

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The working class of the developed capitalist countries began powerful struggles that affected other nations as well like India, where the reformers started organized successful struggles with the workers. Organizations such as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma, Unions of Printers in Kolkata, which were not exactly trade unions, came into existence. The first trade union was formed on permanent basis in 1906 in the Postal Offices at Mumbai and Kolkata. By the early years of the twentieth century, strikes by workers and visible links between nationalist politics and labour movement had become quite common.

MUMBAI MILL WORKER'S STRUGGLE

In 1908, a week long protest was held by the Mumbai Mill workers against the conviction of the nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak on charges of sedition. An uproar against the indenture system of labour recruitment for the plantations led to the abolition of the system in 1922.

SHOLAPUR COMMUNE The workers of Sholapur established workers power for the first time in India – the heroic Sholapur Commune. The colonial ruler prosecuted the workers and detained the leaders in the Meerut conspiracy case.

CHENNAI LABOUR UNION It was an association of the textile workers including workers of other trades in the European owned Buckingham and Carnatic Mills which was founded in 1918 by the nationalist leaders like Thiru Vi. Ka. (Real name T. V. Kalyanasundara Mudaliar) and B. P. Wadia. There was a remarkable disagreement between the union and caused strike and lockout. A civil suit was filed against Wadia claiming the payment of damages for inciting workers to breach their contract. The court ruled out that the Chennai Labour Union was an illegal conspiracy to hurt trading interests and demanded the restraining of activities of the union. Finally, it ended into a compromise which led to reinstatement of all the victimized workers except 13 strike leaders. Wadia

and other outside leaders separated themselves from the union.

TEXTILE LABOUR ASSOCIATION

At the time when Chennai Labour Union was being organized, Anasuyaben Sarabhai began working for the mill workers in Ahmedabad which eventually led to the formation of the famous Mazdoor Mahajan – Textile Labour Association in 1920.

GANDHI'S BACKING TO THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Gandhi called the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad, as his laboratory where he experimented upon his ideas on industrial relations and a model labour union. Being successful with his experiments, he advised other trade unions to follow it.

GROWTH OF TRADE UNIONS IN INDIA

Several reasons support the coming up of unions in the 1920s. Against this background N. M. Joshi introduced a bill for the rights of a Trade Union. But the then member for Industries, Commerce and Labour promised to legislate the subject himself and the Trade Union Act of 1926 was enacted. By this time, many active trade union leaders notably N. M. Joshi, Zabwalla, Solicitor Jinwalla, S. C. Joshi, V. G. Dalvi and Dr. Baptista organized strong unions specially in Port Trust, Dock staff, Bank employees (especially in Imperial Bank and currency office), Customs, Income – Tax, Ministerial staff, etc.

AMALGAMATION OF NATIONALIST AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

After the war, the growth of the nationalist Home Rule Movement encouraged the labour movement to take part in its nationalist effort. Following World War I, the wages were not at par with the price hike. The workers being unaware about the concept of trade union needed the guidance of philanthropists and social workers (politicians) who recognized labour's potential for their political organization. There were different kinds of politicians

like Gandhians, socialists and communists supporting the workers.

GREAT OCTOBER SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

After World War I, workers throughout the country took inspiration from the Great October Socialist Revolution of Russia and struggled against British colonialism.

Labour Movements After 1939

When World War II broke out in 1939, the workers opposed the war through a series of strikes. Favourable conditions such as worldwide anti-imperialist struggles, establishment of rule of under working class leadership in one third of the globe defeat of fascist powers and the role of working class encouraged anti-imperialist struggles in India. Some of the incidents that showed the working class power were the nationwide post and telegraph strike, the Mumbai general strike in support of the naval mutiny and street battles. In the princely feudal states, the working class supported the Telegana armed struggle and was in the forefront of Punnapra-Vygiayar struggle.

BIRTH OF AITUC

The need felt for a central organization was fulfilled with the birth of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920. Many protests and martyrdom of many gave the working class the right to organize itself into trade unions and the right to strike. In 1926, the India Trade Union Act was enacted.

TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1926

The Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, legalized that seven workers can combine to make a trade union. It also removed the pursuit of legitimate trade union activity from the purview of civil and criminal proceedings which is still the basic law governing trade unions in the country.

SPLIT IN AITUC AND FORMATION OF NTUF

From the mid-1920s of the twentieth century, the communists launched a major offensive to capture the AITUC. They started rival unions in opposition to those dominated by the nationalists. By 1928, they fielded their candidate for election to the office of the President of the AITUC in opposition to the nationalist candidate Nehru who managed to win the election by a narrow margin. In the 1929 session of the AITUC chaired by Nehru, the communists garnered enough support to carry a resolution to affiliate the Union to International Communist Forum. This resolution sparked the first split in the labour movement. The moderates, who deeply opposed it, walked out and eventually formed the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF).

RED TRADE UNION CONGRESS

Within 2 years of this event, the Union suffered another split. The communists walked out of AITUC in 1931 and formed the Red Trade Union Congress but following its ban by the British, they returned. The British being most favourably disposed towards the moderate NTUF, appointed N. M. Joshi, the moderate leader as a member of the Royal Commission.

Trade Union Movement : The Beginning

The corresponding growth of nationalist and the trade union movement rose consciousness among the struggling Indian Industrial workers who emerged as winners and stood by the nationalist organisers.

In the years after the revolt of 1857, the British imperialists had a firm footing in the country and they began to set up industrial enterprises. But the inhuman conditions in which the Indian labourers worked resulted in a struggle by the workers throughout the later half of the nineteenth century at various industrial centres like Mumbai and Howrah.

Strike at Empress Mills Nagpur This was an erratic struggle by the workers of the Empress Mills at Kanpur in 1877 following a wage cut. But because of poor organization, it failed and led to more cruelty by the rulers.

Agitation of Mumbai Textile Workers Regular payment of wages and improved working conditions were demanded by 5,000 Mumbai Textile workers, in 1884. This was followed by unsuccessful strikes

between 1882 and 1890. Because of oppression, many workers quit their jobs. Concerned about low labour costs, which gave an unfair advantage to Indian made goods, the Lancashire and Manchester Chambers of Commerce called for an inquiry into the conditions of the Indian workers.

The First Factories Act, 1881 In 1875, the first appointed committee enquired into the conditions of factory workers and demanded factory laws. The first Factories Act was adopted in 1881 and The Factory Commission was appointed in 1885.

The Factories Act, 1891 Another Factories Act came up in 1891, and a Royal Commission on labour was appointed in 1892. This forced restrictions on the working hours and the employment of women.

The Mumbai Millhand's Association This association formed in 1890 was the first workers organization headed by Narayan lakhande who can be treated as the Father of India's modern trade union movement. This organization with no rules, regulations or funds worked for the welfare of workers. Soon other organizations like Kamgar Hitvardhak Sabha and Social Service League also came up.

MERGING OF NTUF WITH AITUC

The breaking away of the NTUF cost the AITUC 30 affiliated unions having close to hundred thousand members. The Red Trade Union Congress quickly fell apart, and the communists returned to the AITUC. During the next few years, there was compromise between the AITUC and NTUF as well. The split had occurred on issues such as affiliation with international organizations which were of no concern to the ordinary worker. By 1940, the NTUF merged completely with the AITUC and it was agreed

that the AITUC would not affiliate itself with any international organization and political decisions would be taken on the basis of a two-thirds majority. In conclusion, the thirties involved wage cuts, wartime inflation, political dissent and the Government's failure in 1937 to meet the expectations of the workers depicting a depressing period for Indian labour. However, some prominent labour leaders such as Shri Nanda and Shri Giri did pass some useful legislations, major being the Mumbai Industrial Disputes Act of 1938, which attempted to eliminate inter-union rivalries by introducing a system recognising the dominant union.

VISIT OF SIMON COMMISSION

The victorious October Revolution led to the development of the ideology of scientific socialism in the working class movement in India and put forth immediate political demands. Simon Commission's visit to India was marked by protests by the working class.

Conspiracy Trials against the Communists

To stop the communists effort for a united party, the British banned their activity with four conspiracy trials between 1921 and 1924. These were the First Peshawar Conspiracy Case, the Second Peshawar Conspiracy Case, the Moscow Conspiracy Case and the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case, which had great political impact.

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