was elected several times as MLA from West Bengal and served in many important positions including Deputy Chief Minister and Chief Minister for over 30 years.



12. G. Ramanujam, INTUC, Served as Governor of Goa (1994-95) and Odisha (1995-99).
13. Prabhakar Kulkarni, INTUC, Member of Parliament from Bombay North West Constituency (1971-76)
14. Indrajit Gupta, AITUC, Elected as Member of Parliament from Kolkata South-Western Constituency (1960 onwards except 1997 and 1980) 11 times and known as Father of the House.
15. Dattopant Thengadi, BMS, Elected as Member of Rajya Sabha for two terms (1964-76), Also served as its Vice-Chairman (1968-70).
16. Dr. Shanti Patel, HMS, Mayor of Mumbai (1970-71) and Member of Rajya Sabha (1980-86).
17. A.B. Vardhan, AITUC, Elected as Member Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (1957).
18. C. Kuppaswami, LPF, First time elected as Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) (1998) and many times thereafter.
19. Dr. G. Sanjeeva Reddy, INTUC, First time elected as Member of Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly (1962) and many times thereafter. Subsequently, also elected as Member of Rajya Sabha (2006-12).
20. George Fernandes, HMS, First time elected as Member of Lok Sabha (1967) and subsequently elected as Member of Parliament several times. Also served as Cabinet Minister for various important Ministries including Railways, Industry and Defence etc.
21. Dr. Datta Samant, first time elected as Member, Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra (1967) and as Member of Lok Sabha (1985) from Maharashtra.
22. Chittbrata Majumdar, CITU elected as Member Legislative Assembly of Howrah North and served as Minister for Small and Medium Industry in Jyoti Basu Cabinet. Subsequently also elected as Member, Rajya Sabha (2004).
23. Gurudas Dasgupta, AITUC, first time elected as Member, Rajya Sabha (1985), second time in 1988 and third time in 1994. Elected as Member, Lok Sabha in 14th Lok Sabha in 2004 and 15th Lok Sabha in 2009.



Evolution of Trade Unions in India

24. Homi F. Daji, AITUC, Trade Union Leader for Textile Workers from Madhya Pradesh, elected as Member, Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1957. Subsequently, elected as Member of Parliament for 3rd Lok Sabha in 1962.
25. M. Shanmugam, LPF, Member of Rajya Sabha from Tamil Nadu since 2019.



V.V. Giri National Labour Institute is a premier institution involved in research, training, education, publication and consultancy on labour and related issues. Set up in 1974, the Institute is an autonomous body of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. It is committed to establishing labour and labour relations as a central feature in the development agenda through:

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