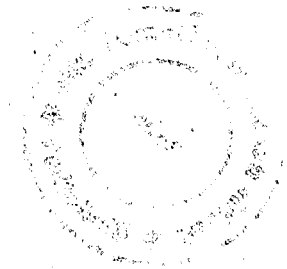


ORIGINS OF
TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
IN INDIA

By
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AITUC PUBLICATION

September 1973

Price: Rs. 1.25



A89-2485

Publishers' Note

This is a slightly edited version of the introduction to *AITUC — 50 Years: Documents*, Volume One, which was originally planned to be brought out in 1970 in connection with the 50th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the AITUC.

Comrade Dange, who was to have written on the socio-economic and political conditions in which this significant event in the history of the Indian working class took place, could not do so due to heavy pressure of current work and indifferent health.

However, when in June this year he was in Prague to attend a meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions, he was sent to the Krem Sanatorium in the picturesque mountain resort of Marianska Lazni in Czechoslovakia for rest. This gave him an opportunity to fulfil his promise of writing the long-awaited introduction.

The quotations in the text are from the proceedings of the 1920 Bombay and 1921 Jharia sessions of the AITUC given in the volume mentioned above.

The documents volume has been published separately including this introduction.

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I. The Foundation Thoughts and Forces of the AITUC

I

More than two generations have passed since the AITUC was founded. The working class of today, especially its younger generation, is no longer what it was at the time of the foundation of the AITUC in 1920. Things have changed out of recognition in every respect.

It is necessary for the workers of today to know how and for what they fought yesterday. Knowledge of history is one of the most essential weapons to fight the present and future battles.

A good exhaustive history of the working class in India has not yet been written, despite the fact that the first modern factories, i.e. machine production, and the first generation of the modern Indian worker began to appear in the 1850s, more than a hundred years ago. There have been some short studies of this or that aspect of the workers' struggles. There have even been short surveys of the hundred years of sufferings, battles, gains of the workers and their trade unions in the economic and political field done by leaders of the trade union movement, some political parties and also by writers from the middle-class intelligentsia. Some partial surveys of well-known strikes have also

been published. But a real comprehensive history fitting the grandeur and heroism of our class, its sacrifices and gains, the most violent, diabolical and inhuman forces of both foreign imperialism and native capitalism that it had to fight and has yet to fight, still remains to be written. The task is big but necessary.

II

The period of 1919 to 1922 was one of tremendous national upheaval, a period of revolutionary uprisings of the Indian people against British imperialism and for national liberation. It was not an isolated phenomenon of Indian history. It was a part of the processes of world revolution against imperialism. It appeared in two forms. One was the revolutionary movement of the working class for liberation from capitalism and for establishment of socialism; and the other was the liberation movement of oppressed nations for liberation from imperialism.

The first push to this process was given by the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia under the leadership of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks). That revolution performed two tasks. It established the rule of the working class in Soviet Russia and, secondly, it liberated all the nations oppressed by tsarist imperialism by giving them the complete rights of self-determination and freedom.

This new state of the working class and the Bolshevik Party in their manifesto declared support to all the oppressed nations of the world in their freedom movements and to all workers in their struggle for socialism.

With this break in the chain of world imperialism, whose forces had been seriously weakened by the first world war, the liberation movements gathered strength, not only in India but also in China, Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey, Persia and many other countries.

Uprisings of the working class came up in many European countries, beginning with the German revolution in 1918, followed by the Hungarian, the Czech, the Yugoslav, etc. Big general strikes began in England and the Irish rebellion struck its blows against British rule.

We need not follow the history of these revolutions here. We mention them only to point out that the great revolutionary upheaval that began in India at the end of the first world war was a part of the world process and not an isolated Indian or Asian phenomenon.

III

Moreover it was not an unconscious part of the world process. The October Revolution had a direct impact on the Indian and Asian developments. It directly and openly appealed to the oppressed nations to overthrow the imperialist yoke. Secondly, it spoke to the exploited masses, particularly the workers and peasants, against landlord-capitalist exploitation. Even ordinary workers, awakened into political consciousness by the burden of the war and its consequences, spoke of how the capitalists and landlords had been liquidated in Soviet Russia. The Anglo-Indian press, who took special care to spread such news with the idea of frightening the richer classes in India, only helped to carry the core of the message of the October Revolution to the masses in India. When Churchill denounced Soviet Russia as the arch-enemy of the British empire, it only made Indians feel friendly to that country and its revolution.

The other revolution which had some impact on us was the Irish rebellion. The home-rule movement of Ireland had been copied here to express India's constitutional demands for "self-government" or home rule. An All-India Home Rule League also had been founded with branches throughout the country. With the armed uprisings of the Irish Sinn Fein for complete independence and separation

from Britain, the home-rule slogan receded there. In India also with the radicalisation of the masses and partly due to the differences that cropped up among the leaders, particularly between Tilak and Mrs Basant, the Home Rule Leagues paled away. The Irish rebellion, however, could not provide any special ideological appeal as such. Their subsequent settlement with Britain and the civil war that broke out among the Irish parties over the settlement put the Irish out of Indian political mind as an example to think of.

The Germans used to have some special links with the Indian revolutionaries. The German imperialists had ambitious plans to fight the British imperialists, capture their colonies and establish themselves as a world power. So they gave shelter to emigre Indian revolutionaries and promised to supply arms to the Indian revolutionary groups, who wanted to plan armed uprisings or armed actions to liquidate members of the British ruling class by the tactics of individual annihilation.

But such help did not materialise very much, as the mass base within the country for an armed rebellion was lacking. Acts of individual annihilation, besides proving costly, became only indicators of protest and sharp discontent, incapable of overthrowing the government or seriously dislocating its power. The German imperialists could not provide any ideological appeal of national liberation as they themselves had attacked the liberation movements of China and Africa, in order to capture colonies and markets for their own imperialist ambitions. The German revolution of 1918 had also made no direct appeal to the oppressed nations nor to the oppressed and exploited masses of the world. Let alone talking of the emancipation of the oppressed nations and the exploited classes, the "socialist" government of the German social-democrats, led by Kautsky, Scheidemann and Noske, suppressed even their own workers with gun and fire, because they tried to take the

revolution to the socialist road and began the takeover of the big German monopolies. They did not want the German people to go the way of the October Revolution and working-class rule. Even some of the few Indian emigre revolutionaries, who had been sheltering in Germany, wended their way to Moscow, though they had not wedded themselves to any ideology of communism. The fact that Raja Mahendra Pratap and members of his "Government of the Indian Republic" in exile went to Moscow to see Lenin and not to Germany to see Kautsky for help was a fact of immense meaning for the Indian revolution and Indian history.

In the make-up of the ideology of our intelligentsia other past revolutions also had a place. Mazzini and Garibaldi of the Italian liberation movement had a big appeal. Many books were written about them. The Hungarian revolution and its leader Kossuth were also studied. The French revolution was taught in the universities, but there the reactionary views of Edmund Burke or the hero-worship philosophy of Carlyle were emphasised. The study of the American war of independence brought forth the slogan of boycott and volunteer army. But all these had no direct relation with current history.

IV

Thus only the Russian Revolution of October 1917 impressed itself on the minds of the Indian people, and particularly the working class, by its national-revolutionary and class-emancipatory role and ideology. The very first session of the AITUC appreciated this fact of history. To put before the Indian worker the role of the Russian revolution and to denounce its imperialist detractors and draw lessons from its successes for the benefit of the ideological and political attitudes of the Indian working-class and trade-union movement—was all done in the AITUC in its very

founding session. The finest statement on this subject came from the presidential address of Lala Lajpat Rai. And it is worth remembering that Lalaji was not a communist nor was there a single communist at the AITUC session in 1920 to inspire or incite such sentiments and thoughts.

Speaking about the different levels at which the world movement of the working class stands, the presidential address says:

“While it is true that the interests of labour are the same all the world over, it is equally true that the power of labour in each country is limited by local and national circumstances. Labour in Europe is in a position to dictate. European workmen have found out that to depend for the enforcement of their right and the amelioration of their condition on the political action of persons who owe their legislative power and position to the vote of men of property is absurd and unnatural. In order to protect the interests of himself and his class, the workman must have a vote and he must give it to a man of his class or to a man pledged to his interests. So every man in Europe is a political unit. Over and above this, European labour has found another weapon in direct action. On the top comes the Russian worker who aims to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

“We, in India, have not yet reached the first stage. The government have not given us votes. As at present situated, they will oppose us at every step. They will not even hesitate to use all the forces of militarism at their disposal to crush our efforts towards united action and to keep us disunited, unorganised and out of touch with world affairs. They have illustrated this by their action in the matter of the Lahore Railway Strike, the Government Press Strike at Calcutta and Simla and the Postal and Telegraph Strike in Bombay.

“Their recent action in prohibiting the importation of *Soviet Russia* and the *Daily Herald* of London is also an

illustration to the point. While the Anglo-Indian press is engaged day and night in disseminating palpable lies about Soviet Russia, the Government of India steps in to prevent the people of India from knowing the other side of the story.”

Then the president of the AITUC, Lala Lajpat Rai, makes a most devastating and revolutionary statement on what is “truth”. He says:

“Truth in Europe is of two kinds: (a) capitalistic and governmental truth represented by men like Mr Winston Churchill and papers like the *London Times* and the *Morning Post*, and (b) socialistic and labour truth represented by labour organs of the type of *Justice*, *Daily Herald* and *Soviet Russia*.

“The Government of India wants us to swallow the first kind of truth without knowing the other side. Unfortunately for us, truth is no longer truth. It is qualified by capitalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and socialism on the other. It is either capitalistic or bourgeois or socialistic. In order to know the whole truth, one has to know all the three brands and then use his judgement. My own experience of Europe and America leads me to think that socialistic or even bolshevik truth is any day better, more reliable and more human than capitalistic and imperialistic truth.”

While endorsing the different levels at which the world labour movement stands and while unhesitatingly putting the Russian worker “on the top” with his dictatorship of the proletariat, the AITUC president has a word of caution and historical realism. He says:

“There is no one in India who believes that the European and Russian standards of labour can be applied to the India of today. If there were any I would remind him or them of the message of Lenin to Bela Kun, wherein the former warned the latter against the danger of applying Russian standard to Hungary prematurely. For the present our

greatest need in this country is to organise, agitate and educate. We must organise our workers, make them class-conscious and educate them in the ways and interests of commonweal."

V

One need not be surprised at the forthright way in which the AITUC president showed sympathy with the Soviet Union and socialist or bolshevik truth. The question is how did the bourgeois leaders who were present in the session tolerate such attitudes? It was because the British ruling class and its representatives in India and all the press organs under their control denounced the national struggle and its leaders like Tilak and Gandhi as being "instigated" by the bolsheviks. It was not only in India but all the world over that the ruling classes denounced all progressive and liberation movements as being bolshevik-inspired.

It was at this period in history that the workers in Britain, France and other European countries were showing signs of revolutionary upheavals. The war of aggression that the imperialists had launched against Soviet Russia in aid of the civil war was suffering defeats. Everywhere the cry was raised: Hands off Russia! The British forces which had tried to advance towards Afghanistan to conquer it and make way through it to attack the Soviet Russia had suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Afghans at the battle of Jalalabad. Rumours were set afloat by the British press that the bolsheviks were planning to invade India. Such rumours instead of frightening the people were eagerly believed and they got credence from the fact that the Soviet government had sent enormous military help to the Turkish revolution led by Kemal Ataturk, which the British were trying to defeat by helping Greece to invade Turkey. In India the leadership of the national movement had declared its support to the Turkish war of independence. And so indirectly our national movement and the bol-

sheviks found themselves on the same side on the main crucial issue of the day, i.e. the overthrow of imperialism.

It is this position that dominated the sentiments and statements of the leadership and the masses at the first and second sessions of the AITUC. Hence the representatives of both the workers and the national bourgeoisie sat on the same platform of the AITUC and heard Lalaji without demur. As witness to this fact there were sitting on the dais of the session representatives from the British Trades Union Congress, the Irish Trade Union Congress, the British Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party.

While on this subject of AITUC's international outlook, it would be worthwhile to keep in mind the fact that in this period of history, US President Wilson had announced America's adherence to the principle of self-determination to settle world affairs, especially the affairs of the colonial and subject world. The statesmen of all nations had hailed the pronouncement but neither the British nor the French and not even the US cared to apply it to their own colonial possessions. Only Soviet Russia had put it in practice long before the hypocrites of imperialism beat their drums about the fine principles of self-determination.

It may not be out of place here to jump a period in history to remind people that the same US and British leadership during the second world war declared the same principles in a new form, called the Atlantic Charter. But at the end of the war, the Trumans and Churchills, like their predecessors, Wilson and Lloyd George, betrayed their word and tried to suppress the liberation movement in the same old way. But this time imperialism itself suffered a defeat and the colonial system collapsed. To those like me, who had seen the first session of the AITUC in 1920, what a fantastically new world of socialism and national freedom it was that greeted them fiftythree years later when we met at the 29th session of the AITUC at Calcutta in 1973!

VI

What were the other basic norms and values that the founding session of the AITUC declared? There are *three basic ideas* that the presidential address emphasised: *one*, class consciousness; *two*, international proletarian brotherhood; *three*, the place of nationalism in the class outlook.

The working class is an altogether new class in history, brought forth by new instruments of production and a new mode of production, i.e. the capitalist system. In order to emancipate itself, defend itself, it must become class-conscious and organise and act as a class. He says:

"We are living in an age quite different from anything that the world has seen or known before.."

"This modern world is characteristically a world of machinery, of steam, gas and electricity. This is a world of mass production, of organised capital, organised industry and organised labour. Organised mass production involves the organisation of capital and organisation of labour on a scale never heard of before. So far, organised capital had its way. It has ruled the world for the last 150 years, and the world today is groaning under its burden. It has destroyed many an old civilisation, enslaved religion, chained science and placed in bondage all the forces of nature and human intellect. Humanity is its bond slave."

Then our president cites two examples of this shattering power of capital. He says:

"Old China with its four to five hundred millions of industrious hard-working and art-loving peoples, with its ancient culture and art, has been broken on the wheel and thrown to the wolves. India with its hoary civilisation, its mighty spiritualism, its great philosophy and its beautiful art, with a family consisting a one-fifth of the whole human race, has also been bled white by the forces of organised capital and is today lying prostrate at its feet."

Maybe some people will separate capitalism from the category of imperialism. Some may even plead that some capi-

talism or capitalists are so good and nonviolent by nature or by their "national character" that they may not develop into imperialism and its accompaniment of militarism. Not to give way to such illusions, the president says:

"Militarism and imperialism are the twin children of capitalism; they are one in three and three in one. Their shadow, their fruit and their bark, are all poisonous."

The remedy to this poison? "It is only lately that an antidote has been discovered and that antidote is organised labour."

Think as a class, organise and act as a class—is the most valuable thought that the president put to the AITUC as the foundation thought of its ideology.

Class solidarity and consciousness has no place for caste divisions or religious differences. Whatever validity they had in the past, they have no place in the modern struggle against capitalism and imperialism and for a new society based on socialism, which is the negation of the three-in-one poison bark.

The second basic idea he set forth was on internationalism.

The question is: could not class solidarity be limited to the national level only? Must it be international? Must we take up the principle of proletarian internationalism and the slogan of "Workers of the World, Unite!"?

There was no such slogan hanging from the festoons of the first session of the AITUC. But the president made it clear that the working class is an international class and must organise and act as such. Giving his reasons, he says:

"Capital is organised on a worldwide basis; it is backed up by a financial and political strength beyond conception; its weapons are less perishable than those employed by labour; it presents dangers that apply universally. In order to meet these dangers, Indian labour will have to join hands with labour outside India also, but its first duty is to organise itself at home." And further on, he asserts the

proposition that "the interests of labour are the same all the world over."

The third basic idea he put forth was that in the fulfilment of its tasks, the working class must refuse to be deceived by false appeals of bourgeois nationalism or needs of national economy, etc.

Every trade unionist knows how the bourgeoisie uses the arguments of nationalism, national growth and national security to put down the demands of the working class for a decent wage and living conditions and for democratic rights.

In the days of British occupation, this argument was used even to justify twelve and fifteen hours' work a day and denial of a Sunday holiday or prohibition of child labour. To this the president's reply was:

"If labour must remain half-starved, ill-clothed, badly housed, and destitute of education, it can possibly have no interest in the development of Indian industries, and all appeals in the name of patriotism must fail."

If that was the attitude of one of the greatest patriots in the preindependence days, how much more valid it should be in the presentday independent India!

The argument of "nationalism" is used by the bourgeoisie and particularly its intellectual defenders in every country to make the working class serve the interests of capital, especially in its competition with foreign capital. He said:

"The interests of Indian industries, they say, require that labour in this country should be plentiful and cheap. There may be something in that argument, but the way in which it is represented in season and out of season carried it too far. We are not prepared to admit the validity of this plea. Under the shelter of nationalism, European capitalists have created sufficient havoc in the world, and we are not prepared to listen with equanimity to that cry being overdue in India. An appeal to patriotism must affect the rich and the poor alike, in fact, the rich more than the poor."

There was the question of "outsiders" in the trade-union movement. Government and employers denounced those intellectuals, social workers, lawyers and barristers for their "interference" in disputes and strikes. The president's address countered this view and called upon "such brain workers in the ranks of labour who are educated enough to lead the movement" to show a spirit of sacrifice. "For some time to come, they need all the help and guidance and cooperation they can get from among the intellectuals as are prepared to espouse their cause. Eventually labour shall find its leaders from among its own ranks." And thousands of intellectuals of India have shown that spirit of sacrifice which the foundation congress of the AITUC demanded of them.

We have gone in so much detail and so much restatement of the basic points of the foundation address regarding such questions as the class outlook and international solidarity, attitude towards the various phases of the world's working-class movement and the world revolution, including the October Revolution, the question of relation between national interests and working-class interests, because it has been said that the AITUC in its original cast had none of these attitudes and that it was merely a "welfare" organisation. It has also been said that it is the communists who brought these questions on the platform of the AITUC and hence forced the others to split away from the AITUC and start new organisations wedded to "pure trade unionism", as they found its original objectives vitiated. Hence it was necessary to emphasise these points from the presidential address. It is equally necessary to note that these basic points were not the personal views of Lala Lajpat Rai. Many of them found endorsement not only in other speeches but also in the resolutions of the AITUC.

VII

While emphasising the great advance that the AITUC represented at that period in our history, it would not be correct to ignore some of its weaknesses. The biggest failure was that the AITUC at its founding session did not adopt any political resolution on the question of national freedom and swaraj. Why was it so?

The mass movement was already advancing towards an open revolt against the British rulers. The peasants had begun to move against the landlords in the countryside and their British protectors. The Indian soldier, who had just returned from the war front, finding himself demobbed and unemployed, had begun to take over the local leadership of the movement in his hands. Big general strikes were taking place on the railways, posts and telegraphs, jute and cotton textiles, mines and tea gardens. Taking note of this, the British imperialists had already embarked on suppressing the rising tide of the revolution by moving their army into action, as was seen in the Jallianwala Bagh massacres, the killings of tea-garden workers, the Jamshedpur strikers, the strikers in mines, etc., the bombing of the villages and railway stations in the Punjab and banning the entry of the leadership of the National Congress into those areas.

At the same time, the British imperialists were offering to the Congress some constitutional reforms, in order to divert the revolutionary mass upsurge and secure the help of the Congress leadership in tiding over the postwar revolutionary crisis.

The Amritsar session of the National Congress of 1919 was sharply divided on the question of the constitutional reforms offered by the Montagu-Chelmsford report. While Lokmanya Tilak, at that time, the radical leader of the Congress, did not want unconditional acceptance of the niggardly reforms, Mahatma Gandhi, who had not yet shed his earlier illusions about the virtues of the British raj, wanted full and wholehearted acceptance, in which he was support-

ed by Mrs Besant and many others. Ultimately the essence of Tilak's standpoint with some compromise was unanimously approved.

Very soon, however, the atrocities at Jallianwala Bagh and other events combined with Tilak's forthright opposition to his political line changed Gandhi's old attitude, from one of cooperation with the British to that of noncooperation. But the moderate anti-struggle wing which supported him earlier left him. And so matters were left to be clinched at the special session of the Congress at Calcutta in September 1920, presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai.

The session, however, was overshadowed by the death of Tilak on 1 August 1920 and the question of launching a political mass struggle for swaraj was left to be finally decided by the Nagpur session in December 1920. All sections and factions of the national political leadership began to mobilise for the great and decisive struggle at Nagpur.

The AITUC was guided principally by the Congress leaders. The masses at this period were being led by Lokmanya Tilak and his group, in which Lala Lajpat Rai from Punjab, Bepinchandra Pal from Bengal and others had a big place. Mahatma Gandhi had refused to sponsor the idea of founding the AITUC and so he did not attend. Tilak was one of the vice-presidents of the reception committee, and was the moving spirit of the Bombay working class, which fully backed the holding of the AITUC session in Bombay. But Tilak died on 1 August. So the session which was timed to meet on 22 August was postponed to October.

With the differences in the Congress leadership which had come in the open in the September session of the Congress, the AITUC leadership could not take any political stand on the question of swaraj and the political movement for national freedom. Hence at the first AITUC session in October 1920, though it met one month after the Calcutta Congress of September but two months before the decisive

Nagpur Congress of December, *the AITUC remained almost silent on the national political demand.*

We say "almost" because the floor of the AITUC session was resounding with slogans of the great strikes that were taking place in Bombay and elsewhere. Slogans of Tilak, Gandhi and swaraj were also being given from the floor. But the leadership from the platform would not talk of "swaraj" and the freedom movement, because it was divided. And with Mrs Besant, Wadia and the British gentlemen on the platform, the clear voice of the masses and the slogan of swaraj could not be embodied in a political resolution.

These weaknesses and the confusion in the leadership were reflected in the speech of the president himself. Despite the fine positions taken by him on other basic matters, he vacillated when it came to the question of opposing the British government and calling for swaraj. Of course everybody spoke in general of freedom and oppression. But there was no resolution on the national question. The result was that in the presidential speech we find the following prevaricating statement, which perfectly reflects the undecided position of the National Congress leadership. While coming to the end of his speech, he said:

"I do not think I should detain you, Ladies and Gentlemen, more than a minute. In this minute, I want to explain our attitude to government. It is neither one of support nor that of opposition." Though this was said primarily in reference to the proposal to seek the British government's mediation and arbitration in the pending labour disputes, yet it reflects the position of the national political leadership two months before the famous Nagpur Congress of 1920, which launched the movement of noncooperation with government for the demand of swaraj. So this statement had not the limited reference as it may look superficially. Moreover Lalaji personally was in the camp of those at this time who were somewhat undecided and uncertain as to what position to take at Nagpur on the non-cooperation programme of mass struggle for swaraj. He

was not opposed to it in principle, as he had supported that slogan in the revolutionary period of 1905-8, only he was worried if it was not premature and whether the masses would respond.

VIII

We have mentioned this to show how closely the AITUC was following the political leadership of the National Congress. This is confirmed by the fact that when the Congress launched the militant noncooperation movement and threw overboard constitutionalism with its goal of dominion status and opted for swaraj and that also "within one year", the second session of the AITUC at Jharia held on 1 December 1921 immediately adopted as its first resolution on the agenda the following political resolution which said:

"That this Trade Union Congress declares that the time now has arrived for the attainment of swaraj by the people of India."

This resolution was in the footsteps of the Nagpur resolution of the National Congress. It may be worth noting, however, that it did not include that clause of the National Congress resolution which said that swaraj is to be attained by "legitimate and peaceful means".

Whether the omission was deliberate or not we cannot say, as the proceedings do not report any discussion on that clause and there were no amendments.

The omission of the clause was not because of any more radical attitudes or disagreement on the part of the AITUC leadership. It was due to the fact that the slogan of "Swaraj in one year!" which had been given by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress was expected to be an accomplished fact on 31 December 1921. Hence the political resolution of the AITUC adopted on 2 December simply declared "that the time now has arrived for the attainment of swaraj". When the goal was within reach, just four weeks

ahead, where was the necessity to discuss the question of means and methods?

On looking into the speeches at Jharia, one immediately feels how the situation had radicalised within one year of the founding session of October 1920 and had gone several steps ahead of the Bombay session.

The leadership of the National Congress and particularly Mahatma Gandhi had refused to define what is meant by swaraj: he thought thereby he could win the support of all classes in the country and make the Congress the national front of the freedom movement. Everybody could define swaraj the way he or his class wanted.

At the Jharia session, however, the workers and some of the leaders put their own content in swaraj and put their own definition on it.

Dewan Chamanlal, the mover of the resolution on swaraj, said:

"It was they—the European and Indian capitalists, who did not want swaraj because they knew that swaraj was not for them... the swaraj that they would have was not to be swaraj of the capitalists but the swaraj of the workers."

Dewan Chamanlal had not said anything of the kind at the Bombay session.

K. C. Chaudhury of Bengal spoke in Hindi and said:

"To remove forced labour and beggary they wanted swaraj. It was to prevent their employers from calling the help of the police and military, who are at their beck and call every now and then to suppress and break strikes, they wanted swaraj. They wanted the railways to be nationalised, they wanted the nationalisation of mines, municipalisation of tramways, gas and electric works and it was for that they wanted swaraj."

Mahammed Daud, Bar-at-law and president of the Seamen's Union, wanted swaraj to enforce the recommendations of the International Labour Conference.

The report of the proceedings says:

"Then a young daughter of Mr Ramjash Agarwall, a girl of nine, recited a highly patriotic poem which kept the house spellbound for several minutes."

Then a speaker, K. P. Sinha got up and said:

"The dawn of swaraj is in sight and you will have it within 31st December."

The workers in all their innocence as well as strength believed all this. When the speakers spoke that the capitalists did not want swaraj, they had sitting before them the most prominent colliery owner of Bihar, as the chairman of the reception committee. In Bombay too they had many Swarajist capitalists on the reception committee. But then the workers did not think this talk to be false, because, in their minds, the emblem of capitalism were men like Tatas and the British gentry who did not want swaraj.

What was the AITUC's politics at Jharia as enunciated by President J. Baptista, a genuine champion of the workers in Bombay? In his presidential address, he said:

"Our political policy must steer clear of the extreme individualism and bolshevism and follow the golden mean of fabian socialism."

Lala Lajpat Rai at Bombay was more advanced than fabian socialism.

At the same time, as the question of the relationship of the working-class movement to politics cropped up again, President Baptista said:

"The fact is that at the bottom of the objection (to politics) was the fear that the masses would wrench from the classes the political power by combination. This fear must be greater in India where power is in the hands of foreigners. Besides direct action even for political ends has been sanctioned by British labour. It stopped Churchill's machinations against Russia. The bureaucracy may, therefore, fear that a general strike may be the shortest way to swaraj, but this is no reason for the Trade Union Congress to boy-

cott politics. We are quite justified in ignoring the objection."

To put the trade unions on the political rails was not a difficult task. The working class as a part of the Indian people was fully with the slogans of national freedom, in whatever form they were put by the Indian National Congress or, in its absence, by the spontaneous actions of the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia. Therefore the first session at Bombay in 1920 and more particularly the second one at Jharia in 1921 were dominated by political emotions and slogans of freedom and democratic rights. *The politicalisation of the trade-union movement and the AITUC took place at its very foundation.* Those who say that politics was brought into the trade unions and the AITUC by the communists are not stating correct history. If those of us, young men, who were there had any big say, the resolution on swaraj would not have waited till Jharia and Bombay would not have been left without the stamp of the key political resolution of that time. Politics was brought into the AITUC from its very inception by the National Congress and they did well to bring it in. They started regretting it only when the working class came of age and began to put forward its own class politics against that of the bourgeoisie.

IX

The spirit of the times and the ideas that moved it are not seen only in the presidential speeches or only in the political questions. There was a telegram from "the socialists of Madras", which the British trade-union delegate Col Wedgwood mentions as having "struck him much". "It stated that *what the Indian workers demanded was industrial control and land nationalisation and not any palliatives as profit-sharing and increase in wages.*" Col Wedgwood called it "the impracticable politics of the labour extremists".

The real spirit of the session was expressed in the speeches of the rank-and-file workers, some of which are preserved in these records. One such notable speech was that of Tej Singh employed in the steel works of Jamshedpur which had been on strike at this time.

Referring to the Jamshedpur strike, he said, the strike lasted for twentytwo days and the strikers throughout behaved peacefully. And yet, he added, what was the result? Producing on the platform a workman who had lost one arm, the speaker said, that was the result.

It was absolutely untrue to say that the strikers were attacked because they wanted to wreck a railway line in the works. They had wanted to do nothing of the kind. The firing resulted in twentytwo men being wounded and six killed. He deeply regretted that such a thing should have happened in the works which bore the honoured name of Jamshedji Tata, a name which the workers in Jamshedpur cherished with deep affection and respect. He regretted that the directors had done nothing beyond expressing mere lip-sympathy with their men.

He was ashamed that he had to speak against his employer whose salt he ate, but he looked upon it as an imperative duty to speak out, principally because these things had happened in an Indian company and that too a company which bore a name which was universally respected in India. It might be that he would be dismissed for having thus spoken out, but he was not afraid to that. He had done his duty.

Though this report belongs to 1920, it could as well read for the 1958 or 1968 strike at Jamshedpur. The same tradition travelled from father to son in the big owner's family and was resisted by the same tradition of struggle and sacrifice in the workers' family. If Tej Singh were alive today, he would not speak of the "salt he ate" but would speak of the blows he gave to the mightiest company of India.

This was not the only speech on strikes. When the session was meeting, there were big strikes throughout the country. Bombay city itself was in the grip of the biggest strike wave after the end of the war. The working class was marching on the offensive both on the political and economic front. On the economic front, the demands everywhere were almost common—dearness allowance against rise in prices, bonus from the huge profits of the war and postwar period, limitation on hours of work which still ran to twelve to fourteen hours, protection against arbitrary dismissals and physical assaults and beatings of men and women, forfeiture of wages, and for general humane treatment. The social-economic demands need not be listed here in full, because in conditions in those times there were no norms for anything, not even physical protection for men, women or children from the assaults of the employers' agents. It was a jungle law of the ferocious men of capital, and so the single demand was—treat us as humans.

The record of the session speaks with indignation of the *indentured labour system* and the demand for its abolition. This system under which lakhs of labourers were sent practically into slavery (with so-called "agreements of long-term service") to the tea plantations in India and sugar plantations in British colonies came in for heavy attacks. The speech of Mrs Deep Narain Singh reveals the position in all its cruelty. The whole of the working class and people in India were in revolt against the continuance of this slave labour. The session passed a resolution demanding the abolition of indentured labour system. In practice it was ended soon, though legally it continued on the statute book for some time.

The session adopted resolutions supporting the big textile strike in Bombay as also the strikes in tramways, post and telegraph and gas workers.

The speech of J. B. Miller was remarkably bold in this connection. He was ready for calling a sympathetic general

strike in Lahore, Madras and other places in support of the Bombay strike.

Mr Miller was not throwing out empty phrases, when he said:

"If the tram and other strikes were not brought to an end, he would appeal to his Lahore friends to close all karkhanas in Lahore and would make a similar appeal to Madras."

Mr Miller and Mr M. A. Khan, who also was at the conference, were powerful leaders of workers in Punjab and particularly the railway workers on the North Western and UP railway system. In those days it was a peculiar feature that the railway workers and their strikes were keeping pace with the militant actions of other industries. Hence the courage and confidence with which Miller spoke and that too in the so-called "backward" period of 1920.

X

The founding session had the unique fortune to be greeted by thousands of workers from all factories in Bombay. In the whole country there was not a single industry which had not burst into struggles. Alongside this the horror of firings on the tea-plantation workers and the oppression of the indentured labourers in Fiji filled the whole atmosphere. No better surroundings could have been found for laying the foundation of the AITUC.

The Jharia session also met in the atmosphere of total hartals and general strikes that raged throughout the country which had been called by the leadership of the National Congress to protest against the visit of the Prince of Wales. At Jharia all the coal mines were closed down by the workers to enable them to attend the rallies of the Congress. In the year of 1921, when the workers had no organisation to lead them, this action of the miners was so gigantic, so frightening to the government and so inspiring

to the movement and the leadership that the British government called in the army to be on the alert.

Thus the first salvoes of the AITUC's first two congresses in the revolutionary period of 1919-22 had heralded a new age of Indian history and brought into the battlefield new forces of the national-liberation movement and the Indian revolution.

The founding of the AITUC in 1920 was an event of great historical importance. It ushered in an organisation of the workers on a class basis. It proposed to provide a central direction to that basic new organisational unity of the workers in their various places of work—called the trade unions. And appearing at a time when the national-liberation movement had begun its upsurge, it became its powerful asset by contributing new weapons of struggle in the form of the *general strike*. And, above all, it brought forward to the attention of Indian society the vision of a new social order without classes and without exploitation, embodied in the great concept of socialism.

Now, new tools, the new machines which put men to collective labour had appeared in history. The old organisation of family, caste and religion with its hereditary individual labour and tools was irrelevant to the new factory, the collectively-operated machine and the wages system. Here family, caste and religion became irrelevant as basic factors of organisation of social and political life. We had to have a new organisation of the collective working man at his place of work called the *trade union*. A new man and new organisation had appeared in Indian society. The founding of the AITUC heralded this new phenomenon. Hence the president of the founding session began his address in the most fitting way, saying:

"It is a unique occasion, the first of its kind even in the history of this ancient country of ours. In her long history extending over thousands of years, India has surely seen many a great gathering in which parts of this vast sub-

continent and all classes of its population were represented, gatherings at which were discussed and settled important and nice questions of religion, philosophy, grammar, law and politics, gatherings in which foreign scholars, and foreign ambassadors and foreign diplomats took part. But history records no instance of an assemblage that was convened solely to consider the interests and welfare of workers, not only of this city or that, not of this province or that, but of Bharatvarsha as a whole... We are living in an age quite different from anything that the world has seen or known before. That being so, the problems that face and the questions that confront us are, from the very nature of things, of a different kind from those that confronted our immediate and remote ancestors. This fact, whether we like it or not, has to be recognised."

2. Origins of the AITUC

I

In this part we shall deal with some of the organisational questions of the AITUC—such as: Why was it founded in 1920; why not earlier? Who were the persons that took the lead? Who were the organisers?

These questions have been raised by those who have written about the history of the AITUC and some of those who participated in its foundation. I am raising these questions over again here because much of what has been said does not reveal the true aspects of the matter. Even the question of the origin has been so dealt with that it does not reveal the truth.

Most of the writers say that the AITUC was founded in order to represent Indian labour on the International Labour Organisation which had been brought into existence under the auspices of the League of Nations at the end of the first world war. It was a tripartite body of representatives of governments, employers' organisations and labour organisations in each country. The nomination of the employers' and labour representatives were to be done by governments in consultation with their organisations whom the government thought to be representative of labour.

In India there were employers' organisations, but no central organisation of workers as such existed. And so the government chose "labour" representative of its own choice. This arbitrary method was resented in the trade-union movement. Though there was no central trade-union organisation as such, there were trade unions in various industries and trades and even federations.

The government of India, knowing the weakness of its position and for tactical reasons, wanted to appoint Lokmanya Tilak for the Washington Labour Conference, when he was in Britain, taking note of the opinion of workers' meetings in Bombay, before the AITUC was founded. But government made him only an adviser, i.e. a subordinate to the government-nominated chief delegate. Hence Tilak refused to go to Washington. He explained his position at a 10,000-strong workers' meeting held on 29 November 1919 behind the Empress mills (*Source Material for History of the Freedom Movement in India*, collected from Bombay Government Records, Vol. II. 1885-1920, Government of Bombay, 1958, pp. 317-18. Hereafter referred to as *Source Material II*). It was soon after this that the AITUC was called in 1920 to provide a central trade-union body to represent India at the ILO.

This presentation of the matter is not correct. Even the note which Dewan Chamanlal wrote as a summing up after the inaugural session says: "The workers were ready for a mass movement towards organisation. But the idea had not been spread forcefully among them... The time had surely come for an all-India movement and the opportunity was afforded by a comparatively trifling incident." And that "trifling incident" was the nomination by the government of India of N. M. Joshi to the Commission of Inquiry and the ILO at Geneva.

Dewan Chamanlal calls the question of ILO representation as trifling. The real reason which he mentions is that the mass movement was ready to call forth a central trade-

union organisation of the workers and so the AITUC was founded.

II

In this note Chamanlal makes the statement that "Until the month of June 1920 labour was generally in an unorganised state in India. There were a few unions in existence. But generally speaking there was no mass movement towards organisation amongst the workers." This was not due to the workers' ignorance or any innate inability. Then what was it due to? Well, the idea was not forcefully put to them so far and so Chamanlal came on the scene and did it!

How did he start? He says the matter of the workers representative to the ILO was taken up by Bombay workers, who held a meeting in Parel on 7 July 1920 and passed a resolution demanding a delegate of their choice and denouncing the nomination of N. M. Joshi to the Commission of Inquiry. It further said "That this meeting resolves to hold an All-India Trade Union Congress in Bombay and elects Lala Lajpat Rai as the first president."

It all looks so nice and neat. Until June 1920 labour in India was generally unorganised. In July, workers meet in Parel (Bombay) to denounce the government on the ILO nomination and decide to establish the AITUC. And they also elect Lala Lajpat Rai as the first president.

The facts as stated are true. There was a meeting of workers in Parel and a resolution was passed. It seems the resolution ended the unorganised state of labour in India, as it existed till June 1920, as per Chamanlal!

The note was not expected, perhaps, to go into the question as to how such an event on such a grand scale came to happen. That it was an unprecedented thing is shown by the thousands of workers and hundreds of delegates that came for the session. The note itself says that the AITUC at the first session in October itself had 800 delegates represent-

ing "no less than 500,000 workers with sixty unions who affiliated and forty who sympathised". Actually from 1919 onwards tens of thousands of workers were going on strikes, not in short spurts but prolonged ones. Hundreds of organisations, as unions or action committees in one form or another, were functioning throughout the country.

To coordinate the rising trade-union and strike movement, which was also a part of the political and economic crisis, the leaders in the political and trade-union fields were planning an organised movement. The growing crisis in the National Congress leadership on the question of tactics and forms of the national-liberation struggle were being reflected not only in the Congress organisation alone. They were taking shape in the working-class front, in the trade unions, in the strikes and even on the question of the formation of the AITUC. The Parel workers' meeting was only one move in these developments.

Chamanlal says that the session was fixed for 22 August. But it had to be postponed "owing to insufficiency of time". Here also he is not stating the facts correctly. Why he is so evasive will become clear later on as we proceed with this narrative.

Anybody can see that if the 7 July meeting was the startingpoint, certainly it could not have been expected to hold an all-India session of such a nature within six weeks. Which means that the July meeting was not the startingpoint. Things had been planned long before by the real people concerned and hence 22 August was fixed. The July meeting only gave mass sanction for the idea. But the date had to be postponed because Lokmanya Tilak, the moving spirit of the idea and the real inspirer and organiser of the working class, died on 1 August 1920.

Dewan Chamanlal had gone to meet Tilak on 20 July in Bombay, in the Sardar Griha, a Bombay hotel, where he was staying. He discussed the AITUC questions with him. Tilak was feeling unwell and had fever. Thinking that a

drive might give him relief, Chamanlal took Tilak for a drive in his car, with the hood open. The exposure seems to have worsened Tilak's illness; he developed pneumonia and died on 1 August 1920. This is what N. C. Kelkar, one of the closest disciples of Tilak, writes in his Marathi biographical volumes on Tilak.

The death of Tilak, which was the most tragic loss to the nation, took place in the midst of the rapidly-developing anti-imperialist movement in India in the period following the first world war. The leadership of the National Congress itself was in a crisis on the question of tactics of the struggle and definition of goals. And every section of the people was mobilising for the decision, which was to have been taken at the special session of the National Congress scheduled to meet in September 1920 at Calcutta.

The programme of anti-imperialist action put forward by Gandhi in the form of noncooperation (NCO) was being opposed by almost all the well-known leaders of the Congress including Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and others. Gandhi was consulting with Tilak about his opinion, as without his support no resolution could have been passed in Calcutta. Tilak was not opposed to the tactical line of non-cooperation as such because he himself had advanced it in the 1905-8 period. But his approach did not coincide with all the points of Gandhi's ideology and approach. Tilak wanted to take the Congress leadership with him while Gandhi was prepared to throw them all out and go his own way if necessary. Tilak was also cautious about the projected time-table that Gandhi had in his mind about swaraj in one year, etc. which Tilak thought utopian. While the political arguments were reaching fever heat, all sections of people had sprung up into wide and intensive political and organisational activity. Meetings and conferences of students and workers were springing up everywhere and so the AITUC was timed to meet on 22 August, before the decisive September Congress.

But Tilak died and the AITUC session was postponed to October 1920. The September Calcutta Congress met in its special session and adopted the noncooperation resolution but the act of putting momentous finality on it was left to the regular December session to be held in Nagpur, in view of the strong opposition it had in Calcutta. In the absence of Tilak, it would have been impossible to put the AITUC on to the swaraj line, as a background to September. And we have seen earlier this is just what happened. There was no swaraj resolution at the Bombay session in October 1920. But it was there in December 1921 at the Jharia session.

The founding of the AITUC, the direction of its objectives and its organisational forces, its timing and composition were not just chance events. They had a political-economic logic of the movement of the working class and the national-liberation movement, which at this time was marching with revolutionary speed and tempo. And the holding of the AITUC session was a necessary link in this chain.

The links of the chain were not coming together spontaneously or just by the chance insult of an ILO nomination or the enthusiasm of two young barristers landing in a Parel workers' meeting. The origins of militant working-class actions and a conscious preaching of trade unionism arose in the Indian working class and particularly in Bombay long ago and had its most militant political action and expression in the years 1905-8. In fact, if the terrorism of the Curzon regime had not suppressed the movements of that period, and if the National Congress had not suffered a split at Surat in December 1907, the AITUC would have been born at some point in time in the economic crisis and the intense political and economic struggles and strike battles of the period of 1905-8.

III

It is necessary to refer here to this period of our history in order to get a better understanding of the historical process that put the Indian working class alongside the other classes on to the field of revolutionary anti-imperialist struggles and their own class-battles. It is also necessary to see what key role Tilak played in these developments, whose threads he later on resumed in the postwar strike struggles and the founding of the AITUC in 1920.

The despoliation of India by the British imperialist conquerors is well-known. How their economic and political policies led to famines and plagues, to the death of millions of Indians is told by many historians, British as well as Indian. Alongside this work of destruction of a people, they were also sowing the seeds of a new social order, not because of any progressive purpose on the part of the conquerors despite Macaulay's shallow boasting but unconsciously and because of the sordid motives of using Indian labour and Indian raw material for manufacture yielding high profit rates for British capital. Thus the cotton textile and jute industries were established, tea gardens and coffee plantations, coal mines, railways and telegraphs, and alongside them engineering works grew up. Along with the new economy, the capitalist economy, its inevitable product, the working class, was being born in India, a class which had never existed in Indian history.

It took the working class in India a long time to realise its position and its power. It did not know even its wage-value, until the plague in Bombay told it that it was more valuable than what it was paid and that capital could not run without its hands.

We do not know much about how and when the first strikes took place. There is a mention of the Budge Budge Jute Mill strike in 1873. There were some in 1875 in Bombay textiles. There was an attempt at some organisation to

present a memorandum to the Factory Commission appointed by the British government in 1890 and the solitary name of Lokhande as its organiser survives. The working class was too downtrodden, exploited, awed and crushed by the infernal machine of oppression of the British owners and their Indian partners to fight prolonged battles and leave its mark on history, which it began to do by 1905.

At the time of the first war of independence of 1857, there were already a few mills and factories and a few miles of railways coming up. But neither the Indian revolutionary army of 1857 nor the British had any use for them except that we smashed the few telegraph wires that worked as the evil carriers of the unholy commands of the foreign enemy and 'satan', as our soldiers called them.

As everyone knows, our defeat in 1857 did not end the fighting. The tribal areas continued to resist the disarming campaign of the British. Bhils and Berads were captured and hanged in the bazars of Baroda town to sow terror and breed loyalty to the British crown. Tribal villages were burned and razed to the ground. Their women, particularly, were herded into concentration camps. And the hatred inspired by the fighting mother of the Bhil leader, Bhagoji Naik, can be read in the pages of British dispatches. There are many such heroic deeds of resistance in all parts of India. And the last, perhaps retreating, fight was given by the Phadke rebellion in the Deccan, led by a "mere clerk" of that name in the government office in Poona City. He raised the standard of independence, issued a manifesto, assumed the title of Shivaji the Second and, gathering a few Pathan and tribal gunmen, harassed the British until he was captured, tried and transported to the Andamans in 1880. Many British historians called it a peasant rebellion arising from the wrong land policy of the British government (see *London Times* and other papers quoted in the Marathi book *Life of Vasudeo Belwant Phadke* by V. S. Joshi).

That rebellion set the British thinking of finding some forum allowing the newly-rising political forces of Indian nationalism a means of expression. As a result, the Indian National Congress came into being, with its centre in Bombay. The question was—would the young generation of the intelligentsia, which was the inspiring and leading force of nationalism, agree to abide by constitutional goals, means and methods? Will the rising Indian bourgeoisie allow the British to continue to rule and yet find roads for its growth and improvement of the conditions of the people, consistently with the existence of the British empire and British profits? The thing was obviously impossible and the Indian intelligentsia, the organiser and inspirer of the freedom movement, made no secret of it. They used all forms and tactics of struggle and their common aim was not hidden.

The movement was taking shape under two different schools of thought. One school held the view that armed resistance must be continued and organised in a new way. The Phadke rebellion form or the tribal revolt form was too narrow-based and devoid of clear ideology and technically too weak to meet the needs of the new period.

This school of thought was not ready to wait for the politicalisation of the masses. Some of them assumed that it was not necessary. Some assumed that it existed in the very conditions of their life of misery and oppression and it required only a big jolt or spark of heroic armed action through secret organisations to put the masses into rebellion—something like a second 1857 minus the emperor. They wanted conspiratorial uprisings or individual assassination of the ruling personages. This in their opinion would serve two purposes. If the conspiratorial network was wide and sure enough, they would capture a few centres and kindle a nationwide insurrection or it may bring about vast upheavals by the masses which might even move the Indians in the army to mutiny and capture power.

The second school of thought held that armed resistance without mass political consciousness and participation would be doomed to failure. Hence the preparations for both must be done—first, mass politicalisation through the open political campaigns and other activities, such as through political newspapers, education, protest movements, boycotts, swadeshi, forms of noncooperation and so on. And, second, alongside this, preparations for training youth and student volunteers, including school boys, under the garb of celebrations in honour of historical personages or of pujas, combined with secret collection of arms, training in shooting, etc. When the masses would be into political action, these detachments would carry out the armed uprising and struggle for power.

Apart from these two there was the third school of the national movement, the liberal bourgeoisie. It was content to carry on with its demand for social reforms, eradicating the caste system, asking for concessions and reforms and finally attain dominion status through constitutional processes. They formed the major part of the National Congress and the strong growing group of Indian millowners, bankers and big capitalists backed this wing. The princes and landholders as a whole were loyal to the crown to the core.

Who were the persons who could be identified broadly with these various "Roads to Freedom"?

IV

After the liquidation of the Phadke rebellion things looked quiet for a time, except in certain tribal areas like the Santals and others or isolated peasant riots against moneylenders and landlords. Things moved a little round Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore and Madras, in working-class areas.

The famines which gripped the country and the plague in Bombay and Maharashtra brought matters to a head.

As everyone should know, there were eighteen famines

in India between 1876 and 1900 and according to official records, an estimated total of 15,000,000 people died (W. S. Lilly, *India and Its Problems*, quoted from R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Bombay, 1947, p. 106).

While the famines sent the ruined peasantry to the towns, to Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Ahmedabad, etc., or in indentured slave-labour gangs to the British plantations and colonies like Fiji, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Guiana and so on, the towns themselves were gripped by the plague epidemics. The famine-stricken were rushing into the cities, while the plague-stricken were running away from the cities. The British official Edwards in his "Rise of Bombay" notes:

"Disastrous famines in Gujarath and Deccan districts in 1899 and 1900 contributed to a flow of people into Bombay at the same time that the residents were fleeing from the city."

Where to? Death faced them on all sides. What 'peaceful' strangulation and murder of the Indian people—what crime!

It was during this period that the abovementioned revolutionary schools with two tactics or roads to freedom began to take definite shape. As can be seen, the two were not separate from each other in objectives, but differed on immediate tactics and forms of struggle. A section in the first school was composed of men who served in the different native states in responsible positions as either civil servants or in the small detachments of ill-equipped sepoy of the princely houses. They had hopes that they could put a new sense of patriotism in some of the native princes and make them the focal points of insurrection and a new edition of 1857. Some significant work was begun on this line in Baroda, Indore and Kolhapur raj. How the tactics on the princes' front did not lead to much except for some small but good gains is a different story which can be told elsewhere.

Some groups of this armed action school built secret societies like the Anushilan in Bengal. Some went about with their separate groups, like that of Chapekar brothers, Savarkar brothers and others, planning individual annihilation of the enemy.

Enraged by the atrocities of the British soldiers in the plague epidemic in Poona city, Chapekar shot two British officers in charge of plague operations named Mr Rand and Lt. Ayerst in Poona city on 22 June 1897 which was the sixtieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation. The British called them jubilee night murders. The atrocities committed by the British soldiers were the immediate cause of this upheaval. It is said the angry and wailing cries of the women of Poona city, at the public fountains, where they went for water supplies, moved Chapekar to do that avenging act.

From then on began the campaign of individual annihilation in a planned manner and with a manifesto, philosophy and forces different from Phadke's. We cannot go into the daring deeds of these groups and individuals. However philosophically and tactically wrong they might have been their heroism was appreciated by the people and due homage was paid to them. Chapekar, Kanhere, Savarkar, Madanlal Dhingra, Khudiram Bose, Ramprasad Bisimil and, later on, Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad or the heroes of the Chittagong armoury raid—are all honoured names of this school of armed action in India's history of the freedom movement.

But it is also to be noted that despite their immense sacrifices, none of their actions sparked off any uprising or even sympathetic mass action anywhere in India in this or subsequent period.

One may ask—did they expect any mass response? They did. It may be useful to put before our reader an extract from Savarkar's pamphlet published in London entitled

Bande Mataram and smuggled into India in 1909. In one place, the pamphlet said:

“Terrorise the officials, English and Indian, and the collapse of the whole machinery of oppression is not very far. The persistent execution of this policy that has been so gloriously inaugurated by Khudiram Basu, Kanai Lal Dutta and other martyrs will soon cripple the British government in India. This campaign of separate assassinations is the best conceivable method of paralysing the bureaucracy and of arousing the people. The initial stage of the revolution is marked by the policy of separate assassinations” (Sedition Committee Report, 1918 p. 11).

Digressing from the period under our study, one may remark here that this statement of policy exactly reads like that of the modern naxalites of the Charu Muzumdar school, except that Savarkar had not the advantage to add the letters “Marxist-Leninist” to his party nor the name of Mao Tse-tung to quote. Neither preindependence revolutionary nationalism of Savarkar based on individual assassination, even of the most-hated bureaucrats, roused the people to insurrectionary action, nor did the Maoist “proletarianism” of the CPML arouse the exploited masses to any mass insurrectionary upheaval for liberation and socialism in independent India. Both before and after independence, these forms and tactics have proved historically incorrect despite the amount of courage and sacrifice shown in their execution in both periods.

One interesting fact should also be recorded here. We have seen in the earlier section, how the Russian October Revolution and bolshevism found attraction and praise in the first session of the AITUC. It seems, however, that even before the bolsheviks, the Russian anarchists and nihilists also had attracted the Indian revolutionaries. When Ganesh Savarkar was arrested in 1909, he had a book with him entitled *How the Russians Organise a Revolution*. It was on secret societies and assassinations. He had also

a copy of Forst's *Secret Societies of the European Revolution, 1776-1876* in which the Russian nihilists' secret society organisation was described. Some political writers wrote about how bombs had forced the tsar to give the Duma to the people. Everyone knows the historical fact that Lenin's brother followed this road and was hanged for the assassination of the tsar. Lenin argued against that path and he succeeded with history.

V

Now we shall come to the second school of the Indian revolutionaries. How was it evolving and through whom? The theoretician and organiser of this school was Tilak. He was the only person who wanted to combine all forms of mass struggle including preparation for an armed uprising. And he first gave the working class and the trade unions a political role in furthering the movement of the anti-imperialist national-liberation struggle, along with the peasantry and the intelligentsia.

Though it is not necessary to give the biographical sketch of Tilak, yet the relevant landmarks which reveal his main direction of political thinking and work have to be indicated. As a young man, he is reported to have attended some of the secret meetings of the rebel Phadke, in which he tried to recruit followers and give his programme. Tilak did not go that road. He held before him first the task of establishing an educational institution wherein selfless and upright teachers would give young students the usual courses along with feelings of patriotism and self-respect. The teachers were supposed to work and live like jesuits, as some put it. The institutions were built but they went the way of all flesh and Tilak left his friends for the other job of education and propaganda.

That was to start a weekly paper which would go to the masses and tell them of politics and economics, their

own life's problems and the solutions. One paper, *Kesari*, was to be in Marathi and the other *Mahratta* was to be in English for all-India consumption. *Kesari* soon became the political mobiliser of the revolutionary masses. Every village in Maharashtra read it collectively and it became a real anti-imperialist mass organ.

Then he started the Shivaji and Ganesh celebrations, the rebel politics of one being covered up by the religious garb of the other. Yet it is a well-known fact that the Shivaji and Ganesh celebrations soon turned into political gatherings and vehicles for young men and even school boys to spread sentiments of patriotism and collective social service. The government and the loyalists attacked them as a cover and ruse for "seditious" and anti-British actions.

Just about the time of the Rand murder, a meeting about Shivaji Utsav took place in which Tilak and others spoke. In the speeches there were references to Shivaji's killing of Afzalkhan. Replying to critics of Shivaji on this question, Tilak said that Shivaji was justified in doing what he did and that "he cannot be judged in terms of the penal code". A report of this appeared in *Kesari*. The government took this and other material in the paper as justifying the Rand murder. Tilak was arrested, tried and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in 1897 at the very height of the plague, famine and misery of the millions, who were not yet conscious enough to know the roots of the evil and how and where to fight it.

It is necessary to mention here that the reportage article in *Kesari* was not the real nor the only reason for Tilak's arrest. A report by the ICS commissioner of the central division of Bombay on the riots in Thana district in 1897-98 says that the Kolis and Christians raised a riot against plague measures and "burnt down every plague hospital in their parishes as soon as it was erected". The report further notes:

"Meanwhile Bal Gangadhar Tilak, through the agency of a seditious Sabha in Umbergaon, was flooding the country with proclamations against payment of land revenue and urging resistance to any attempt to collect it."

This was highly dangerous for government because "in the midst of these troubles there was a partial mutiny among the police and one of them deserted with a drill book and after arming and drilling a small number of confederates went to the Ghats to raise the hill Kolis for an attack on Matheran" (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 638) which was a British hill station on the road to Poona.

The Rand incident did not tame Tilak nor made him change his line—educate, organise and rouse the masses and, in its time, lead them to insurrection. The Rand murder may be wrong tactics but he would not desert the terrorist-revolutionaries. In fact he managed to give medical and legal aid to them. So in 1902 after his release and a little look around, he put his trusted lieutenant K. P. Khadilkar to study the art of guerilla warfare, not of Shivaji's times but of modern times. How was this to be done? By studying the Boer war, which was raging in South Africa at this very time. The whole study was put before the people through *Kesari* in the form of nine articles from 17 June to 26 August 1902 by Khadilkar. They make valuable reading even today. In those days you had only to substitute the word 'Indians' or 'Marathas' for Boers regarding the question of capturing arms from the enemy, positions of the battle, the nature of the rifle, the main weapon of such war at that period, and the question of morale, ideology and arms, etc. The article on the conclusions to be drawn on theory and practice of guerilla war could not be published, because they were so explosive and explicit, so blatantly applicable to India that to have published them would have led to the suppression of the press and the imprisonment of the editors. The article was written, but withheld for legal consultation. Unfortunately in the process the manuscript was lost.

After studying the Boer war tactics Tilak thought of arms supplies, production and training. So he sent Khadilkar to the neighbouring independent state of Nepal to establish an underground arms factory. An agent of the Krupps in Germany had agreed to supply the machines for it. Khadilkar started a tiles factory as a cover, but the machines never arrived. And very soon, one of the accomplices working there revealed the scheme to someone, which led to the betrayal of the plans. The arms factory project misfired. Some feelers seem to have been put to the Russians through the tsarist consulate in India.

Why the factory? Tilak was convinced the masses were becoming more and more discontented and the middle classes in the Congress were turning to the left while the leadership was in no mood to go into political action. So if the movement burst forth, the plan of armed action in consonance with mass action must be ready. Otherwise there is no reason why a person like Tilak, who is generally described as a "constitutionalist Home Ruler" and not a very big revolutionary compared to the renowned terrorists or the post-1920 Gandhian resisters, should plan an arms factory in Nepal within months of his release from prison for 'defence' of the rack-rented peasantry and the terrorist Chapekars, who killed two high-placed British officers. The biographers of Tilak have no explanation and they are just confounded. But they go on asserting that Tilak had no plans or ideas of armed insurrection. At best he was a militant but pious Hindu Home Ruler—nothing compared to the Great Mahatma, who openly called for the overthrow of the satanic state but also condemned the terrorist revolutionaries.

The arms factory and the study of guerilla war and its tactics under the cover of the Boers were not being done for intellectual luxury nor did they fit into journalistic practice as they ran several weeks in succession and were in places so detailed as to make one think that they were written for someone's training.

VI

Then began the economic crisis and the attacks of the imperialists to control the growing discontent and disrupt the rising revolutionary ideology and organisation. The proposal to partition Bengal announced from Simla on 19 July 1905 provided the spark and the conflagration began.

The partition of Bengal was a measure to disrupt the growing national unity of the Bengali people, irrespective of religion. East Bengal which was predominantly Muslim was to be separated from West Bengal which was predominantly Hindu. But the East Bengal peasantry was radical-minded and, apart from Calcutta in the West, many of the Bengal revolutionaries hailed from Dacca in the East. Right up to the partition of India in 1947, Dacca was a storm-centre of the revolutionaries in company with Calcutta.

The partition of 1905 was calculated to put the Hindus and Muslims at loggerheads. But it worked the other way.

To fight the partition became a national issue. The movement also gave birth to more slogans—boycott of foreign goods, swadeshi, national education and finally swaraj. The song of *Bande Mataram* was taken up from the novel of Bankimchandra on the Sanyasi rebellion. And bombs began to be prepared by the underground revolutionary groups for individual annihilation of the enemy.

The political crisis received some emotional nourishment from the news of the Russo-Japanese war. The victories of an 'Asian' nation against a European nation pleased the Indians as a suppressed Asian nation. The political crisis fed by boycott and swadeshi slogans came to the relief of Indian industry particularly textiles and the bourgeoisie, which was harassed by discriminatory duties by the British to protect Manchester barons, was pleased by the boycott slogan. At the same time the compradors feared Tilak and the masses and their revolutionary upsurge for these

slogans which in their essence meant independence and swaraj. The people joined in the boycott and swadeshi campaign in defence of their country, their right and self-respect. They did not bother just now as to who made the profits from it and what the same bourgeoisie did to its own working class.

At this very period a big strike wave broke out. The first strike wave came up due to the owners' lengthening of the working day beyond the "sunset and sun rise" limits, i.e. beyond twelve to fourteen hours a day, depending on the season. In 1904, electric lights were introduced in the mills and that nullified the limits set by the sunlight rule, with the result that the working day was pushed to and even beyond fifteen hours a day. At the same time, under the plea of depression some mills worked short hours and some introduced double shifts. The *Indian Textile Journal* of July-October 1905 says about Bombay:

"The disorderly situation finally culminated in October 1905 in riots. Mobs of operative roamed from one late-working mill to another calling out workers, throwing rocks, breaking windows and, in one case, destroying the attendance sheets and records kept by the time-keeper."

Added to the increase in hours of work was the fact that the cost of living was continuously rising in the cities, one of the reasons being the export of rice and wheat to England.

Tilak at this time is found taking politics to the working class by holding meetings and writing in his papers.

A government report of 1906 says that in the meetings connected with Ganapati celebrations in Poona,

"Tilak urged the necessity of having unions and organisations throughout the country similar to those in England, America and Russia to represent the grievances of the public, and observed that the recent strike of postal peons in Bombay proved futile for want of a union. The leaders of the country, he said, had succeeded in making the present state of affairs known to all and it was now their duty to

stimulate matters by putting forward suggestions for the formation of unions with a view to approach government in a more systematic way (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 218).

The Poona paper *Dnan Prakash* of 18 December 1907 reports a meeting in Bombay on 15 December, addressed by Tilak on the boycott and other matters. The report says: "The meeting which was attended by about 5,000 persons, mostly millhands, was presided over by Tilak."

The movement of the workers and the strike struggle were not limited only to Bombay or only to the textile workers. It affected the whole country and all sections of workers. A strong plea for formation of trade unions everywhere was being made by Tilak and others through the papers and meetings.

The anti-imperialist liberation movement, with the slogans of boycott, swadeshi and swaraj, caused big upheavals in Bengal, Punjab and Madras, where it was led by Bepinchandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and Chidambaram Pillai. It took the form of peasant uprisings, strikes of workers, and student actions.

One of the most striking things in this period was that the European workers also went on strike. The railways were the key points of the strike struggle and the European loco drivers' strike on the East Bengal and North India railways in November 1907 precipitated events.

The European drivers and Anglo-Indian workers were employed by the railway companies (railways belonged to private British companies in those days) thinking that it would not be safe to entrust this key job in a vital industry to Indian workers, who being prone to political influences might go on strike. But contrary to their expectations, the European workers also struck work on questions of pay and allowances, duty hours, housing, etc.

This was a serious jolt to the government as government and to the prestige of the European despots as Europeans, when a section of their own 'ruling caste' went on strike.

The strike of the European drivers was not in any way political. It was due partly to their own grievances and partly to the strike wave in England, their home country, where their own brother workers were also in the grip of a strike wave. But the British railwaymen's union in England did not approve of the Indian strike.

In India, the strikes were being denounced as politically motivated and as part of the tactics of the extremists in the camp of the Congress led by Tilak to prepare for a revolutionary uprising. This frightened that section of the bourgeoisie which was tied up with the British and their political wing in the Congress forced a split at Surat in December 1907 and broke up the unity of the only organ and party of the national movement.

VII

The Tilak school which had in its ranks men like Lala Lajpat Rai, Bepinchandra Pal and others was consistently preaching trade unionism and politics to the working class. When the political crisis began to develop, Lala Lajpat Rai was deported to Burma. Bepinchandra Pal and many other leaders were imprisoned.

It is not possible here to survey the strike struggles of that period. But we have some articles in Tilak's paper on this question. Writing in *Kesari* of 11 June 1907, under the caption "Railway Union", he says:

"It is extremely necessary in the modern period of struggle for living to take up the work of organising unions of the western type and run them without break. Some months back an organisation called 'railway union' was established in Calcuta. It is reported that in our part also recently the postmen of Bombay have organised their union. If anywhere there are large numbers of Indians with education and understanding employed, they are there in the railway companies. If they think of it, it is quite easy for them to run such a union with unity and careful attention

Last year, Mr Eknath Ganesh Bhandare had published in *Kesari* some correspondence on this matter. We feel confident that if he himself takes the lead in this work and gets a similar type of organisation established, it will earn the sympathies of the people also. In the Kali age, the spiritual, supranatural or physical strength does not reside in each individual separately but according, as the saying goes, 'in Kali age power resides in the collective organisation', it will reside only in the organisation (union). It is needless to say that this principle, embodied in the Puranic dictum, is very valuable" (translated from Marathi).

The article in *Kesari* on 26 November 1907 with the caption "Strikes and Politics" gives us even a larger review of the strike struggles. Though it is a long piece, it is valuable enough to be quoted at length here:

"Last week the European and Eurasian drivers on the East Indian Railway went on strike. And because the European and Eurasian drivers struck work, all the engines were crippled on the spot...

"European military battalions were sent to Asansol station and government's military department took possession of the East Indian Railway. Some prominent European officers and merchants went to discuss conciliation with the engine drivers and chief railway officers and they tried to break the strike by winning over some drivers. But they did not succeed.

"This strike of European drivers has given a good dose of medicine to the bureaucracy. The strike of the telegraphists on the GIP Railway, the strike of the Bombay postmen, the Bombay policemen's leaning towards the strike, the strike of the merchants of Nagar, the strike of the traders of Sawantwadi, strike of the people in Peth, the strike of the workers in the Parel workshop of the GIP Railway, the workers' strike in some textile mills in Bombay, the strike of the workshop in East Indian Railway last year, the strike of the station masters and telegraphists on the East Indian Railway, the strike of the workers in the

Government Press in Calcutta, the strike of the workers in some mills and factories in Calcutta, and such small and big strikes have been taking place in India. During these strikes, government did not hesitate to unequivocally put the blame for them on the political movement. No other strike before inflicted such losses on the travelling public, factory owners and the government as this strike of East Indian European engine drivers. In spite of this, no one ascribes to it a political character. It is true that government has sent military police and military battalions to preserve order. But nobody says that this strike is due to political reasons. Lap dogs in the control and pockets of the government like the *Times of India* are not at all barking at the strikers in the name of political agitation. The originators and organisers of this strike being pure Englishmen, the understanding of the government that strikes in India take place due to political agitation has proved baseless. In Europe not a week passes when there is not a frightful strike going on somewhere. Nobody there says that strikes take place due to politics. Some days back, there was a decision to carry out a gigantic strike of all railway workers in England. Reduction of working hours, increase in wages, more holidays and leave privileges, and such others are the demands generally of all strikers. Not that strikes do not take place due to local and particular reasons also, but they are shortlived. To put the above demands before the factory owners or other proprietors is the right of everyone. And to demand privileges according to these demands by creating stoppage in the work of the factory owners by going on strikes is considered in Europe to be the right of all employees. Not that the British rulers are not aware of all this. But when they come to India they develop a cataract of authoritarianism on their eyes and they cease to see things as they are" (translated from Marathi).

One thing stands out from these articles. The strike movement was serious and widespread throughout the

country. Secondly, it was denounced by the press of the British ruling class as being motivated by politics and as a part of the political movement that had gathered such momentum. Thirdly, the trade-union movement was developing ideas and proposals of centralising it and giving it a new organised shape, as was already seen in Tilak's speeches before the workers in 1906. The idea of centralisation and coordination is clearly visible in them. The concrete step to founding a central all-India trade-union body was not a far cry, with the all-India strikes leading that way. The government killed that possibility by arresting Tilak and his associates and establishing a reign of terror in 1908.

The strike wave continued for quite some time at least in the textile industry. The Millowners' Association report of 1908 spoke about the workers' "growing awareness of power" and the frequency of strikes. The millowners since many years had conscious plans to prevent the unity of the workers. They purposefully brought workers from other states, with different languages, different castes and different levels of consciousness in order to make them quarrel among themselves and prevent united strike struggles. As far back as 1888, Mr Tata wrote: "... it should be borne in mind that the older operatives are getting educated and beginning to have a faint glimmer of their true position in the industrial development. They pretty freely know when to strike and when to demand higher wages" (quoted by M. D. Morris, *The Emergence of Industrial Labour Force in India*, p. 54).

So the clever Tatas planned to weaken this rising consciousness by importing labour from UP. There is on record a Tata scheme of calculated mix up of the Bombay workers prepared in the year 1897. Morris quotes Ralph C. James as saying "Mill management thinks and feels in *geographical-origin* terms... management consciously considers and plans the 'community' composition of its mill. Prejudice concerning a community's efficiency and *political* proclivi-

ties are reflected in hiring practice" (op. cit., p. 81, emphasis added).

That is how the bourgeoisie planned the disunity of our working class. But the crisis of 1905-8 and the consequent united strike struggles defeated those wily schemes of the bourgeoisie. And the workers' movement took a big stride much to the chagrin of both the British and Indian capitalists, who though politically divided agreed in the common exploitation of the Indian working class.

VIII

The rising political unity of the masses received some setback due to the split in the National Congress. The right wing led by Pherozeshah Mehta planned the split by changing the venue of the session to Surat, where he was assured help and protection against the masses who were following the left led by Tilak and which included Lala Lajpat Rai, Bepinchandra Pal and others.

At the same time, the British ruling circles began to talk of granting some constitutional reforms which later became the Morley-Minto scheme.

But the mass movement against the Bengal partition, the boycott accompanied by workers' strikes, heightened by the economic crisis could not be controlled.

At this very period the 'terrorist'-revolutionaries also intensified their activities and went into action, as was evidenced in the Maniktola Bomb Case, the Muzaffarpur killings, etc.

As had happened at the time of the Rand case in 1898, *Kesari* wrote four articles on these actions. The 'hot-heads' were criticised and their action disapproved as futile. But the main blame was laid on government's terror policies and denial of India's aspirations for swaraj.

Besides writing articles, Tilak did something more. A government dispatch says:

"On the 21st and 22nd May (1908) Tilak attended meetings of the extremists to discuss the situation caused by the discovery of the anarchist plot in Calcutta. One of the resolutions passed at these meetings was to the effect that subscriptions should be raised for the defence of the Calcutta anarchists. The meeting also passed a resolution that 'the regrettable occurrences were in their opinion due to the persistent disregard of public opinion and continued policy of repression on the part of government'" (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 223).

This was enough to give government a pretext to put their plan of repression and muzzling the Tilakite national leadership from going into action. Tilak was arrested on 24 June 1908, tried and sentenced on 22 July to six years' deportation, plus serving the unexpired portion of the sentence of 1898 when he was prematurely released due to extremely bad health, on the representation of the public and many eminent personalities including Max Muller.

The workers of Bombay were angered by the vengeful sentences and went on a general strike. All the mills closed down. And not only the mills. The middle classes, the shopkeepers, the merchants and others also shut down and there was a complete hartal or bandh as we call it nowadays.

The police and the army were called in. The people fought. The heroic struggle and hand-to-hand skirmishes and clashes between the workers and the police spread to all the areas of the city, from north to south. In the fighting there were not only Marathi workers. Factory workers, peons, young men of all professions and communities were in action. It was the first heroic political general strike of great intensity and dimensions. It lasted six days and took several days to cool off.

The terror rule and repression that followed this great struggle need not be taken up here. To show the spirit of the times and how the students were also in the revolu-

tionary stream, we are giving a report from the *Kal* of 31 July 1908 and *Rashtramat* of 1 August 1908, sent by their correspondent from London:

"I have already informed you that Mr Harnam Singh and R. M. Khan left the Cirencester College and refused to rejoin as the Principal called Nanasaheb and Laxmibai murderers. A dinner was given in honour of the two students for their resolute conduct" (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 954).

How well and wide the forces of the national-liberation struggle were advancing is reflected in the above action of two students.

The assassination actions of the national-revolutionary armed groups continued hereafter also. Dhingra killed Sir William Curzon Wylie in London on 1 July 1909. Anant Kanhere killed Jackson, collector of Nasik, on 21 December 1909. And so on.

But these actions did not evoke any response in the form of mass actions as the political revolutionary mass line of Tilak and his arrest did.

IX

What is the evaluation of the 1908 events, particularly the strike wave and the political general strike and bandh in Bombay?

The first is that the working class had taken its first step to emerge as an active fighting force of the national-revolutionary front.

Secondly, the weapon of its economic struggles, i.e. the trade union, had taken shape and was on the verge of taking an all-India form of organisation.

Thirdly, the revolutionary intelligentsia had decided to give the necessary ideological and political outlook of the anti-imperialist national revolution to the working class and the peasantry. This ideological push had necessarily to come from outside the actual ranks of the working class

because the oppressing classes, whether British or pre-British, had kept them bereft of intellectual equipment.

Fourthly, the well-planned policies of the employers to divide the workers on the basis of caste, language or religion had failed to prevent this burst of national-revolutionary unity of their class as such, though as yet they had not begun to organise as a class. The rudiments of class consciousness had begun to appear through the economic strike struggles. But they had not come to the stage of asking for themselves what a class is and what makes it. Nor had they come to the stage of asking for whom the swaraj to come was, as they were going to ask at the Jharia session of the AITUC in December 1921. As we have seen earlier, these questions were hurled on the stage of world history at the end of the first world war by the October Revolution and the subsequent wave of European revolutions and working-class actions. They could not have been anticipated by the workers in India of 1908, though the Paris Commune had put them before Europe in 1871.

The fifth lesson was that given the political ideological equipment, the working class could produce its own organisational cadres and methods to meet the demands of militant mass action.

One glaring weakness of the 1905-1908 situation was that the peasantry and tribal masses had not gone into action on any big scale, except in some parts of Punjab, Bengal and Madras.

It has always perplexed the bourgeoisie and also the petty-bourgeois intellectuals as to how the worker without any union or party or any other visible forms had organised the great action of 1908. Group after group of workers was moving and giving a type of guerilla answer to the movements of the British police and military forces. The officials themselves have raised the question as they were surprised by the skill and plan of the 'rioters'.

The answer they gave was that all this was the result of the conspiratorial activities of Tilak and his men. In this

connection it is worth mentioning a report given by Pradhan and Bhagwat in their book on Tilak which says:

“Tilak just before his trial had addressed two meetings at Chinchpokli, Bombay, on June 6th and 7th, 1908. He advised the millhands, especially the jobbers and head-jobbers to form local committees of millhands for the purpose of discouraging liquor drinking among them.”

Certainly he did not limit himself to that subject only. Everyone in India knows that prohibition in those days was one of the planks of the anti-imperialist movement and prohibition meetings were invariably hot political meetings. No wonder if those mill committees provided the leadership for the general strike of 1908.

The report of the Bombay government dated 27 August 1908 says the following on this question:

“As pointed out, the idea of organising had already been put into the minds of the millhands by Tilak not long before his imprisonment, and to prove that the seed did not fall on barren soil, I may mention that since Tilak spoke on the subject, an association has been formed styled ‘The Bombay Millhands Defence Association’. The object and reasons of this association are clear, and I do not propose to discuss them but what I desire to call attention to is the fact that it is the first step towards organisation on the part of millhands” (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 271).

The next natural question on this great event is—did anyone feel and speak out the peculiarity, the political newness of this phenomenon which had appeared on the historical scene?

It is necessary to mention in this connection the famous statement of Lenin, who noted this event as indicating the fact that the working class in India had begun to fight with anti-imperialist political and class consciousness. He said:

“The Indian proletariat has already matured sufficiently

to wage a class-conscious and political mass struggle and that being the case, Anglo-Russian methods in India are played out.”

That Lenin with his science of Marxism and the depth of his understanding should have said it is a valuable factor in our understanding of those events. Question is: did the Indian leadership do anything to understand it?

Hardly had peace come to Bombay than *Kesari* began to analyse the events. A series of five articles appeared. They had the most interesting heading—“Why is Bombay Ahead of All?” All over India there was anger about Tilak’s conviction. But no one expressed that anger as Bombay had done. Why did Bombay do it and put itself at the head of the all-India feeling of protest against British imperialism? That was the question put in those articles which were written by K. P. Khadilkar. It was his pen that had written the reports at the time of the Rand assassination which sent Tilak to jail. Again it was his pen that had written some of the articles on the Calcutta bomb affair, which again sent Tilak to six years’ transportation. It was he who wrote the guerilla war articles. Of course, all of them were written under Tilak’s instructions and sanctions. And now Khadilkar wrote a fine analysis of the 1908 events and has given us almost a class viewpoint of the events, though not so clear as one would like it to be.

The analysis sounds unusual in the writings of that period. His main proposition is that Bombay was ahead because of its men in industry and trade, i.e. what we may call the national bourgeoisie and the working class. Industrialisation binds men together in a collective as nothing else does. Agriculture fosters isolation and dependence. Industry does the reverse. Hence Bombay workers behaved as no one else. He also mentions that it was the women who organised the first protest meeting, not men. And the students too. But Bombay was ahead of all because of its working class was the conclusion that comes

out of those five articles, written between 22 September and 20 October 1908.

The *Times of India* of 25 July 1908 sums up the view of the British ruling class on Tilak, which shows its hatred and fear of the man and also the revolutionary essence of Tilak's struggle and methods:

"It was not this or that article of the seditionist for which he was brought to book, but it was the whole tenor of his life and tone of his writing that was working havoc and creating mischief in the minds and hearts of gullible and illiterate and half-educated masses of the people. His intriguing ways, his unscrupulous methods, his incitement to disobedience to lawful authorities, his pernicious influence upon the young and the unwary, his underground work, all these should be taken into account in the adjudication of his case."

This summing up by the enemy of the line of Tilak, the general strike and the battle of the masses shows how this line of revolution was far more effective and correct than any other line at that time followed by other groups of revolutionaries of the school of individual assassination and annihilation, in whose 'defence', in fact, Tilak had written those articles which were made a pretext for his conviction. And this line was also reflected in the battles of this period in Bengal, Punjab and Madras in particular.

Tilak was the only leader of the anti-imperialist national-revolutionary movement who combined all forms of struggle, including the peaceful and the nonpeaceful, legal and illegal, open and conspiratorial, always teaching and learning from the masses and always keeping himself at the head of the masses. Though he had his own religious views, he never mixed up religion with politics. The communalists and casteists tried to attack him on the question of social reforms and thereby sidetrack the main political issue of the anti-imperialist revolution and independence. But the masses knew better and remained with him till the last.

The British government, while beheading the movement with terror and force, was also forced to offer concessions. The Morley-Minto reforms introduced legislative councils (with practically no powers except to ask questions!).

They also had a Factory Commission appointed and introduced a legal limit of eleven hours on the working day in the factories and some nominal constraints on juvenile labour. But imperialist rule remained imperialist rule and kept the patriots in prison.

When the world war broke out in 1914, Tilak was released. He resumed his activities which soon brought him into conflict with government on the question of war effort, which he refused to support unconditionally. During the war, there were heroic efforts by the "armed action wing" of the revolutionary nationalists to incite mutiny in the army and to import German arms. But they all failed. And many valuable patriotic lives were lost.

X

We need not recount the story further. The world war imposed heavy burdens on the people for war loans and recruits to the army. Tilak took up the question by refusing to campaign either for recruits or the war fund which brought him in conflict not only with government but with Gandhi also and all the moderate wing of politicians. Tilak was once again prosecuted and bound down "to keep peace". He paid the security and resumed his line.

The imposition of war fund and recruit quotas on the villages angered the peasants. The workers were not yet going into strike action. But as soon as the war reached the 1917 phase and the Russian revolution took place, things began to stir. Slowly strike actions began for dearness allowance against rising prices. With the end of the war in 1918, the floodgates of mass discontent flew open. The postwar crisis began. We need not go into details. To sum up, we may say the following:

The anti-imperialist national-revolutionary front that had begun to take shape with rapid strides from 1905, the Bengal partition, the boycott, the split in the Congress and the strikes of 1907-8 had gathered within its fold the working class, the peasantry, the students and the revolutionary anti-imperialist intelligentsia as representatives of the national bourgeoisie by 1905-8.

The war gave the national bourgeoisie more economic and political strength. With the end of the war, the October Revolution and the first world crisis of capitalism, India stepped into the period of anti-imperialist colonial-liberation movement with greater force.

The working class again took its place in the struggle. The national front gathered more strength and began the attack in 1920. One of the instruments for the mobilisation of this attack was the AITUC as seen in Bombay and Jharia. Therefore let us connect our account to the foundation of the AITUC.

How did things come to it? And once again, we have to revert to the role of Tilak and his "Nationalist or Extremist Party".

Tilak went to England ostensibly to file his appeal in the Chirol Case before the Privy Council. Once there, he began his political work about which a few points are worth mentioning.

Before going to England, he sent five thousand dollars to Lala Lajpat Rai, who had been in exile for a number of years in America, for the American branch of the Home Rule League for India, which he had inaugurated on 22 October 1917.

What were Tilak's activities in England? Let us see the government dispatches on this question:

"Tilak was reported to have been taking keen interest in the military situation, especially as regards the unrest and dissatisfaction in connection with the demobilisation. He was kept fully informed by his labour friends concerning the spreading of Bolshevik tendencies in England, and was

hoping, with the downfall of the government to find scope for his activities in labour and socialist circles.

"He is also reported to have given £2000 to the Labour Party and was much disappointed at the result of the election" (*Source Material*, Vol. II, p. 313).

"With the Sinn Fein movement, too, Tilak's adherents have formed an alliance... he had... made himself as pleasant as possible to the ILP" (p. 314).

The reports go on and one says:

"He has the strongest hope of the deliverance of India by the Bolsheviks and was delighted with the Afghan imbroglio and the Amritsar riots, which occurred as a result of Gandhi's agitation...

"As a contrast to the studied moderation of Tilak's language in public, it is worth noting that in the course of a conversation about New Year's Day, he expressed his disbelief that India would ever be granted Home Rule, stated that the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme was purely a blind, instanced Egypt still a slave despite her control over her own finances, army, commercial contracts and industrial developments and stated that only by a 'clean cut', by a complete severance from England, can India look to become nation among nations" (*Ibid*, p. 315).

The English visit gave to him and his associates new sights and horizons. He saw the trade unions in action. He saw the British Trades Union Congress and the British Labour Party as well as the ILP at work.

And was it not time to think of something like that in the developing Indian situation?

With those ideas in mind, he agreed to become a delegate for the Washington Labour Conference elected by the meetings of workers in Bombay. As already stated he refused to go when he was made only an adviser to the delegate appointed by the government of India. So instead of going to Washington, he returned to India where the first thing he did was to go to the workers'

meetings in Bombay and explain to them things as they happened.

The government report says:

"On 29th November 1919, an open air meeting attended by about 10,000 was convened behind the Elphinstone mills by the leaders of the labouring classes for the purpose of presenting an address to Tilak, their chosen representative for the Washington Labour Conference on his return from England. President Mawji Govindji opened the proceedings" (Ibid, p. 317).

Tilak in his speech described conditions in England and compared the wages in India and England:

"He ... at some length explained why he had not gone to Washington in connection with the Labour Conference, the gist of which was that having been elected by the labourers as their representative, he declined to go as an assistant to the man selected by government.

"Proceeding, he said, he had brought a message from the English labouring classes. It was that they should form trade union, and the stronger they were, the sooner they would obtain their rights. They should not be deterred by opposition in this respect. He strongly recommended unity between different castes of Hindus and between Hindus and Muhammadans" (Ibid, pp. 318-19).

So here was the same theme again as that of 1908. But this time the world experience had raised new vistas.

Tilak had returned with a plan of starting a Social Democratic Party in India with a new programme, such as the National Congress so far had never attempted. Secondly, he had plans for starting English and Marathi dailies in Bombay and to make Bombay the centre of his activities, which to some extent it always had been, in the working-class and middle-class areas. Thirdly, he planned to develop the radicalisation of the mass movement and launch struggles for swaraj.

For the paper itself, Tilak had chosen Barrister V. M. Pawar as his representative and secretary of the new company. Pawar had been put in charge of making arrangements to buy new up-to-date machines. For location, he had purchased for Tilak the premises of the oldest Marathi daily in Bombay named the *Induprakash*, belonging to the well-known publisher D. S. Yande.

Tilak had also asked Pawar while organising the daily to take up the question of trade unions and the growing strike movement. It was during the discussion of these plans that the question of founding a central organisation of the trade union was worked out.

Lala Lajpat Rai was advised to return to India as things were fast changing. He came back and was welcomed at a huge public meeting presided over by Jinnah and addressed by Tilak and Mrs Besant on 20 February 1920 in Bombay. A special welcome was given to him by the Student's Council of Bombay on 21 February at the same place. Tilak agreed to preside over this meeting also. It was addressed by R. S. Nimbkar and myself. We did not invite Besant or Jinnah to this meeting, as we were opposed to both on the question of their political line.

Within a few days of this, I with one other companion, named Patwardhan alias Kamalakar, met Tilak at his residence in Khare's bungalow. We asked for directions on further work. The first task we were given was to prepare for picketing the depots from where the contractors and gangmen exported indentured labourers to Fiji and other places and to the tea gardens. Both Tilak and Gandhi had taken up this issue in a big way. We were also told to work among the workers, form trade unions and begin to assist in the preparation for holding an all-India conference.

At this time Wheeler of the Anglo-Burma Railway Servants' Association was holding an all-India conference in Bombay, in which he asked us to assist him.

Soon, Dewan Chamanlal came on the scene and joined

hands with Pawar and others. Chamanlal, hailing from Punjab, did not know Marathi and could not build a bridge directly to the workers, except through Pawar and young men like us. He could not have made Lalaji president in the Parel workers' meeting nor got the galaxy that was seen on the AITUC dais on the inaugural occasion, without Tilak's initiative and advice. How this helped we shall see in the next part when we come to the men on the platform and floor.

At the time, there were many leaders doing some work among the mill workers with a variety of societies, sabhas and unions. Among them were Bole, Achrekar, Mayekar, Baptista, Jhabvalla, etc. But except Baptista, who was a disciple of Tilak and commanded respect for his honesty and selfless work, few had any stable following. Jhabvalla was working on his own. The others were 'moderates' in politics and generally disliked strikes. So strikes just took place without the leaders and then the strikers sought the leaders to do some talking and drafting for them, for which they were paid well. Most of them except Baptista had one thing in common—they disliked politics, feared Tilak and government and would have liked to avoid all strikes. Many were caste-minded also. But the working class in Bombay, which had fought in 1908 and was now launching big strikes demanding higher wages, bonus and reduction of hours and Home Rule or swaraj, was driving every leader and shade of thought to line up with it.

And so the AITUC had to be founded and was founded—"not a day too soon", as Lajpat Rai said in his address, when somebody asked if the worker was ready for such a thing. What was really due in 1908 took place in 1920. The AITUC at last came and came with a bang as we have already seen. But the man who so much worked for it did not live to see it: He died on 1 August 1920.

3. The Dais and the Floor

There are in the pages of the record of the proceedings of the first and second sessions of the AITUC things which one might like to overlook. Having seen the picture of the grand march of the Bombay strikers at the founding session of 1920, the great all-India political general strike and hartal of 17 November 1921 against the Prince of Wales's arrival in India, and the miners' strike for the Jharia session of 30 November 1921 one is inclined to skip over what looks as the prosaic part of the reports. But they are not so prosaic as one might think. There is a world of meaning in them too.

Take, for example, the list of those who adorned the platform at Bombay and the list at Jharia. Is there any necessity to look into those faces after fifty years, during which time millions have died and millions have been born and a whole nation has been liberated and is going ahead with new faces, new names and new fames? I think it is necessary to look into those lists.

Or take the list of members of the first executive of the AITUC elected at its first session.

It is not only necessary to know who were there. It is important to note who was not there and why. History is bound to ask at least of one name—why it was not there?

As already said, the dominant note of the founding session as well as of the Jharia session was the anti-imperialist national-revolutionary movement. Its leadership was represented by the National Congress. Every class in that movement read its own class demands along with and within the general demand for swaraj. But the various classes in the Congress and the liberation movement had their own class contradictions. The workers' demands for higher wages were opposed by the employers, Indian and European alike. But the Indian employers' demand for industrialisation and protection from British competition was supported by the workers but opposed by the British.

So an unwritten historically-evolved agreement came into being. The working class and the national bourgeoisie would fight the common national enemy on a common programme of national front, and during that common fight, the national bourgeoisie and the working class should adjust as far as possible their contradictions in the sphere of economic and social demands on the basis of humanism and social justice.

This compromise was a necessity, a national necessity and also a class necessity. An anti-imperialist national unity, without giving up the class viewpoint, was put forward both at Bombay and Jharia sessions. This unity and contradiction were reflected very vividly in those names of people who sat on the dais and in the committees mentioned above.

Let us look at the founding list.

Headed by Lala Lajpat Rai, the revolutionary, there were, on the platform as the records show, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Vithalbai Patel, well-known Congress leaders. But on the Bombay platform and in the city of big industry and high finance, the heads that drew pointed attention, not only by their big pugrees but by their big purses, also, were men like Lallubhai Samaldas, Lalji Narainji, Hansraj P. Thackersey, Lallubhai D. Jhaveri. In the postwar boom period at that time when the rush for floating new companies began, many of which sank in the sea within a few years like the "South Sea Bubble", there was not one prospectus which

did not contain the name of Lallubhai Samaldas. Hansraj P. Thackersey had made millions on his prewar stocks of German dyes, whose prices rocketed when the war broke out and made Hansraj a millionaire overnight.

Two more names deserve mention in this class of rich men and they are Mavji Govindji and L. R. Tairsee.

Laxmidas Rauji Tairsee, who later was elected treasurer and in his speech promised that the AITUC would not run short of funds, was a very honest man in his personal and financial dealings, though sometimes he did things with the funds at his disposal which politically may not be correct. For example, as one responsible for the Tilak Swaraj Fund, he allowed part of it to be invested in the big Ashok Swadeshi Stores, which actually sold foreign goods. He tried to correct it when I pointed this out to him. Despite this, the AITUC had a treasurer who at that time deserved that place and when he left it, it was not his fault.

A few words about Mavji Govindji may be put on record. He too was a rich man. But he addressed meetings of workers in company with Tilak in the Parel area of Bombay. He liked research work in Indian history to be made and so he financed the publication of some of the well-known Rajwade volumes of Maratha historical records.

The proceedings mention Mian Mohommed Haji Jan Mohommed Chhotani as having donated Rs 500 to the AITUC session. This gentleman was the biggest timber merchant and saw-millowner in the city but began to lose heavily when he went over to Khilafat agitation. It is said that secret British agents set his timber-yards on fire. Later on, he tried to salvage himself by asking for a loan of sixteen lakhs from the Tilak Swaraj Fund of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, which proposal was opposed by me as being beyond the objectives of that fund and it was not adopted.

In the record, there is a mention of the resolution on Delegates to International Labour Conference being supported by Subhani. This was Umar Subhani, one of the most

progressive millowners of Bombay. It was his support which defeated the move of the loyalists in Bombay to raise a memorial to Lord Willingdon, the departing governor of Bombay. Subhani sent all the workers of his mills to the Town Hall where the sheriff had called a public meeting to pass the resolution of thanks and the memorial. There were clashes between the police on one side and the workers and students on the other. It was on this occasion that Mrs Jinnah gave a bold lead to the people on the streets by standing along with them and shouting slogans and thus earned deserved fame. This agitation was launched principally by B. G. Horniman, the editor of *Bombay Chronicle*, who was later deported. A big part was played in it by Jinnah also. And hence both were at the AITUC session, along with Umar Subhani.

Umar met a tragic end. Due to the machinations of the British government, Umar failed to meet his cotton contract on the market and lost first his prosperous mills and then all his fortune. He ended his career by committing suicide. When we young college boys started a students' magazine in English in 1917 Subhani gave a handsome donation to it. He financed the *Bombay Chronicle*; the activities of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and many of its leaders, including Mrs Sarojini Naidu.

The list of prominent names has not mentioned N. C. Kelkar, who took over the work of Tilak after his death. In the session, he moved the resolution supporting the textile workers' strike. But later he and his party did not support the NCO movement, especially of the students. He really was a great scholar but not a revolutionary political leader, despite the training which his preceptor Tilak gave him. He was a good liberal democrat.

Not to forget the champions of the women's movement, attention may be drawn to two names—Miss Joshi and Mrs Avantikabai Gokhale. Miss Nagutai Joshi was a doctor by profession and one of the most beautiful women in the social circles of the day. She and Mrs Jinnah brought a dazzle to

the platform, by the side of Mrs Gokhale, who was a serene, steady, social reform worker in those days and spoke on public platforms.

Just a little away, one could not miss seeing the slim, handsome and cultured figure of Syed Abdulla Brelvi of the *Bombay Chronicle*. He was an asset to the national movement. Some eighteen years later, he was on the Bombay Textile Labour Inquiry Committee, under the Congress ministry, and was helpful in giving a good award to the workers.

K. F. Nariman, a young radical Parsi, was at that time an exception in the Parsi community which as a whole took moderate and loyalist positions in the politics of the day. He later sprang to fame, when he exposed the corruption in the Bombay government in the Back Bay Reclamation Scheme, in the well-known Harvey-Nariman Case. He was in the thick of Congress politics, until Sardar Patel nearly ruined his career and reputation in the 1937 crisis of ministry-making.

That was our national bourgeoisie on the AITUC platform right from the progressive millowners, company promoters, merchants and traders to modest middle-class men and women, lawyers and solicitors like Kher, Ginwalla, Nanavati, etc., and staid upper-middle-class women's leaders.

I need not point out to Mrs Annie Besant and her retinue. B. P. Wadia had certainly the right to be there because of his Madras Labour Union. But as a follower of Mrs Besant, he could not make much headway. Mrs Besant had lost her former standing, as a defender of "India as a Nation"; because of her opposition to Tilak and Gandhi and support to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

It should, however, be noted that the platform was not all of congressmen. The Besant-Wadia group was not of the Congress. N. M. Joshi, who later became one of the great builders of the AITUC, did not belong to the Congress. Nor many of his liberal friends like M. D. Dalvi, Ginwalla, etc.

Opposite to them but cheering them sat the working-class and student helpers. The political-minded student groups

had been mobilised for all the odd jobs of the Congress, in which our Wilson College group was the biggest and most politicalised. The workers who came could not be put into that small theatre. Hence they were spilling over into the bylanes and the maidan, which was just across the road. There were five textile mills within half an hour's walking distance from the session, besides the docks. Though their great idol, Tilak, had died and not many of the leaders on the platform had direct working-class appeal, except Baptist, the very atmosphere of political radicalisation and the current strike struggles drew the workers to the session.

As regards the students, that section which came from the poor middle-class belonging to the Marathi-Gujarati people had come over to politics and to the movement led by Tilak and Gandhi and the Congress.

The workers and student groups are not listed on the platform. But they are found in the list of the Standing Committee members, of whom a few should be mentioned.

A faithful person who stuck to the trade unions till his last was the modest but active worker called Bapu Ramchandra (Shinde). He was a worker in the tramway workshop and was always busy with his union work at the cost of his health and his wages. Another name was Shaunkar Ladoba (Mhapankar) who later became a controversial secretary of the Bombay Girmi Kamgar Union in the stormy days of 1929. Pandurang Sabaji Masurkar still carries on the work of a Tilak Service Society. Mistri Karam Ilahi has perhaps left no record. But one can say that to have about twelve workers in the Standing Committee of 82 was not bad for that period, but not so good either.

Were any of the shining millionaires on the platform taken on the committee? Thank heavens, none of them—they did not come in. Not even Umar Sobani. All of them left it to L. R. Tairsee and partly to Mavji Govindji.

Our revolutionary student group—which due to the non-cooperation call and other political and social activities was in the forefront—had its place not only in the session but

also in the committee. Our best speaker and most turbulent, irrepressible organiser, Nimbkar, had made his speech on a resolution. Another of our ace organisers, V. D. Sathaye, had also made a speech. But we had no time to sit on the Standing Committee or continue to be at the call of Chamanlal and Pawar, who did not recommend themselves much to our continuous allegiance and service. They had neither a proper plan or method of work, which later on led to quite a disaster, but which need not be discussed here. But we had a fine active, outspoken and brave young man in our group. He was fond of the Irish example and their republican army. We put him on the Standing Committee. His name is Nadkarni.

I myself did not go on the committee. I was conducting a students' strike against compulsory teaching of the Bible in the Wilson College. For that reason I and twelve others (two of whom were put on the AITUC Standing Committee) were thrown out of the college on 9 October 1920. There was also the additional reason that I was spearheading the noncooperation movement of the students in Bombay, for which we were organising a conference under the presidentship of Rev C. F. Andrews. I was chairman of the reception committee. That conference got the foreign delegates who had come for the AITUC session to speak. It met on 18 December 1920, on the eve of the Nagpur Congress session, to which we sent trainloads of workers and students to defeat the opponents of the NCO.

The other person who represented our view, though not of our student group, was G. K. Gadgil, a very self-sacrificing, efficient, hardworking young man. He was made one of the assistant secretaries. Chamanlal put him on the fabulous salary of Rs 250 per month and himself on Rs 500 as general secretary. Such salaries in that period looked scandalous. But Chamanlal and Pawar were out to make the AITUC look at least on paper like the British Trades Union Congress, which they had seen in England.

But Gadgil never got his wages. He borrowed, lived and

starved and ultimately in despair and grief left the movement. We could not trace him again. The entry in the records against his name that he got Rs 900 as salary (for nine months) is a bogus entry. And it reveals its truth by the pompous remark made twice in the records that D. Chamanlal makes a donation to the Trade Union Congress of all salaries due to him.

It is not relevant to pursue this aspect of the matter here because many unwholesome developments took place in Bombay in the next two years in the AITUC office. Chamanlal relieved Pawar of his general secretaryship and became himself the general secretary. Of course, Chamanlal was more active and political than Pawar, who later in his life went to Gwalior state and became a minister there through his family connections. As a minister he tried to suppress the textile strike there. In the resulting clash several workers died and Pawar had to go.

Another young man who worked hard with Gadgil at that time was G. S. Kanthi, who also left soon.

We cannot fail to notice the name of V. Chakkarai Chettiar. Later, in AITUC history, he became its president in the period 1952-57.

One more name in the list worthy of attention is that of A. B. Kothatkar. This is the famed adventurer in Marathi journalism in Bombay, who initiated a new style of reportage and satire. He gave good publicity to workers' activities in his well-known daily *Sandesh*.

The second session of the AITUC at Jharia showed the same picture of national front as in Bombay but with a difference. It was in essence a congress of coalminers. At Bombay you could not say that it was only the textile workers or postmen or tramwaymen and railwaymen who dominated the gathering.

In Bombay the topmost section of the Indian industrial houses, some of whom had built their relationships with the British even before 1857 and more so after, refused to take

note of the trade-union movement or the AITUC. The European houses, of course, did not. All of them had seen what fire the working class showed in 1908, whose memories they had not forgotten. But many of those Indian sections who had come up in the beginning of the 20th century and particularly during and after the war were not afraid to patronise the opening session of the AITUC. The Tatas, Patis, Fazalbhoyas, Bradys and Sassoons scoffed at the 'show', both of the AITUC and the National Congress. But the house of Lallubhai Samaldas, Hansraj Pragji and Subhani saw the signs of the new age. It was that national bourgeoisie which wanted swaraj of their own, in which the Mahatma had allocated a harmonious place for all classes and no class struggle. Lala Lajpat Rai's address did not disturb them.

The Jharia session showed a new feature which, though in class-essence was the same, was differently composed. Partly it was a retreat from Bombay and partly an advance, a reflex of the growing sharpness of the contradictions.

At Bombay, the Reception Committee chairman was Baptista, a barrister and a well-to-do man. But he was known to be championing the workers' cause in his own way. In Jharia, the Reception Committee chairman was Ramjash Agarwalla, himself a big mine-owner. He had spent thousands of rupees to build a big pandal for the session. At the same time, the mine-owners, both Indian and European, had opposed holding the session in Jharia and asked for a ban on it. But the government which by now came to realise the mood of the masses did not take the risk.

Ramjash Agarwalla made a speech, in which he declared: "Our Hindu society has evolved on the socialist basis" and asked: "do we not all feel the call of the epoch? It is the epoch of the sudra. It has come to raise the sudra from the dust to the throne". But to realise that socialism, the workers must "learn to suffer, suffer and suffer again". I wonder how it would have sounded in Bombay!

And, as if to make the sudra feel the touch of the throne, Chamanlal wired to the press from Jharia on 5 December the following news item: "The Chairman of the Reception Committee, the genial and kind-hearted Ramjash Agarwalla, and Vice-President, Seth Hardeodas Agarwalla, presented *gold medals two each* to Chhotalal Jain, Jagannath Gupta, Secretary, Reception Committee, Lala Daulat Ram, C-in-C of Tilak Seva Samiti, and Gopal Krishna Gadgil, Assistant Secretary of the AITUC..."

The national bourgeoisie was at our service in Jharia as much or more than in Bombay. But Jharia showed another special feature. The representative and president of the *European* "Indian Mining Association", Pattinson, attended the session. He even made a speech on how workers can improve their earnings and conditions by full six days' work and how his brethren were prepared to negotiate things with the leaders of the workers. And when the resolution on hand-spinning and weaving was put to vote, "*even Europeans attending raised their hands*". Of course, they did not raise their hands on other resolutions!

Why did the Europeans in Jharia attend and not in Bombay? The spirit of revolt had matured more during the one year from Bombay to Jharia. The national strike against Prince of Wales's visit was a warning of what was coming. The Europeans, isolated as they were in the mining area, unlike in Bombay, were finding a safety valve to sidetrack the miners' attack. Secondly, the Indian mine-owners, despite Ramjash Agarwalla, had shown hostility to the session and to Agarwalla. The Europeans, by attending, sought to divert the attack to the Indian owners in whose mines the conditions of work and wages were worse than in those of European owned mines. The meaning of this shrewd tactic was later realised by the Indian mine-owners. They realised their mistake and waited upon the AITUC President to explain and express regret. In Bombay neither the Europeans attended nor did the Indians regret. Tatas banned the workers from going to Jharia and the

session passed a resolution against this. Tata textile workers in Bombay flocked to the session, but Jamshedpur's iron men could not go to Jharia.

In essence, the national front at Jharia was the same as in Bombay. Pattinson's attendance at Jharia should not be exaggerated. None of the European jute millowners and their Indian partners cared to look at Jharia, except to warn the viceroy of the impending catastrophe and act. Hence the Jharia session did well to pass a resolution moved by R. Agarwalla himself, saying: "This Congress condemns the attitude taken by the Indian Mining Association, the Indian Mining Federation and the Chamber of Commerce and warns them that such attitude will only precipitate the bitterest of class wars between employers and employees."

Swaraj was to dawn on 31 December 1921 according to the resolution and promise of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress. So all the Brahmins and Kshatriyas and all the Agarwalla clans wanted to keep in step with the new sudra and his epoch, "to raise him to the throne"—not to rule but to suffer and suffer more!

Jharia was one step ahead of Bombay because the Indian revolution had taken a big stride from Bombay, with the rousing slogan of "Swaraj in one year!" The Jharia session looked like a roaring sea of miners, everywhere with women and children and all, surging up from the "death-pits" of Bihar and Bengal. Swami Vishwananda, their leader, shouted the warning of history to bring reason to the employers.

He said, "the spirit they were seeing today around them was not engendered by him, but it had come from outside and if they were to stem the tide of the surging wave, the only remedy lay in the Trade Union Congress. And if proper steps were not immediately taken, Russian Bolshevism would enter India and would spread like anything."

The threat succeeded and Pattinson agreed to give a wage increase to the miners—whether to stem bolshevism or the

that the workers' demands were right and the millowners wrong, he defended their strikes also. Thus Gandhi was not against formation of a union and a strike.

For a strike, he laid down two absolute preconditions. One was that the demands must be just. Secondly, the workers must agree to submit them to arbitration. Strike was justified only if the owners refused arbitration. And who is to judge as a preliminary that the demands were just, if the employers rejected to put them to arbitration? Gandhi himself would judge and then decide whether the strike be supported or not.

His third tenet was that workers in one place and industry should not join their union in a common organisation with unions and workers in another place or trade. Such a combination would lead them into politics and violence. Unions must not do politics. Workers individually as citizens, as Indians, surely must support swaraj and the noncooperation movement. But only as individuals, i.e. as part of the Indian people. Hence they could join the Congress individually. But their union had no business to join in hartals or undertake political strikes. The moment they do that they become a class apart. It leads to evil and hence to violence.

Gandhi conducted two strikes of the Ahmedabad textile workers. He helped to build the Majoor Mahajan. But he did not want them to join the AITUC. He had not wanted the AITUC as such, as it would inevitably lead the workers into politics and class conflict. At the very moment he was calling upon the whole country on hartals, he did not want the workers to go on strike. But the workers did go on strike, much to his displeasure.

I do not want to go into all the aspects of Gandhi's approach on these vital questions, including his doctrine of treating capitalism as a system of trusteeship and the capitalist as a trustee of social wealth. Some people think that in this principle, he negated private ownership by implica-

tion. I do not wish to go into this question here. This trusteeship is an old Hindu concept of the varna system and equilibrium of rights and obligations based on that system. It has nothing to do with the modern concept of negation of private property, i.e. capitalist property and class relations.

As history developed, Gandhi modified some of his earlier ideas. His disciples formed all-India organisations of unions and the only Gandhian concept they adhered to was insistence on compulsory arbitration and opposition to strike. His votaries today join international organisations also.

But here we are speaking of Mahatma Gandhi and the formation of the AITUC. From the above remarks, it is clear why he did not want to attend or send a message to the AITUC sessions, both at Bombay and Jharia.

Some might say that Gandhi had no time and was too busy with the noncooperation campaign. It may be pointed out that on 29 April 1920, he went and met Tilak at his Sinhadgad residence, near Poona. In May 1920, he was conducting Ahmedabad textile workers' strike. There was arbitration and an award which the workers and some owners refused to accept. So politics had not prevented Gandhi from doing strike and trade-union work.

On 3 October, just four weeks before the Bombay session, "he presided over a meeting called by Sobani, Banker and Pawar to introduce NCO to the workers". The record says that the speakers were Gandhi, Shaikat Ali, Dr Savarkar, Ginwalla, D. R. Mayekar and others. All of these except Shaikat Ali were in the AITUC session.

It would not be out of place to quote here a record of his speech made in a meeting held to celebrate "Labour Day" in Ahmedabad on 18 April 1920. He addressed the workers saying:

"They should cooperate with the millowners. They wanted a ten hours day but they should do more work than they were doing at present in twelve hours in those ten. They should have their union and disputes should be

referred to arbitration. They must not go on strike and they must abide by the rules of their unions." The meeting was addressed by Seth Mangaldas Girdharilal, president of the Millowners Association, and by Ambalal Sarabhai (*Source Material*, Vol. III, p. 272).

Unfortunately by 3 May 1920 the spinners of Ahmedabad had gone on strike.

So if Mahatma Gandhi did not attend the Bombay session or welcome it, it was not because he was not near or was busy elsewhere or those who were preparing for the session were not in touch with him.

He was just not ready to approve of a central body of the workers' trade unions.

Alongside this, one finds Gandhi saying the following on a report of a strike in the Fiji islands where Indian workers were held as slaves under the Indentured Labour Act:

"The *Morning Post* believes that the strike in Fiji was due to the efforts of a Sadhu sent there by me. Now I do not know who the alleged Sadhu is. I have certainly sent no one to Fiji to advise a strike. At the same time, the strike having been declared in Fiji, the strikers have my sympathy. All the evidence in my possession shows that Fiji is a huge exploitation camp in which the poor Indian labourers are used by the sugar planters for their fabulous profits" (Gandhi, *Works*, Vol. 19, p. 558—a Government of India publication).

This was in regard to Fiji, outside India, where the European planters held the Indian workers as indentured slaves. Gandhi took up the cause of Champaran indigo peasants against their European masters. But such a statement did not come from him with regard to workers in India under Indian owners or even European owners. I do not know if he ever endorsed any of those big strikes that were raging at the time of the Bombay and Jharia sessions. But one need not pursue the subject more at this stage. The new working class in India was still a mysterious, highly explosive, powerful and unknown force to

Gandhi. Even in Ahmedabad, where he had such an influence, he barred the workers from joining in the political hartal called on 20 March 1920 as he was told by the authorities that the workers' participation would lead to violence!

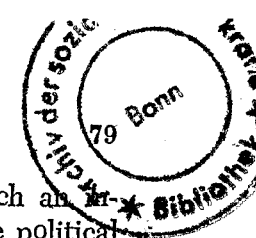
This is enough to tell us why while Lokmanya Tilak had agreed to become the Vice-President of the AITUC Reception Committee, Mahatma Gandhi refused to have anything to do with it.

What would have happened if he had joined and tried to bring his tenets on the AITUC platform? At the Jharia session, where all the miners had gone on strike to join the AITUC session and was resounding with the slogans of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and "Swaraj", what would Gandhi have done, if he had agreed to come? Would it have changed the Mahatma or the miners? It is my personal opinion that things would have turned for the better, if like Jawaharlal Nehru, C. R. Das and Subhas Bose Gandhi had also taken part in shaping the AITUC.

Meanwhile, the AITUC after its foundation session had adopted the following aims and objects:

"The object of the congress shall be to coordinate the activities of all the labour organisations in all the trades and in all provinces in India and generally to further the interests of Indian labour in matters social, political and economic."

There was not a word of revolution or socialism in this clause or in the constitution.



4. International Affiliation

The question of international affiliation of the AITUC has been a stormy subject throughout its history. As an international working class, it is inevitable and necessary for it to have international relations with its brothers everywhere and also to join in a common organisation on a world scale to defend its interests and fight its enemies.

The subject came up at the foundation session itself because some of the foreign delegates as, for example, from the British TUC and the Labour Party were eager to get India and its only central trade-union organisation in the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). The IFTU was politically an adjunct of the Second International. During and after the war, the Second International had split on the question of support to the war and it had its effect on the IFTU also.

The IFTU requested the AITUC to affiliate to it, but the matter was deferred to the Standing Committee (15 June 1921).

The differences and split in the IFTU (Amsterdam) was followed by the formation of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) with its headquarters in Moscow and bureaus and committees in various countries. The RILU supported the revolutionary movements of the peoples of the colonies for independence, while the IFTU, dominated by the thinking of the British TUC and the reformist Eu-

ropean organisations, had never supported the demands of the colonial peoples, not even the Home Rule demand of the Irish people or the demand for self-government of the Indian National Congress. In such conditions, it was difficult for the AITUC leadership of 1920-21 to join the IFTU and agree with the advice of the British delegates.

Very soon, however, Tom Mann and N. Watkins of the British Bureau of the RILU in London addressed a letter to the AITUC at Jharia. The letter was published in the *Bombay Chronicle* of 3 December 1921. The letter speaks for itself and we need not repeat its contents. It invited the AITUC to join in its congress to oppose the machinations of imperialism and its reformist supporters in the IFTU and the British TUC, which had failed to fight the India Office bureaucrats who prevented Horniman and Saklatvala from attending the AITUC session. The letter said, "A shortsighted labour movement of the past... permitted the slavery of western capitalism to be enforced upon the innocent, helpless human beings of the East and we have now all seen the result."

The AITUC did not affiliate to the RILU also or attend its sessions.

The leadership of the AITUC received a slap in the face by the British TUC session refusing to admit Horniman and Saklatvala, who had been elected AITUC delegates, to attend its congress.

Thus the AITUC remained unaffiliated both to the IFTU and the RILU.

And it continued to remain so till the year 1945, when the united World Federation of Trade Unions was formed, with all the world trade-union organisations including the British TUC in its fold. The AITUC joined the WFTU from its very foundation date.

Whatever be the difficulties, internationalism and fraternal association and common action in unity with trade unions and with the world movement in some form or other is now

an accepted tenet for all schools of thought in the trade-union movement, and neither the AITUC nor any trade-union organisation in India can opt out of it. As Lajpat Rai put it—we are a class and we are international. Hence every trade union in India upholds the slogan;—“*Workers of the World, Unite!*”

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The AITUC had become a fact. The Indian working class had forged a new weapon of its own, not only for itself and its own class tasks but also for participating in the anti-imperialist national-liberation movement of the whole country which, after the suppression of 1905-8, was now attaining new heights, with greater sweep, unity and clarity of aims, with both national and international aspirations, fraternity and unity.