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Industrial Relations, Workers' Welfare and the Nationalist Movement: The Delhi Cloth Mills, 1928-'38

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DECLARATION

I certify that the dissertation entitled, "Industrial Relations, Workers' Welfare, and the Nationalist Movement: The Delhi Cloth Mills, 1928-'38" submitted by Nita Kumar in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) of the University is bonafide work to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for their consideration.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the world of academics and research, an M. Phil. disseration is a small thing. My M. Phil. dissertation is particularly small. I may even venture to remind readers that it satisfies the requirements for the degree in that it is based on a study of primary sources, and incorporates original interpretation and analysis. Constraints compelling me to research strictly within Delhi defined the limits of the subject, and as for its choice, hopefully the subject will justify itself.

For a topic of such a restricted scope, the debt of gratitude I bear to some people is out of proportion, and it may well seem to them that I bothered them to unnecessary extents. Certainly, my reliance on them was immense, particularly at the first stage when I needed to stop groping and start finding.

In this context, I would like to thank Sri R.R. Prasad for the first guidance regarding source material, Smt. Narayani Gupta for introducing me to my most valuable repository, and Dr. K.B. Lall for opening up an approach to "buzurg" Delhiwallahs.

I am exceptionally grateful to Sri K.K. Ray for allowing me to consult old Statesman files. Sri Kachroo, Sri Ravinder Singh, and "Panditji" of the Delhi Archives were unflinchingly nice in making all that I needed available. Both Dr. Bharat Ram, and Sri Vinay Bharat Ram were kind

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enough to give me access to certain records of the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Co. Ltd.

I was especially lucky in having two guides, Dr. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, and Dr. Bipan Chandra, from both of whom I tried to extract the maximum possible help. I believe that I could have done even better, and it is only for this reason that I wish that my M. Phil. could continue a little longer.

Finally, I would like to thank very warmly, Sombabu for his patient discussions, and Raman chachi, Chandana, and Amarbabu for board and lodging off and on.

January, 1978 - Nita Kumar

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The present work set out to be a study of the Delhi Cloth Mills during the Depression of the 1930's, including the DCM workers and their trade union activities. The secondary sources on the DCM gave a picture of growth on every front: production, sales, profits. At the same time, they spoke of excellent labour relations, unusual labour welfare schemes, and a general atmosphere of industrial peace. That both these phenomena viz., the expansion and the industrial peace, occurred during the Depression was interesting enough to prompt inquiry into the reasons why.

The broad factors responsible for the expansion were determined, but the emphasis on this aspect of the study became gradually reduced. These factors are now discussed briefly in Chapter I, and Chapters II, III, IV and V contain an extensive discussion of the workers, their trade unions, and their political activities.

The reason for the change was a shift in interest as the research progressed. Once the conditions responsible for the successful functioning of the industrial unit were broadly understood, it did not seem as attractive to study further the successful functioning itself, as to inquire into the repercussions of these conditions on the only human "factors of production", the workers. As a result, the study resolved itself into not one of the DCM expansion during the Depression, but one of the DCM workers during the

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Depression, with the expansion forming the background.

The very paucity of material directly dealing with workers further increased the attractiveness of the subject, by complicating the answers to seemingly straight-forward questions. It was often discouraging to feel that relatively simple matters like workers' earnings, or conditions of work, needed so much cross-questioning. The special subjective understanding achieved during the course of this work was that these simple matters were the most important facts about the objects of study. A cliche may be said to have been comprehended in practice: that "Common people", who never make news or leave behind records, form an integral part of those processes of which we otherwise only pick out that which is known as "historical".

In the case of the Nationlist Movement, for example, one of the questions that is put forward with increasing impatience is: How far did the lower classes participate in this supposedly broadbased Nationalist Movement ?

In the case of the Depression of the thirties, it is essential to find out in detail how the industrial workers, the lowest rung of the urban ladder, fared in the context of the economic and consequent political changes.

Similarly, for the "Depression" may be substituted "the early stages of industrialization", and it is self-evident that the lives of workers at such a time is an unavoidable field of enquiry.

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Or for the "Nationalist Movement" we can substitute "a colonial structure" and ask the question: how were the workers, a currently weak, but potentially powerful, group, treated at the hands of an Imperialist Government.

These are, in fact, the four key themes around which the following study is based: the conditions of workers in a colonial and early industrial setting, and the influence upon them of the Depression and the Nationalist Movement.

These are all large questions, and a "case-study" like this has its limitations in answering them. The danger is not primarily from exceptions masquerading as the rule; these can be easily enough distinguished after sufficient immersion in the subject. If there are doubts expressed in this dissertation, it is to a large extent due to insufficient knowledge of conditions in other parts of the country, and the world, and at other times. The main problem is inadequacy of data.

The Data

Since "inadequacy of data" may not be used as a defence for shortcomings in analysis, since it should be actually anticipated in history writing, the other difficulties in data collection will be described. This is done at the risk of redundance, for many of the problems faced here are typical of the data altogether.

Government records turn out to be the richest source of information for our purpose. These are so transparently

biased that they may almost never be used in isolation.

Firstly, causality is almost always confused, reflecting the Government preference for seeing the people as divided by communities and illiterate and backward to the point of not judging their own actions. An action is therefore not ascribed by the records to a purpose on the part of the actor, but either to an accident, or to sheer ignorance.

At the same time, the threats to law and order are magnified. On the one hand, the participation of people in processions and hartals is due to their gullibility and is not indicative of any concern. On the other hand, all such activities, especially if labourers are involved, have to be seriously watched, for they constitute carefully hatched plots to undermine the Government. This divided attitude makes it difficult to judge the real strength or extent of the workers' activities - when data from other sources is absent.

There is often sheer inaccuracy in the Government material. It frequently presents a picture of what Government would like to have found rather than what it did. The two reasons for this are: firstly, the stress on maintaining calm and harmony led to the ignoring of many conflicts, or threats of them. Secondly, the job of reporting or surveying was often merely completed somehow, with no attempt to make a realistic assessment of the subject. The Industrial Surveyor of Delhi's statistics on labour are clumsy and inconsistent. His descriptions, as for example of the welfare work of the DCM in the Annual Factory Reports, are simplified and idealised.

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The reason is merely superficiality, and the execution of a job with proper bureaucratic finesse, i.e., without interest in those it directly concerned.

Within the category of "government data" comes certain material which presents so much contradiction that it resolves itself. Reports on the application of the Royal Commission's recommendations, for example, or correspondence on proposals of labour legislation, contain such a variety of opinions arranged without plan, that they may be checked against each other until some kind of consistency is achieved.

The second important source for this research were the Congress files in Nehru Memorial Library, dealing with provincial and labour affairs. There is little relating to Delhi because of its relative unimportance. This material does not have the saving grace described above, that is, there is little sequence in the documents. Almost all are difficult to check against others.

The result in a discussion, even within the narrow bounds of the present subject, in terms of "it seems that" and "the probable conclusion is...." This is aggravated by the state of the company's own records. Many of these are, again, "official", i.e., superficial, versions, and many were not made available at all. This was also a reason for relegating the study of the company itself to the background.

The hope that some "private papers" could be unearthed somewhere was not given up to the end. This project was partly undertaken, in its original form, on the conviction that there

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would be plenty of Lala Shri Ram's papers to sift through. Apart from a few letters maintained in a separate Business History Section of the DCM, the papers were not made available inspite of various attempts.

The most trustworthy source turned out to be the two dailies, The Hindusthan Times, and The Statesman, to different extents. The latter, with its profound Imperialist bias, leaves out many local Delhi happenings for the sake of local British happenings. The Hindusthan Times gives all the news, and is excellent as a source of facts. It does however deprive us, because of its lack of comments, of a source to tell us what took place as it seemed to a contemporary from a stand fairly opposite to that of the Government.

This missing information was attempted to be supplied by interviews. Unfortunately, the most active of the public figures of the time are no longer alive. We could search out either their relatives, who had not a single new or insightful item of information to impart, or we could find certain people who had been associated with labour and politics on the periphery. These were not more helpful, either because they could not recollect, or because they-embittered, no doubt, by years of sameness - evidently engaged in wishful thinking, not in testifying to history.

What remain to be mentioned are the secondary sources. In 1948, S.D. Punekar deplored the absence of "a Webb or a Cole to write a History of Indian Trade Unionism or a History of the Indian Working Class Movement".

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Since his time, many ventures to fill in the gap have been made, among them Punekar's himself, Trade Unions in India (Bombay, 1948), and the literature on the Indian labour movement is constantly reaching vaster dimensions. One of its outstanding features is that in most cases, a la Cole, the effort is to present a comprehensive survey of the whole labour movement with all its complexity. Particular problems of labour and trade unionism are very seldom taken up for ~~the~~ intensive study, unfortunately for the researcher on labour. Some of the thus unexplored areas are systematically listed out in Labour Research in India (Bombay, 1970), one of the many works of perhaps the most prolific "data collectors" and "synthesizers" in the field, V.B. Singh.

Given this shortcoming, it is the survey type secondary sources that provide the only background reading for a study on labour such as this.* The latest work on the subject is Sukomal Sen's Working Class of India - History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1970 (Calcutta, 1977), and, on the whole, representative of all the work on thes subject. We shall look at this book below, and in the process, be able to assess most of the other works alongside.

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* "Background" only theoretically, however; by far the better method of procedure is to make one's conclusions from primary sources first, then try to distinguish either supporting or conflicting views in the secondary sources. Only thus can the salient features of the subject be marked, as is done above. A random reading of any of the books mentioned in this discussion would give an impression of far more confusion and impreciseness than the discussion makes it seem.

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A labour history must have, first, a general perspective, i.e., it must describe those features that are characteristic of all labour movements, such as its economic base, its forms of organisation, and the significance of trade unions. The last, for example, always

> belong to the triangular struggle of the State, Capital and Labour. Each of these has its own problems that cross those of the other two....The State's problems lie in the sphere of maintenance of law and order, the employers are motivated by the motive of maximum profit-making, while the workers desire to improve their working lives. It is for this reason that the workers' organizations formed for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of employment naturally come in opposition, not only with the employers' associations, but many a time also with the machinery of the State. (Punekar, p. 134)

The second, accompanying perspective, must be a particular one. The peculiarities which accompany the growth of a labour movement in each country must be carefully noted, in fact, highlighted. All camps of historians falter in performing this task. Only a few Marxists, eg, allow themselves to find that the working class has not always and everywhere been powerful, politically conscious, and acting in unison towards a directed goal. At the same time, this aberration from the 'scheme of things' must be examined, not accepted as a priori. Most non-Marxists fail to do so, as they fail in grasping the full implications of Imperialism, or capitalist exploitation. For example, Rajani Kanta Das writes on workers;

> For centuries the people of India have lived more by thoughts and feelings than by material goods....The ideals of ascetism and self-renunciation have reduced the number of wants to a minimum. What the social ideals have started, economic necessity has accomplished. By far the majority of the people live in extreme

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simplicity and poverty. (Factory Labour in India, Berlin, 1923, p. 154)

Histories of the Indian labour movement are written either by participants, trade union leaders like Shiva Rao, V.V. Giri, V.B. Karnik, Ahmad Mukhtar, and lately, Sukomal Sen; or they are produced by those concerned with present conditions of production, labour welfare, and industrial relations, seeking to clarify these problems in the perspective of the past. Punekar is the outstanding example of the latter group. For both, data on labour is readily available. The favourite sources are government publications, documents of the trade unions and political parties, archival material of the Industries and Labour Departments, books on the labour movements of other countries, and newspapers. The last source is the least used of all, even by the best of the labour historians. It is certainly a difficult source to use for general histories, but will have to be further explored, if for no other reason than that the existing books seem to have exhausted the information to be gleaned from the other sources. Similarly, contemporary and vernacular material - records or diaries, e.g., of local labour leaders - have been almost totally ignored, again, presumably, because of the intensive work required for an all-India study spanning perhaps a century. Sukomal Sen remains conservative on all these points, though slightly less so than his predecessors. (On p. 284 he cites one vernacular source, a book by Kedar Nath Bhattacharya; elsewhere he cites The Bombay Chronicle, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, and even The Times, London.)

To come to the subject itself, all the books stress to varying degrees the following features of the working class movement:

(1) The very backward - almost fatal - economic conditions of the workers. This is not very clearly analyzed by any author, all mostly busy wrestling with problems of data, and explanations for this economic backwardness are even less clear. But they are implicit: the underdevelopment of Indian capitalism; the illiteracy, heterogeneity, and lack of organization of the workers; colonial exploitation, and British lack of concern for Indian workers. Sen has made probably the most precise exposition of this, and successfully linked it up with the growth of workers' struggle, too. Comparing Indian conditions with those in independent countries, he concludes:

> The domination of British imperialism placed Indian capital in such a position where it had to preserve the most barbarous forms of exploitation. At a given stage of capitalist development when acquisition of relative surplus-value becomes the objective, semi-medical forms of oppression of the working-class appear unprofitable for the bourgeoisie itself. In the colonies, however, the foreign monopolies enjoying the support of the entire state machinery, the local capitalists got into an extremely difficult condition to compete with (sic). To compensate the imbalance, the local bourgeoisie subject the working class to unscrupulous and reckless forms of exploitation.

(2) The varying role of political, economic, and social factors in the growth of an organized working class movement. ++++Here the main point is the political leadership of the trade unions which all things conspired to produce: the poverty and illiteracy of workers, victimization at the hands of the

employers, the primacy of a nationalist struggle for independence. The inevitability of political leadership in a colonial and economically underdeveloped situation is brought out best by Karnik, Indian Trade Unions - A Survey (Bombay, 1960) and Punekar, but both make it adequately clear that economic discontent must first fertilize the field to be ready for unionization. Sukomal Sen discusses the various factors involved in trade union development rather less clearly.

(3) Another characteristic that accompanies economic underdevelopment and colonial rule is state hostility to workers' movements, in fact, non-recognition of their needs as human at all. Not only are all problems strictly law and order problems, but there is a natural tendency for capitalists and government to seek out each other's support in preventing disturbances:

> From the point of view of the manager, it is certainly useful to enlist the friendly sympathy of the local officials. Should trouble arise with the workers, there is little difficulty in having a report sent to the headquarters of the province on familiar lines: how good the wages are in comparison with those in the neighbourhood...how considerate the manager is and how all this "mischief" is due to the misplaced zeal of a certain agitator." (Shiva Rao, ~~1. 169~~, The Industrial Worker in India. P. 169

Legislation is not strictly adhered to (C.B. Kumar, Development of Industrial Relations in India (Bombay, 1961) p. 109; R.P. Dutt, Labour Movement in India (n.p.,n.d.),p.15). All manifestation of discontent, whether political or economic, are systematically put down, so that the protests based on economic grievances become gradually closed to political radi-

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calism directed against British repression. In India, "moderate leadership was edged out by a Communist-nationalist coalition which dominated the AITUC and the labour strikes of the period" (i.e., the 1920's and 30's). (Charles Myers, Industrial Relations in India (Bombay, 1958), pp.106-7.)

(4) Political leadership of trade unions did not prove directly beneficial to labour after the initial stage of organization. Congress remained predominantly a middle-class movement, and the indifference of national leaders to workers' grievances resulted in little welfare legislation. Apart from their middle-class orientation, the political rivalries of nationalist leaders proved harmful:

> The workers are divided a great deal already through the propoganda of the employers, through communal differences and through differences of language and caste. If the ignorant workers are divided afresh into rival groups owing to the difference of idealogies of the labour leaders, their solidarity will be seriously undermined and the labour movement will receive a setback....Leaders are few and they should not dissipate their energies by setting up rival unions or contesting elections to the executive of the same union on the grounds of idealogical disparity which are far too remote for workers that are denied subsistence wages and the ordinary amenities of life....(Radhakamal Mukherjee, The Indian Working Class (Bombay, 1945), pp. 305-6.)

(5) Punekar very wisely regards the political nature of trade unions as normal and desirable since "the economic activities of an individual if carried on by the working class as a whole, turn into political activities" (p. 179). But of the historians of the Indian labour movement, none have been able to escape the conclusion that trade union leadership was dominated by "careerists seeking to exploit workers for personal

gains", mostly political gains....."the spread of a philosophy ideology or or/..advancing the interests of their respective political parties, unionism being only the means to ultimate ends not directly connected with the welfare of labour." (N. Pattabhi Raman, Political Involvement of India's Trade Unions (Bombay, 1967)). This point is particularly emphatic when made in studies concentrating on the political aspects of the workers' movement, like the above, and P.P. Lakshman, Congress and Labour Movement in India (Allahabad, n.d.), and fairly un-specified and therefore lost, in other labour histories. Sen is an example of the latter, in so far as he admits that the AITUC was dominated by reformist bourgeois ideology (p.191), and implies that it struggled clear of this domination, without sufficient explanations how.

In fact, none of the authors of labour histories have dealt satisfactorily with this particular question, one which could provide the necessary link to understanding labour as part of the larger socio-economic context to which it belongs: What was the role played by the bourgeoisie in the working class movement ? If the role played was too large, what, in fact, would have been adequate ? How could a desirable adjustment of economic and political demands of the workers have been reached by (a) the leaders, (b) the workers themselves ? While the latter two questions are obviously outside the scope of this work, the first question, as well as the themes discussed above as being common to the more notable labour histories, are what form the backbone of the following case-study.

Chapterization

As mentioned above, Chapter I discusses the growth of DCM during the Depression, and the likely reasons thereof. The next four chapters deal with the DCM workers, topicwise.

For workers, more so than for other earners, the primary need is for security, of both employment and income. A worker who cannot sell his labour is without an identity, and certainly without the ability to survive. The second chapter, therefore, deals with the state of employment and wages of the worker, and opens up the connections between these two factors and his other activities.

The next question that must be asked about the worker is regarding the nature of his work. His job may be judged according to:

a Working conditions, hours, speed, facilities etc.

b His standard of living, health, housing

c His relations with his employers, and protection against arbitrary treatment.

These are treated in two chapters. In Chapter III is *are* discussed his working conditions, welfare, and living standards. Chapter IV presents the Industrial Relations system within which he functions, and what it portends for his job and his life. The main information is to be had from the trade unions and strikes of the period, which are sought to be studied in some detail.

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Finally, we look further into the strivings and achievements of the worker, and his relationship with the larger world. In Chapter V, this resolves itself into the questions: How far were the workers motivated to participate in politics ? What did they achieve thereby ?

The "conclusions" for each section are given side by side with the discussion itself, for a separate summing up, although neat, would be repetitious.

~~Appendices II and III give details of the two strikes in Chapter III; the next two~~ Appendices I and II describe the constitutions of the DCM Workmen's Union of 1929, and of the Textile Labour Union of 1936.

LIST OF TABLES

(Contd.)

CHAPTER I

The two features of the Delhi Cloth Mills during the Depression period of 1928-1938 of importance to this study have been mentioned in the Introduction:

i An expansion of production, sales, and profits, and

ii Apparent industrial peace and labour contentment.

In this chapter we will first seek to clarify the facts of DCM expansion, and then, the probable causes for it.

Table I.1

Details of Delhi Cloth Mills, Delhi

Year	Sales	Cost	(in Rupees) Profit	Wages	Dividend (%)
1930	83,42,933	76,46,744	7,20,763	16,56,812	40
1931	79,29,459	68,32,242	11,22,429	19,60,622	135
1932	80,20,953	81,68,401	10,30,676	23,84,386	35.5
1933	85,71,915	74,61,650	7,87,301	23,61,528	42.5
1934	98,44,306	82,34,888	12,62,963	25,32,340	48
1935	90,20,437	90,78,983	15,02,601	23,53,924	100
1936	99,28,285	96,29,035	11,02,592	23,72,185	60
1937	114,23,621	94,64,293	12,33,172	22,83,338	70
1938	123,02,371	95,76,603	19,19,852	24,28,167	80
1939	111,56,666	100,79,687	16,72,632	27,43,728	8
1940	140,95,482	126,51,513	18,00,572	28,88,408	7

SOURCE: Accounts Dept., D C M, Bara Hindu Rao.

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Table I.2

Index numbers of Sales, Costs, Profits, Wages and Dividend (1930=100)

Year	Sales	Costs	Profits	Wages	Dividends
1930	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
1931	95.04	89.35	155.73	118.34	337.50
1932	96.14	106.82	143.00	143.91	88.75
1933	102.74	97.58	109.23	154.60	106.25
1934	118.00	107.69	175.22	152.84	120.00
1935	108.12	118.73	208.47	142.08	250.00
1936	119.00	125.92	152.98	143.18	150.00
1937	136.93	123.77	171.09	137.82	175.00
1938	147.46	125.24	266.36	146.56	200.00
1939	133.72	131.82	232.06	165.60	20.00
1940	168.95	165.45	249.82	174.34	17.00

Tables I.1 and I.2 present time-series data on Sales, Costs, Profits, Wages, and Dividends for the DCM during the years 1930 to 1940. The data for 1928.30 is not complete. Table I.1 records the actual figures in rupee terms, and Table I.2 the data in indexed form, with 1930 as base.

The first observation to be made from these figures is that DCM experienced a sustained growth in both sales and profits during these years. Indexed data bring this out very clearly. Another feature is that although costs also showed a rising trend, the profit per unit sales grew much faster than costs per unit sales. This would indicate a growth in profits

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~~and sales~~ in real terms also. The third noteworthy feature is the high growth rate of profits per se. The growth of profits far exceeded the growth of sales, and it should be noted that this growth was achieved during a period of rising total wages and material costs.

A set of 'Trend equation' fitted to the data of Table I.2 corroborate the above observations. The equation fitted is of the following form:

$X = f(T)$ where T = Time, (1930 to 1940)

and X denotes Sales, Costs, Profits or Wages.

The trend rate of growth of Profits was the highest of all the variables, while, the trend-rates of both Sales and Profits are higher than that of Costs (which includes wages). The trend equations are given in Table I.3.

The relationship between Sales, Costs, Profits and Wages should be of interest in this case, since it appears from our inspection of the data that Profits and the other variables did not show an equiproportionate change. Simple correlation coefficients between pairs of these four variables show some interesting features. The correlation coefficient between Sales and Costs turns out to be as high as 0.887, while the coefficient between sales and profits is somewhat lower at 0.796. But, the coefficients between sales and wages as well as between profits and wages* are much lower than the former set of coefficients. If this is coupled with our earlier observation regarding the rate of growth of profits as compared to the other variables,

* 0.633 and 0.607 respectively.

(contd. on p. 5)

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Table I.3

Trend Equations

	Constant	Time Coefficient	$\bar{R}^2$ / R^2	DW / F
Sales	81.128	6.571	0.822	2.098
	(6.497)	(0.958)	0.839	47.057
	12.488	6.859		
Costs	83.506	5.664	0.784	1.805
	6.296	0.928	0.805	37.219
	13.262	6.100		
Profits	95.306	13.872	0.672	2.439
	20.290	2.992	0.705	21.504
	4.697	4.637		
Wages	114.908	4.777	0.550	0.753
	8.911	1.314	0.595	13.219
	12.895	3.635		

Notes: (1) First line under the coefficients gives the 'Standard error', and, second, t-values.

(2) R^2 = Multiple Correlation Coefficient, Squared.

$\bar{R}^2$ = R^2, corrected for degrees of freedom.

F = F statistic

DW = Durbin-Watson Statistic

(3) Degrees of freedom for F is (1, 9) for all the equations.

(4) Data, Indexed (1930=100), Table I.2.

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one would infer that the relationships between growth in these variables were not straightforward. Therefore, as we will argue later, the DCM management's plea against wage rise due to falling profit does not stand to logic. We have attempted to formalise some of the relationships and to estimate empirically the coefficients of these formalised relationships, but without much success.

On apriori logic one would expect that the Profits would show a positive relationship with sales and a negative one with costs and wages. These relationships are attempted to be formalised with the help of some Linear Regression models. One of them is presented below:

$$X_p = -42.422 + 1.833\ X_s$$

st. error
t-value 57.076 0.465

$\bar{R}^2 = 0.592$ DW = 2.228

$R^2 = 0.633$ F = 15.518 DF = (1, 9)

where

X_p = Profits, Rs, indexed (1930 = 100)

X_s = Sales, Rs, indexed (1930 = 100)

The equation is acceptable on usual statistical criteria. $\bar{R}^2$ is fairly high, DW does not show the presence of any serial correlation. t-value of the Sales-coefficient is significant, showing the strong positive association between profits and sales. So far so good, But, when we attempted to bring in Costs or Wages into the equation, the model broke down.

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Conclusions from these models are rather negative: We could only say that during the period under consideration Profits had no direct explanations through rise/fall in Costs and Wages. The relationship was more complex than what could justify simple statements on rise or fall of profits on the basis of rise or fall of wages or costs or sales, ~~and~~ while it was a common practice with the DCM management to cite occasional yearly fall in Profits as to be consequent to their wage policies. Their statements can not claim to have any factual basis.

The factors that may be suggested as leading to the expansion in the DCM ~~mmm~~ seem to fall into four parts:

1. Decrease in cotton prices;
2. Change from low-quality to high quality cloth;
3. A better market; and
4. Rationalisation in production.

The cost of purchasing raw cotton per maund in this period is set out in Lala Shri Ram's personal register : as shown in Table I.4, it declined steadily from one anna per maund to six pies in the course of 1928 to 1938. Wholesale harvest prices in the Punjab fell by approximately 50 % altogether (Table I.5) among them of both varieties of cotton, "desi" and "American". Whereas the acreage under cotton expanded in certain years like 1929-31 and again in 1936 according to the Delhi Administration Reports (eepecially of

(contd. on p. 9)

Table I.4

Cost of purchasing cotton

Expenses per maund

Year	Weight (mds)	Expenses (Rs)	Expenses per maund.
1926-27	1,02,000	6405	-/1/-
1927-28	1,16,000	7160	-/1/-
1928-29	1,46,000	8850	-/-/11 $\frac{1}{2}$
1929-30	1,58,200	9182	-/-/11 $\frac{1}{7}$
1930-31	2,05,000	10245	-/-/9 $\frac{3}{5}$
1931-32	2,34,800	10838/12/-	-/-/8 $\frac{11}{12}$
1932-33	2,30,300	10870	-/-/9
1933-34	2,28,000	9946	-/-/8 $\frac{1}{3}$
1934-35	-	-	-
1935-36	3,20,000	11890	-/-/7
1936-37	3,40,000	12250	-/-/6 $\frac{7}{8}$
1937-38	4,00,000	12620	-/-/6
1938-39	4,00,000	13620	-/-/6
1939-40	4,75,000	13620	-/-/5 $\frac{5}{8}$

Source : Documents in the Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources.

Table I.5

Wholesale Harvest Prices in Punjab

Year	Wheat (Rs)	Wheat (As)	Gur (Rs)	Gur (As)	Cotton Desi (Rs)	Cotton Desi (As)	Cotton American (Rs)	Cotton American (As)
1926-27	4	8	5	15	7	14	9	6
1927-28	4	6	5	6	10	13	13	12
1928-29	4	6	6	2	10	0	13	2
1929-30	3	2	6	5	6	15	8	15
1930-31	1	9	4	2	4	7	5	9
1931-32	2	1	3	13	5	7	6	10

Source : Brij Narain, India in the Crisis (Allahabad, 1934), p. 2.

Table I.6

Cost of production per lb of cloth

Year	Cotton/lb As	Cotton/lb Ps	Salaries/lb As	Salaries/lb Ps	Coal/lb As	Coal/lb Ps	Stores/lb As	Stores/lb Ps	Total cost/lb As	Total cost/lb Ps
1927-28	7	7.25	2	6.25	-	5.5	1	4.5	11	11.5
1928-29	7	8.5	2	10	-	4.25	1	5.25	12	4
1929-30	6	3.5	2	6.25	-	3.25	1	3	10	4
1930-31	4	1.5	2	5.88	-	4.25	1	1.75	8	1.5

Source : Documents in Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations.

Table I.7

Quantity of Coarse & Fine Yarn Manufactured

Year	Below 28's	Over 28's	Total
1928-29	9,860,602	38,081	9,898,683
1929-30	10,566,897	52,892	10,619,789
1930-31	12,391,646	203,715	12,595,361
1931-32	14,432,209	829,448	15,261,657

Source : Indian Tariff Board, Cotton Textile Industry, Vol I (Delhi, 1934).

"mollisoni" cotton)[1], this probably happened because of the even sharper fall in price of other commodities. In any case, the Administration Reports too, without giving any figures, describe the cotton prices every year of this decade as "falling", "very low", "below normal", and "lower than last settlement commutation prices".

This fall in the price of raw cotton, the ingredient that constitutes as much as 60-70 % of the total cost of production, contributed greatly to the overall economies described later. Lala Shri Ram's figures for 1927-31 (Table I.6) show the dramatic contribution of falling cotton prices in falling costs altogether.

[1] According to the Revenue & Agriculture file, B 32, 1932, in the Delhi Archives, "Mollisoni cotton" was the M 60A 2 variety, a Punjab cotton namely introduced into the U.P. because of the higher yield. Lala Shri Ram, when asked his opinion on the subject by the Chief Commissioner, found the new cotton suitable for only lower counts of yarn, but commended it for its low price.

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A shift in the production of higher counts from lower counts of yarn was an all-India phenomenon during the Depression[2], evidently the result of the shrinkage of cheaper-cloth-consumers' income, and the increase of the number, or the income, or both, of the consumers of higher quality cloth.

At an Extraordinary General Meeting of DCM Shareholders held on 16th September 1931, Lala Shri Ram discussed the problem created by the Depression and methods of recovery. According to him: "The Punjab farmer who used to be our mainstay is so hard hit by the fall in prices that it will take him years to recover, which is affecting our sales appreciably". Therefore, "The present conditions of the industry make it imperative that we should spare no means to produce superior class of goods to replace the coarse goods to the extent that the demand for coarse goods has gone down".[3]

The manufacture of superior varieties of cloth in the DCM dates, in fact, from 1929, indicating that the decision to switch the emphasis to a higher quality was taken a couple of years before this General Meeting. Lala Shri Ram's papers evidently provide the data on which similar conclusions in our secondary sources are based,[4] but these papers are presently unavailable for research. It is certain that Lala Shri Ram's

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[2] See Table I.7

[3] Industries, B File No 68, 1934, Delhi Archives.

[4] Draft of the Lala Shri Ram Biography Volume 3, prepared by the Business History Section of the DCM, 5 Pusa Road, Delhi-5. Pp 390-91. Henceforth referred to as 'Draft'

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objective behind installing a third textile mill in 1929 was to produce superior yarn of above 30 counts.

In his biography of Shri Ram, the author wonders why such a changeover in the production pattern should have been introduced at a time when sales were so difficult, and then rather confusedly suggests that it must be due to the "trend of the times." This can only be interpreted to mean "the times of falling prices and falling agricultural incomes."

Another solution suggested by Lala Shri Ram at the same meeting was the consolidation of the market by the opening up of DCM retail shops, and the support of boycott of foreign cloth.

In 1930-31 and onwards, a number of new retail shops were set up by the DCM not only in Delhi, but, according to the biography, as far away as Bihar and Bengal under the care of "selling agents".

Most of the outlying ones were not very successful because of the extra competition, and the DCM consolidated its market firmly only in the Punjab and U.P. Table I.8 shows the establishment of DCM selling agencies in different regions, and Table I.9 the sale of DCM textiles through its selling agents in different parts of the country.

Table F.8

TRENDS IN THE COMPANY'S SELLING AGENCIES IN DIFFERENT REGIONS - 1929-38

Year	Punjab	U.P.	Rajasthan	Bihar	Bengal	Madras	Sindh	Kashmir	M.P.	Delhi	Remarks
1929	Amritsar	Kanpur	-	Muzaffer-pur	-	-	Sukkar (DH)	Jammu (DH)	-	-	Muzafferpur agency was closed in 1932
1930	-	-	Jaipur	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1931	Peshawar	Farukabad Saddar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Saddar & Farukabad agencies were cancelled in 1935 & 1936 respectively.
1932	Multan	-	-	-	Calcutta	-	-	-	-	-	
1933	-	Lucknow	Palee (DH)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Palee agency was cancelled in 1935
1934	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1935	Lyallpur	-	-	-	-	-	Karachi	-	-	-	
1936	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
1937	-	Gaya	-	-	-	Madras Bezwada	-	-	-	Delhi	
1938	Lahore (DH)	-	Ajmer	-	-	-	-	-	-		

Source : Draft, p. 413.

TABLE I.9

Total Yearly sales at Agencies

Name of Agency	1933-34	1934-35	1935-36	1936-37	1937-38	1938-39
Delhi shops	4,95,5201	49,99,793	52,203,94	59,52,960	60,66,748	52,59,827
Chandni chowk store	-	219,000	414,030	238,186	212,410	2,24,787
New Delhi store	-	-	-	-	23,643	33,599
Subzimandi Store		-	-	-	-	-
Cawnpore	11,44,279	6,86,680	9,26,425	11,12,643	8,73,018	11,11,215
Lucknow	94,940	1,12,602	1,46,605	2,10,467	1,85,698	1,97,662
Calcutta	5,61,665	5,83,726	4,37,863	6,63,279	8,29,389	4,93,109
Amritsar	14,63,602	12,66,687	11,94,590	13,88,485	13,62,770	12,82,962
Sukkar	37,41,501	2,41,389	1,54,842	1,55,577	1,79,815	1,46,067
Jammu Tawi	2,32,102	1,51,371	1,39,613	1,36,975	1,08,697	86,076
Lyallpur	-	-	-	44,929	55,932	~~14,260~~ 41,758
Ajmer	-	-	-	-	19,754	31,030 ~~10,136~~
Ghaziabad	-	-	-	-	-	5,124
Agra	1,20,482	72,346	69,710	75,238	77,889	68,989
Gaya	-	-	-	-	2,69,435	2,23,903 ~~10,136~~
Jaipur	1,51,624	1,83,641	2,55,780	3,55,937	3,46,814	2,01,286
Karachi	-	-	-	1,68,550	2,17,648	
Multan	-	-	-	98,371	1,22,228	
Ludhiana	-	-	-	-	-	

Source: DCM Documents, SRC.

TABLE II.10

OUTLET OF D.C.M. CLOTH, 1929-1938

000 Omitted

Year	Direct sales from Mills		DCM Retail Stores Sales			Agencies Sales			City shop sales		Total Sale
	Amount	Of totaal sales	Amount	No. of Stores	% of total sales	Amount	No. of agen-cies	% of total sales	Amount	% of total sales	
1929	1.23	1.45	1.27	1	1.51	33.05	5	39.08	49.99 46.05	59.11	84.58
1930	034	.40	2.30	1	2.76	34.90	6	41.74	[illegible]	55.08	83.60
1931	.91	1.10	3.13	2	3.80	36.30	9	44.13	41.90	50.94	82.26
1932	1.08	1.23	3.96	3	4.31	37.55	10	41.31	43.97	50.49	87.08
1933	1.14	1.16	5.39	3	5.36	43.86	12	46.65	47.04	48.28	97.44
1934	1.32	1.31	5.10	3	4.22	42.29	12	42.27	51.32	51.29	100.04
1935	1.34	1.42	4.88	3	5.18	37.38	12	39.70	50.55	53.68	94.16
1936	1.22	1.14	5.80	3	5.43	47.52	11	44.48	52.29	48.94	106.84
1937	1.11	.92	6.59	5	5.46	51.20	15	42.47	61.64	51.13	120.54
1938	1.27	.90	7.13	5	6.48	43.33	17	39.37	58.57	53.22	110.04

Source: Files entitled "Statement showing cloth sales at various Depots and Agencies yearwise (1929-1952)" and "Comparative Statements of Cloth Sales at each Depot and Agency, monthwise". The above files belong to Accounts Section, C.M.O.

Interest free credit, originally made available to dealers for one week, was extended up to three weeks, and a handsome system of bonus was introduced. It was the DCM's own retail stores, however, which showed the largest increase in the sales to their credit, as can be seen from TableI:10.

The actual contribution of DCM marketing techniques in this period to its increase in sales is difficult to compute. Similarly, the role of other factors may be only mentioned as being definitely contributive without being statistically supported. These included the marketing space created for inland textile mills like the DCM because of the atrophy of the older established Bombay mills;[5] and the displacement of imported by Indian made cloth.

What is documented is that Shri Ram as President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 1930 took steps to support the Swadeshi Movement. About the Boycott Movement, he said, "If this movement had not come, I do not know what would have been the fate of mills like our own..."[6] He aided in setting up an organization called the Swadeshi Prachar Association, which concentrated on publicity of Indian mills and their products, and of the advantages and necessity

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[5] This was repeatedly reported in Government files, cited in the next chapter with reference to the migration of textile labour from Bombay-Ahmedabad to Delhi. See p 22.

[6] File 68 B Industries, 1934, D.A. Also, Dr. Yudhvir Singh, ex-Congress worker, in an interview on November 8, 1977.

of buying Indian yarn and cloth. The early years of the Depression witnessed the most nationalist phase of Lala Shri Ram's career. It was during his Presidentship of FICCI that G.D. Birla, moving the vote of thanks, declared: "Merchants had been taking a silent part in the Congress; they could not take more active part as unfortunately merchants were suspected and labelled as "Capitalists".... Our brain and our heart is with the Congress if not our body".[7]

Again, what quantitative difference Swadeshi propaganda made to the sales is not known but that the movement commanded the degree of attention of a thoroughly pragmatic businessman that it did, is an indication of its efficacy in influencing sales.

The last factor which may be ascertained to have contributed to the expansion of DCM profits was the "competitive rationalization and other methods of reducing costs" introduced by Lala Shri Ram.[8] These may be briefly summed up under three heads:

(1) An improvement in both the quantity and quality of production through more careful management and supervision, a stricter system of fines and controls, and increased demand from the workers.

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[7] FICCI Proceedings of the 4th Annual Meeting held at Delhi, p 18.

[8] Shri Ram to Singhania, Sept 1936, Correspondence in SRC.

(2) Simultaneously, no proportionate increase in the remuneration made to the workers, probably even a decrease in their wages, partly because of the overall fall in the cost of labour, partly through the stricter system of fines and wage cuts.

(3) Efforts to guarantee efficiency and silence protest by easy dismissals for "disloyalty".

These will all be discussed in detail in the next two chapters since they relate directly to workers' wages and working conditions.

CHAPTER II

The Nature of the Labour Force

The first important question regarding the labour force of the textile industry in Delhi, and specifically the labour force of the DCM, is: Was it a "committed" or a "casual" one ? Were the labourers primarily rural or had they become urbanized ? On the answer to this depend most of our further conclusions about the conditions of labourers and their activities.

The Census of Delhi for 1931 fails to help us get an accurate picture of the extent of immigration into Delhi, and the origins of the immigrants. Of the 57,674 employed in industries, only 19,457 are described as from outside, and the rest, 38,217 as "province born".[1] For our purpose, most of the latter are immigrants, too, in the sense that they came from outside the city.

In the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the textile industry in Delhi had faced a labour shortage, and was obliged to "import" labour: skilled from Ahmedabad, Bombay, and later, a number from Cawnpore; unskilled from the neighbouring villages, and from the neighbouring states of U.P., Punjab, and Rajasthan.[2] Until the 1930's, it seems, as in other parts

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1. Census of India, 1931.

2. Interviews, T.N. Sharma, 17th March; R.K. Gupta, 22nd March, 1977. The former is an ex-DCM employee of our period; the latter is a present employee.

of India, "the labour is generally drawn from the agricultural class whose main interest lies in the land and who only joins the factory with a view to fill in spare time between the harvests".[13] Shortages in the sowing and harvesting seasons were reported.[14] In 1929, the DCM manager claimed that "probably nearly 50 % of the workmen in his employ at any given time have been with him for less than 12 months".[15]

By the beginning of our period, 1928, there was no labour shortage, but the majority of workers, of course, remained originally rural-based. It is difficult to say exactly how many still earned the distinction of being employed in industry only seasonally, but it seems as if the labour force in Delhi was gradually settling down. According to the Royal Commission on Labour, "....the turning point came during the last five years. Up to that stage, labour tended to have the upper hand in that there was competition for its services; since then the tendency has been for the workers to compete for jobs".[16] Whether the workers ever had an "upper hand" may be doubtful, since there are other factors besides demand and supply which determined the employer-employee relationship. But it is probably true that they may have enjoyed some facilities - like that of housing - provided by employers to attract them in the earlier

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3 Ind, B 53, 1931.

4 Report of an Industrial Survey Conducted in 1950-51 in Delhi State (Simla, 1952) p. 13.

5 Ind, B 31, 1929.

6 RCL Report (1929), quoted in Harris, p 3

period of labour shortage, which they lost as employment became more competitive. Even as the labour came to be "committed" - the skilled labour ~~at~~ first - their security of employment, as we shall see a little later, did not improve. Unskilled labour probably remained migratory a little longer. The estimates are untrustworthy because they tend to vary according to the purpose for which information was supplied. While discussing the feasibility of a Sickness Insurance Scheme for workers, Lala Shri Ram, DCM Secretary, emphasized the migratory nature of the workers: "....two-thirds come from outside the province, principally from the U.P."[~~15~~7] While speaking of the good results of providing housing for the workers, the management noted its good effects in stabilizing workers.[~~16~~8] On the whole, the weight of opinion fell on the side of the former analysis.

There were two special features of Delhi leading to constant migration, and consequent over-abundance of labour. With the first impact of the Depression, the Bombay and Ahmedabad mills decreased production and a vaccuum was created in the textile market that was quickly filled by a spurt in production in centres like Delhi.[~~17~~9] This persisted till 1931 at least, and according to the Annual Factory Report of that year: "...labour

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7 ~~15~~ Ind, B 31, 1929.

8 ~~16~~ Ind, B 68, 1934.

9 ~~17~~ Ind, B 61, 1929.

troubles in Bombay and Ahmedabad created trade openings in other centres which the millowners in Delhi have not been slow to take advantage of."[10] A number of skilled workers - probably weavers[19] - migrated to Delhi from Bombay and Ahmedabad, undoubtedly increasing competition and reducing their bargaining power.

The unskilled market was simultaneously swelled by the cessation of building activities in the new capital around 1931, and the gradual decline in the commercial and industrial activities of the Province as a whole.[20] This was emphasized by a fall in the cost of living in the city as a result of the primarily agricultural Depression, and the inflow of unskilled labour from surrounding rural areas. (See Table I.5 for the fall in prices).

It may be possible to argue that a satiation of the labour market depressed wages and acted as a threat to security of employment, for that is an accepted theory. But we have no numerical record of the increase in workers nor any clear evidence of a relationship of ready supply of labour with wages and employment. What is clearly documented is an indirect relationship of a kind. We shall see later in this chapter that many aspects of employers' policies did constitute a threat to

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10 RCL Evidence, p. 123; See also Ind, B 54, 1929; Ind, B 11, 1932; Ind, B 8, 1932.

19 See increased production of woven goods in Table 1.

20 Delhi Administration Report, 1931-32.

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wages and employment, and such a situation was possible primarily due to the ready availability of cheap labour.

The migratory nature of at least the unskilled labour, and the special features of the Depression, combined to affect every aspect of the life of the labourers, and most of all, their bargaining position. As will be discussed in detail later, the employers used the argument of a casual, uncommitted labour force to resist a variety of important measures proposed for legislation by the government, like provision for periodical leave, medical benefits, insurance, and accident prevention schemes. Secondly, most of the few schemes which did exist proved unworkable because of the lack of stabilization of the work-force, like the Payment of Wages Act, and the Workmen's Compensation Act.[21][13] Finally, it was this rural-based, unstable nature of the workers that was directly and indirectly responsible for their poverty, helplessness, backwardness in organizing, and weakness in fighting for a preferred state of affairs.

The State of Employment

Table II.1 shows a more or less constant increase in factory operatives over these years (in seven years out of ten), implying that a gradual, if small, growth in industrial activity continued. Similarly, the number of industrial units declined to a low of 43 in 1932, from 61 in 1928 after which the number increased steadily to 83 in 1938.

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[13] [21] In both cases, it was impossible for the worker to "hang around" while awaiting the court decisions regarding the arrears of his wages or compensation. When he lost his job, or was injured, or sick, he returned to the village for security or cure. See Table IV.1 for comments on all the schemes relating to workers. p. 93

Table II.2 shows slightly different figures of textile labour, probably because it includes only permanent workers, as against 'badli' and temporary included in the earlier table. The DCM built a new mill in 1931, giving employment to 1000 new workers in the two following years. Otherwise there was decline in the total number of DCM workers between 1932 and 1938, and in the percentage of DCM to the total labour force between 1934 and 1938. The Industrial Surveyor of Delhi, Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh, claimed: "the extent of displacement of labour has been very small as a result of rational methods of work. The comparative dearth of daily applicants for employment who gather at the mill-gates also indirectly indicates the absence of acuteness of unemployment."[22] 14

Although he gave no explanation or statistics in support of his conclusion, it was correct that direct displacement of labour was small. But that some retrenchment did take place is borne out by different sources.

In the June 27, 1931, issue of the DCM Workmen's Gazette, Lala Shri Ram wrote a note under the heading "Unpleasant News":

> I have been watching the trends for the last three months and find that the cloth of our mill is not being sold to the extent it is produced and now half of the stock is lying idle. Men are being sent from Peshawar to Calcutta to get our cloth sold. But our efforts do not yield any desired results.... If this condition prevails for some time more, many of our employees are likely to lose their jobs. This h thought hurts me deeply. I am afraid I shall have to close one unit or stop one shift. Though it is only as a warning but if any one can suggest me a way out, I would appreciate his point of view and be grateful to him.

(Contd. p. 26)

14 [22] Ind, B 65, 1934.

Table II.1

Year	No. employed Textile operatives	No. employed Total operatives	No. of factories Total	No. of factories Textile
1926	4336	-	-	4
1927	5999	9,481	58	4
1928	7011	10,443	61	4
1929	6814	10,109	-	4
1930	7435	-	57	4
1931	10079	12,472	48	5
1932	10507	12,875	43	5
1933	9267	11,726	44	5
1934	9641	12,960	52	5
1935	9704	13,229	57	5
1936	9601	-	-	5
1937	9838	13,954	74	5
1938	10738	15,398	83	5

Source : Annual Administration Reports of Delhi Province; Annual Factory Reports; Ind, B 65, 1934.

The blanks are a result of the absence of figures in any of the above sources.

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Table II.2

DCM Workers and Total Textile Workers

Year	DCM	Total	Percentage
1930-31	5600	7228	77.40
1931-32	6000	9906	60.56
1932-33	6615	10481	63.11
1933-34	6305	9267	68.03
1934-35	6253	9641	64.85
1935-36	6144	9704	63.31
1936-37	6018	9601	62.68
1937-38	6032	9838	61.31
1938-39	6769	10738	63.03

Source : DCM Register, SRC

There were the following three responses to this note in the July 7, 1931, issue:

> I felt disheartened and thought for a moment how ungrateful are those brothers (workers) who earn their livelihood from the DCM and purchase and wear cloth made in foreign countries.... Why to go far ? Our own workers and officers feel shame in using our own mills' cloth and look upon it as 'below standard.'...now it is the workers' duty to use his own mills' cloth. In this way the company may go on continuing its work. If all the employees of the mills wear only our own cloth then the question of closing the shift may not arise.
>
> When I saw the issue of the Gazette and read the unpleasant news of the Secretary, I was really terrified. If one shift or two shifts in the mill is stopped, hundreds of labourers will suffer.... If the goods are not sold, try to find out other means. Reduce the rates and the cloth will be sold. To meet the loss, the cost of production must be controlled by introducing economy. But do not try to touch labourers' wages.... Instead of making the workers more unhappy the Company should ask all the officers to work the mill in advance... Do not pay the officers till the mills condition returns to normalcy, and you can pay the arrears to them in future.

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> Our mill is working all the time. New houses, new mills and new equipments are coming up and still the Company is suffering the loss ? I will pray to God that all of us may wish to sustain such losses....Though it is beyond our mental capacity to think beyond it, still it appears that somehow bad days are approaching for some people. When the flood comes, the grass and dry wood all are washed away. Only those whose roots are strong and only those trees and houses whose foundations are strong can stand the situation. So only the labour will be drowned because they are poor. So what can they do ? We request the management that if they take any action against the workers' wages, or reduce the number of workers, they may be kind enough to explain the whole position and to take the workers into confidence. Excesses and injustice never bring good results. Still we want to make you realise that nothing is wrong with the mills.[23] [15]

One of the reasons for the Industrial Surveyor's lack of interest in the small number that were dismissed was the contrast that he was drawing with Bombay, where unemployment was a major grievance "used by extremist agitators to forment discontent." Whereas in Delhi there was a "marked absence of industrial unrest....due to the non-existence for practical purposes ~~ft~~ of labour organizations"[24] [16] - and, implicitly, due to lack of grievances.

He was generalizing too broadly, for dismissals, if few, were frequent enough in the DCM to be a major grievance at each of the strikes of May 1930, March 1932, and April-June 1934.

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[15] [23] Arun Joshi, Lala Shri Ram (Delhi, 1973), pp. 545-547. In the absence of footnotes in this book, it may be referred to only for opinions, or, as above, when the source is mentioned in the text. The excerpts given here may seem a trifle lengthy and are included because they convey - in spite of the poor translation from Hindi - an idea of the desperation Shri Ram's threat aroused in the workers.

[16] [24] Ind, B 65, 1934.

The first justification for dismissals which was complained against was the raising of the standard of efficiency, so that damaged cloth over 3 %, and absenteeism of 3 days or over, led to loss of work.[25][17] The second reason for dismissal was violation of the rule made in 1930 that workers "will not indulge in anti-mill activities and will remain loyal to the Company."[26][18]

The very first strike in the DCM, in April 1930, resulted in dismissal of the activists and leaders. The follow-up strike in May 1930 had re-employment of the above as one of its demands. That action in this respect continued to be prejudicial to the workers' is borne out by the fact that in March 1932, about 50 workers went on strike to demand the reinstatement of the dismissed workers; and that the biggest strike of 1934 was attributed to the leadership of dismissed and disconted workers.[27][19] The number of the dismissed apparently increased after the 1934 strike; they formed an Unemployed Workers' Union in May, 1934, and agitated, with meetings, hunger strikes, and picketting, for reinstatement.[28][20] Upon the failure of these means, a follow-up strike took place again in June, 1934, when "general economic discontent," according to Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh, was enflamed by "those workmen who were victimized after the 1930 strike and those who were not reinstated after the recent strike."[29][21]

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17 25 Balance Sheet of the DCM, 1937; Ind, B 47, 1930. Both will be discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

18 26 Joshi, op. cit., p. 227.

19 27 Ind, B 47, 1930; H-C, B 1(1), 1934; Draft, p. 246. See chapter on Industrial Relations for the full details.

20 28 H-C, B 1(1), 1934.

21 29 Ind, B 68, 1934.

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As the Industrial Surveyor assessed, Delhi was not comparable with Bombay in the retrenchment policies of the textile employees. What is important to note at the same time, is that the threat of retrenchment was effectively used by the DCM management - together with frequent arbitrary dismissals - to control any attempt on the workers' part to agitate for their demands. Lala Shri Ram's intolerance of workers' organizing in any way was regarded as unjustifiably extreme even by outsiders sympathetic to the management. After the May 1930 strike, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi reported: "The labourers at one of the local mills allege that certain officials of their union were dismissed by the DCM owing to their participation in the union." The italics are mine; in the original report, submitted by the Superintendent of Police, the words are, "have a real grievance, in as much as..."[30] [22]

As early as 1929, Lala Shri Ram sought to isolate his workers from any unionist influence by forming the DCM Workmen's Union, whose rules were framed by himself to exclude all outside participation, and which was provided by all facilities by the company. This union was never known to have come into conflict with the authorities. And all agitational or organizational activities outside it were regarded as a breach of contract, and liable to result in dismissal, either directly of 'indirectly' i.e., using the justification of some other imperfection in the worker, the latter method being more favoured by Shri Ram.[31] [23]

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[22] [30] B 1, 1930 (Home Confidential)

[23] [31] For the constitution of the union, see Appendix I. For Shri Ram's self-declared technique, see his letter to Singhania on page 130.

The two arbitrators called in by the DCM for the 1934 strike also commented on the arbitrariness of the situation:

"We have, during the course of our enquiry, had ample opportunities of noting how even insignificant grievances are liable to be magnified disporportionately due to absence of a trusted organisation of the workers.... The DCM Labour Union should be entitled to have a membership subscription.... and the association with it of some responsible outside social workers."[32 24]

The pattern that can be established is as follows: There was doubtful security of employment for the textile workers in this period. The security came only at the price of a submission to negative changes occurring in the workers' conditions. These included many of the rationalisation measures of the DCM, any protest against which meant organization, representation, and strike, all of which were anathema to the employers. The latter responded with the strongest weapon possible: the threat of dismissal, and occasional practice of it. The result was the most effective weakening of workers' struggle for acceptable working conditions.

Wages

The second in importance after security of employment for the worker is the security of a living wage. The Depression was notorious for dealing harshly with the worker on this score. As production

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[24 32] Strike Enquiry Committee Report, Joshi, p 247.

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and sales fell, workers' wages were reduced in every mill centre, leading to severe strikes in the largest centres, like Calcutta and Bombay.[25]

There are various sources which gave the DCM wages of this period; of these three claim that the Delhi wages were higher than those in other industrial centres in India.

According to the Strike Enquiry Committee Report of 1934, mentioned above, "The authorities of Delhi Cloth Mills have been able to establish conclusively that the general level of the wages paid to their workers is higher not only in comparison with the local mills but also in comparison with wages in the other important industrial centres in the country. In the majority of cases, salaries and wages paid by the DCM compare favourably with those paid in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Sholapur, Southern Maharata Centre, Khandesh, Gujerat, Cawnpore, Madras, Amritsar, Lahore, Nagpur and Delhi."

The Enquiry was undertaken by Zakir Hussain and Depty Mall Jain, two social workers invited by the DCM employers to look into the grievances of the workers. It was in no sense a formal investigation, as the two were invited by only one party; and were self-conscious that the enquiry was such a one-sided affair.[26]

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25 Among many other works, for Bombay, see Morris D. Morris, The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India, (Bombay, 1965), Chapter IX.

26 Joshi, p.245. At the beginning of the report is the apology: "We confess, we found ourselves in a rather awkward position. We were invited only by one party to the dispute...We were afraid, therefore, that since the workers of the DCM had not asked us simultaneously with the Secretary...we would not be able to have a fair estimate of the strikers' case."

Two other significant points in this Report are: (1) In reply to the workers' protest of a low level of wages, the investigators said, "We consider these demands to be unjustified and doubly so during the present period of economic depression." That is, the workers' complaints may even be justified, were it not for the present troubles of the company. (2) A scientifically calculated system of weavers' wages had been demanded in a strike four years' earlier, and the demand had then been accepted. But "the task is a very complicated one and delay was natural. We were glad to note, however, that the mill authorities after careful thought and expert advice have prepared a schedule which we consider to be very reasonable...."[27]

The second place where we find mention of higher wages in Delhi is in the correspondence between Lala Shri Ram and Padampat Singhania. They compare the different weaving and spinning rates in their respective mills, and the DCM rates are the higher (see Tables II.3 and II.4). Here the significant point is that it is the piece rates of the weavers which are mentioned, and Singhania suggested: "The rates paid by you seem to be very good rates and your labourers must be satisfied, provided they are earning above Rs.50/- per month. But in case the efficiency and the working conditon of your mills is not good, even these rates might prove less for the labourers."[28] The DCM workers were noticeably not satisfied with their wages, and the reason for this possibly lay in one of the directions suggested by Singhania.

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[27] Ibid

[28] 13 June, 1934, Shri Ram-Singhania correspondence, SRC.

Table II.3

Wages per piece

(Rupees)

Warp	Weft	Reels	Picks	Width	Length	Delhi Rate	Cawnpore rate
20 s	24 s	44	42	35"	37½ yds long cloth	-/8/- piece	-/7/-
"	"	48	44	42"	10" Dhoti Nekins	-/3/3 pair	-/2/3
"	"	36	36	38"	10 yds 3/4 Doby border	-/3/- "	-/1/9
10 s	12	36	36	35"	24 yds Khadi	-/6/4/piece	-/4/8
14 s	13	28/2	24/2	36"	40 yds Dasuti	-/10/3 double	-/6/-

Source: Shri Ram - Singhania Correspondence, SRC.

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Table II.4

Rates in Spinning Dept.

	Delhi	Kanpur (Rupees/month)
Blow Room		
Mochi	24/-/-	22/-/-
Opener Men	24/8/-	19/-/-
Hopper Men	19/-/-	-
Sweeper	16/-/-	15/-/-
Card Room		
Grinder	25/-	13/-/-
Stopper	24/-	20/-/-
Lap Carrier	19/8/-	18/-
Minder	18/8/-	18/-/-
Frame		
Drawing frame	-/2/10 per	-
Slubbing	-/2/6 "	-
Inter	-/2/4 "	-
Roving	-/2/5 "	-
Doffer	13/8/-	13/-/-
Sweeper	14/8/- Jamedar	19/-/- 15/-/-
Half doffer	7/8/-	-
Ring		
Double Sider	30/8/-	-
Full "	20/8/-	22/-/- (one bag only)
Half "	15/8/-	-
Doffer	-/2/8/-	13/-/-

Source : Shri Ram - Singhania Correspondence, SRC.

The third discussion of changes in the wage rates during the Depression is by Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh, the Industrial Surveyor of Delhi, when he undertook an enquiry into unemployment and wage cuts in the cotton textile industry of Delhi in 1934. Comparing Delhi favourably with Bombay, he says: "One of the factors which can be counted as a contributory cause to the comparative prosperity of the industry in Delhi is the marked absence of industrial unrest." This he attributed, as with unemployment discussed in the previous section, to (i) the absence of labour organizations, and (ii) "maintenance of wage levels practically unchanged."[29]

A comparative analysis for the two different causes for industrial peace which he suggests was not made. We must note in passing that Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh was credited with possessing a "certain looseness of language as well as of thought here and there" by his immediate 'boss', the Director of Industries, Punjab.[30]

Of the other information sources on DCH wages, the first contradicts Sardar Singh directly. The Annual Factory Reports of the Delhi Province were prepared by the Sardar himself, and their findings are laid out in Table II.5. For five representative occupations, they show an almost constant decrease in wages from 1928 to 1938. For a complete picture of the negative change in wages, Table II.5 should be compared with the cost of living Index in Table III.4 (See pages 87-88).

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[29] Ind, B 65, 1934.

[30] Director of Industries, Punjab, to Chief Commissioner, Ind, B 47, 1930.

The Delhi Administration Reports, while giving no figures on wages, note a "lower cost of labour" for most of these years. They were probably based on the Factory Reports, and their information is tabled in II.6.

That wages did decrease was never denied by Lala Shri Ram himself. In what is called his "old personal register" by Joshi, he tabulated the rates described in Table II.7. These are only marginally helpful to us as they include only the 1935-38 period, but it is evident even from these that rates were neither steady nor consistently rising.

Even more significant were the two strikes each of 1930 and 1934. In the former, four of the workers' six demands related to wages, the first directly, the other three indirectly:

(1) Rates for weaving of improved quality cloth to be adjusted so as not to affect normal wage level.

(2) No more double deduction for absenteeism provided it is not after a holiday. For five days' absenteeism in a month, the operative may be dismissed without notice, without deduction in wages.

(3) Fine for defective cloth not to exceed allowance to beopari. The worker may purchase cloth if he cannot afford the fine.

(4) The Provident Fund should be discontinued, and the worker withdraw the amount to his credit.[31]

(Contd. p 40)

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[31] "Industrial Strike in the Delhi Mills", Ind, B 47, 1930.
Compare with Table IV. 4, p 108 a-b.

Table II.5

Wage trends in textile industry, Delhi

(Rupees per month)

	Weaver	Spinner	Dyer	Reeler	Coolie (per day)
1928	62	33	30	20	-/5/6
1929	55	30	30	16	-/5/-
1930	54	30	29	16	-/5/-
1931	46	22	22	12	-/4/-
1932	45	22	22	12	-/5/-
1933	45	22	22	12	-/5/-
1934	44	23	20	12	-/5/10
1935	40	23	20	12	-/5/-
1936	38	23	30	12	-/5/-
1937	36	22	28	12	-/4/6
1938	35	23	25	13	-/4/-

Source: Annual Factories Reports of the Delhi Province.

Table II.6

	No. of workers	Cost
1928-29	10,443	Same
1929-30	10,109	Decrease
1930-31	9,811	Decrease
1931-32	-	Biggest fall
1932-33	12,875	Slightly higher
1933-34	11,726	Steady
1934-35	12,960	Same
1935-36	13, 229	Same
1936-37	13,643	Decrease
1937-38	-	Decrease
1938-39	15,398	-

Source: Delhi Administration Reports.

Table II.7

Highest and lowest Average Wages per day per loom (Rupees)

Year	Highest	Lowest	Average
		A - Mill	
1935-36	2-0-9	0-5-3	0-13-3
1936-37	2-10-3	0-5-6	0-14-7
1937-38	1-7-6	0-7-6	1-0-5
1938-39	1-7-8	0-5-7	0-15-8
		B - Mill	
1935-36	1-14-8	0-7-2	0-14-7
1936-37	1-5-2	0-6-7	0-14-3
1937-38	1-6-9	0-6-5	0-14-5
1938-39	1-8-9	0-8-3	1- 0-5
		C - Mill	
1935-36	1-11-10	0-6-2	0-13-5
1936-37	1-6-7	0-6-4	0-11-6
1937-38	1-10-0	0-10-9	0-10-2
1938-39	1-7-0	0-10-6	0-9-9

Source : DCH Documents, SRC.

This was the first ever strike in the DCM, one in which 80 % of the workers took part, and, as we shall see later, one carried off by the workers themselves practically without any 'outside' help. Their demands, therefore, were common to them, and of the utmost importance to them.

In the strike of 1934, the following demands related to wages:

(1) The starting salary of folding department workers has been reduced and it is suggested that it should be Rs.25 per month.

(2) The wages in the looms sections have been reduced and it is suggested that the practice of payment that was in vogue in 1929 may be reintroduced.[32]

Not only did Lala Shri Ram not deny the reductions, but the Draft of his official biography states clearly about the 1934 strike:

"The chief cause of the strike in the DCM was the wage cut that Lala Shri Ram had adopted during the depression years. It is not possible to know the extent of the wage cuts in the DCM. But we know it for certain that like many other industrialists in the country Lala Shri Ram had adopted the policy of wage cuts as one of the measures to save the DCM through the crisis of Depression."[33]

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[32] Ind, B 68, 1934.

[33] In SRC, pp. 276-77.

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Table II.8

Total working force of the DCM, total wage bills and the average wages of the workers, 1928-33:

Year	DCM workers	Total wages	Average wage per month Rs	As	Ps
1927-28	4034	1,67,599	41	5	0
1931-32	6233	2,50,990	40	2	0
1933-34	6359	2,30,815	36	2	0

Source: Draft, p 269

The wage policy of the DCM may then be summed up as follows: (1) The original wages in some departments may have compared favourably with those in other centres. But in our period certainly, the DCM wages were always well below those in the textile centres of Bombay and Ahmedabad, and often below those of the inland centres like Nagpur and Sholapur. Tables II.9 and II.10 attempt to show this.

In the light of this fact, it is strange that Lala Shri Ram always claimed the opposite about Delhi wages. Interestingly, the industrialists of Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Cawnpore, each claimed that the wages they paid were the highest in the country.[34] One explanation may be that Shri Ram was speaking strictly of the wage-cuts during the period, which were perhaps smaller in Delhi than in the larger centres. The amounts are not possible to calculate, but in light of the fact that Bombay suffered the impact of the Depression so much more strongly, it seems reasonable to

(Contd p 43)

[34] The Statesman, May 24, 1934; December 18, 1937.

Table II.9

Comparative Monthly Earnings of textile workers in different centres, 1936-38 - (in Rupees) :

Centres	Ring Spinning tenters			Frame tenters			Weavers (2 looms)		
Bombay	27	9	11	36	12	0	49	9	11
Ahmedabad	27	10	3	32	10	9	52	1	8
Sholapur	19	10	8	22	6	0	43	6	6
Baroda State	18	0	0	21	0	0	34	4	2
Indore	16	0	0	23	0	0	41	0	0
Ujjain	13	8	0	14	8	0	32	0	0
Nagpur	15	0	6	18	3	4	31	3	2
Madras	17	9	4	27	6	6	32	12	4
Madura	11	10	6	20	3	9	29	4	0
Coimbatore	11	9	8	14	10	9	15	11	4
Cawnpore	20	0	0	25	8	3	37	0	0
Calcutta	15	0	0	20	0	0	35	0	0
Delhi	20	0	0	25	0	0	35	0	0
Lahore	20	0	0	22	0	0	32	0	0

Source : R.K. Mukherjee, The Indian Working Class, p. 142

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Table II.10

Standard muster April 1st, 1926	Bombay		Ahmedabad			Cawnpore			Delhi		Nagpur		Madras		
	Re	As	Re	As	Ps	Re	As	Ps	Re	As	Re	As	Re	As	Ps
Blow room tenters	29	0	23	10	0	16	14	6	19	0	24	0	25	14	6
Card room tenters	27	4	24	7	6	23	12	0	14	0	24	0	23	3	3
Frame tenters	37	12	29	6	0	27	3	0	25	0	30	12	25	2	0
Ring frame side boys	29	12	26	7	6	15	10	0	20	0	24	0	14	10	8
Winders	21	4	23	1	0	27	13	0	25	0	18	8	21	8	0
Weavers	47	12	47	15	9	32	7	0	35	0	41	00	34	7	0
Folders	29	0	25	11	3	14	6	0	20	0	24	0	26	3	5

Source: Indian Tariff Board, Cotton Textile Industry (Delhi, 1928) P. 113.

suppose the above.[35] The other claim was that DCM workers were paid better than the other textile workers of Delhi. This was belied by the demand of the workers in 1934 that weaving wages be adjusted to the rates in the Birla Mills, Delhi.[36] The average monthly earnings in the DCM, as given in Table II.7 are also lower than the Government's average for textile workers. Since there were five textile mills in Delhi at the time of these wage rates, it seems that the three DCM mills were paying lower than the others. The possibility of faulty calculation on the careless

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[35] The Bombay millowners were very conscious of this disadvantage. See, the Report of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, 1930, Vol II (Bombay, 1931), p.92; Also, Annual Industries Report of the Delhi Province, 1928-29, Ind, B 26, 1930.

[36] Ind, B 47, 1934.

Industrial Surveyor's part cannot be ruled out, but this carelessness could be only marginal, and certainly could not be repeated annually.

The purpose of Lala Shri Ram's argument was to convince workers and anyone else interested that the DCM wage policy did not compare unfavourably with any other textile mill's in the country. For the same purpose, he started, after the 1934 strike, a new column in the DCM Gazette, "directed at giving a truer perspective to the DCM workers about the economic and social problems of the textile industry as a whole."[37] From the point of view of the workers, of course, the argument was a more or less theoretical one. Their experience of falling wages was not made easier to bear by the realization that wages were also falling in other parts of the country. In fact, they were likely to judge the 'fairness' of their earnings only as a function of something closer to home, namely, the prosperity and profits of the company they worked for. This was expressively stated by the third worker who replied to Shri Ram's "Unpleasant News" in the DCM Gazette (see page 27).

(2) Even when a wage cut was admitted indirectly, it was sought to be excused on the grounds that it was essential to the profitability of the business, and if the latter collapsed, the workers would be the ones to suffer most. This was perhaps the favourite argument of employers everywhere, together with the

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[37] Joshi, p. 552.

reminder that the textile industry was one of prime national importance. Mody told the Bombay Millowners' Association that "It was only when it became impossible to carry on and after every avenue of reduction in the cost of production had been explored that most reluctantly they were compelled to reduce wages."[38] The same idea was also reiterated in practically all the FICCI sessions from 1930 to 1938, in the former of which was clearly admitted that textile labourers needed help, but that the textile industry was in no position to give it.[39]

For those who supported the labour cause, there was no justification for either reducing wages, or for doing so in the arbitrary manner in which it was done. What they pleaded for was standardization of wages, and the setting up of a basic minimum wage.[40] And during Depression, there could be a reserve fund to compensate workers, just as there was one for meeting capitalist losses.[41]

From the record of DCM profits and dividends given in Tables I.1 and I.2, no prima facie case can be made for reducing the wages of labourers. The same point was made by the workers, both in their rejoinders to Lala Shri Ram in the DCM Gazette, and in the strike of 1934. Raghubir Singh, a trade

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38 The Statesman, May 24, 1934.

39 FICCI Proceedings, 1930 (Delhi, 1931) pp 162-163.

40 The Statesman, January 8, 1938

41 Ibid., January 13, 1938, December 16, 1937.

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union leader during the latter strikes, stated, regarding its causes:

> "The mill-owners could not in fairness to the workers deny them bare subsistence in view of the fact that they were giving as much as 45 % dividend to share-holders and six pies to one anna per yard of cloth turned out by the mills to the managing agents."[42]

(3) As Padampat Singhania's letter to Shri Ram suggested, the DCM piece rates were good. The decline was on the daily, weekly, and monthly earnings. This was the result of the most efficient of the DCM methods for reducing the cost of production during the Depression: (a) to reduce the working hours of each shift while keeping the mills running full-time; (b) to keep the mills going on Sundays.[43]

(4) Other methods of "progressive rationalization" which proved detrimental to the workers' interests were the stricter demands set for efficiency of production, and for attendance. The fines for defective cloth had been a burden even in 1930, when it was promised that new rules would be prepared by Mehtab Singh. The new rules are not specified, and were probably not made, for the strike that took place the next month had this as a reason: "Lala Shri Ram discussed the workers' grievances and promised quick action....Inexplicably, though, the demands remained unfulfilled for three weeks and the workers struck again...."[44] The fines became no more

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[42] Draft, p. 284

[43] Annual Factory Reports; Delhi Administration Reports; Draft, p. 266; Lala Bharat Ram, Interview, December 2, 1977. See chap III

[44] Joshi, pp. 542-3.

tolerable in later years. In 1934, workers demanded that their union check up the faults that they were fined for. Raghubir Singh was interviewed for Joshi's biography, and "vividly recalls how the workers expressed their dissatisfaction against the policy of the DCM management to deduct the amount of fines from the workers' total earnings at the time of giving wages to them." An explanation is added by the biographer: "The workers were occasionally fined by their supervisors for negligence of work, late coming, continued absence or misbehaviour. This was the most common feature of the Indian Textile Industry in the thirties."[45]

The last point is confirmed by M.D. Morris, whose research with regard to Bombay corresponds closely to our findings regarding Delhi. In Bombay, the list of fineable offences was often not put up, and the weavers' fines could often be as high as 55 % of their actual monthly earnings. In Delhi, the DCM management refused to publicise the reasons for fines by posting up notices, as that would increase clerical work unnecessarily (proving a further burden on production costs, which would deflect on the workers again, went the argument) as well as lead to greater carelessness and indiscipline among the workers.[46] The fine usually ranged from a day's wages to a week's.[47] If the worker could not pay the fine, he was

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[45] Draft, p. 270. [46] Ind, B 68, 1934; Legis, B 18, 1933.

[47] For the Delhi data, RCL Evidence Vol II, Part I (London, 1930), p. 136. For Bombay, Morris, p. 118.

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required to take the spoiled material, and the value of the cloth was deducted from his monthly earnings. This deduction was likely to be substantially larger than the fine. In Morris' survey, for example, the average fine was Rs 0-4-4, whereas the average deduction for spoiled cloth was Rs 5-12-6, over three days' pay.[48] The worker sold the defective cloth, of course, but at a considerable loss.

In a survey of the whole industry, the amount of fines to the total wage bill was not found to be large: .39 %. For the DCM, it was possibly close to this amount, i.e., to the average and probably somewhat higher. This was one aspect of the DCM functioning never remarked upon as exceptional by any party including by the management which made broad claims about other aspects, like wages and welfare. At the same time, the problem of fines was brought up at every strike, very much as it was elsewhere in the textile industry. The point for us to comprehend is that, whatever the average loss per worker may have been, the hardship involved by fines in individual cases must have been tremendous.[49]

Another of the methods for combating the adverse effects of the Depression employed by Lala Shri Ram was to shift production from lower to higher counts of yarn ~~(see Appendix I)~~. The new types of techniques did not bring corresponding new wages.

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[48] Morris, pp. 119-20.

[49] The figures, and this last point, in ILO, Industrial Labour in India, pp. 242-3.

A major demand of the workers in 1933 was that "the rates of wearing are not scientifically based and therefore need revision." In 1934, when the demand was repeated because of non-fulfillment, the strikers were blamed for having broken the "1933 agreement", especially Clause 10, which said:

.... "In order to meet the exigencies of Japan, Absenteeism, Decay, and other ills, it is necessary to reduce the expenses and improve the working quality of the products. ....if the Company provides better rooms, better machinery, and better working conditions with the result that the laborers can work on more machines or produce more, the laborers will help the Company in this connection provided further that the laborers do not suffer in any way and they not more eager than they were working previously."[60]

The "suffering" of workers was not quantifiable, but the wages were. They complained of over-work and inadequate compensation. Contrary to Clause 10, they claimed that workers were given two additional looms, without the advantage of better quality cotton, machinery, or place. Not only had there been no increase in their earnings, but their overall wages had been reduced by 20 %.[61] The management did not deny the latter claim, but argued: "The Company having fulfilled its part of the obligations was quite justified in trying to bring down its cost to be able to stand the internal and external competition."[62]

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[60] The Hindustan Times, June 6, 1934.

[61] Ibid.

[62] The Hindustan Times, May 31, 1934.

It is possible to understand how the Indian worker, whether for lack of training or innate conservatism, could find it difficult to manage more machines than they were used to. As the General Secretary of the Delhi Labour Union pointed out, wide publicity was given to Japanese girls who worked at eight looms, whereas the Indian worker grumbled at four. If workers in India could be given improved looms and machines, he argued, they would be able to work eight looms, too.[83]

A discussion of the nature of work and the workman's capacity belongs to the next section. What is being argued here is that, apart from the possible effect on the working conditions, the rationalization measures of the DCM did not have any positive effect on the workers' earnings. That the Enquiry Committee of the 1934 strike should say the same thing clinches the argument:

> It is a well-known fact that less efficient and more conservative labour resents more rational methods. But it cannot be allowed to check progressive rationalisation which is essential to the growth of the industry. We think, with improved machinery and material, an efficient weaver should be able to attend not only 4 but 6, 8 and even more looms. But we venture to suggest that this resentment of the less efficient worker should be overcome and the inducement to the more efficient worker enhanced by offering to him the distribution of the fruit of extra labour in at least its present proportions and preferably in a proportion more advantageous to labour than the present one.[84]

Our first chapter dealt with the questions of the security of employment and a living wage. We may sum it up by saying that these did not exist for the DCM workers during the

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83 The Hindustan Times, June 6, 1934.

84 In Joshi, p. 347

Depression. The ease of dismissing and replacing workers made the demands on them extreme, and usually an arbitrary, in lieu of fulfilling which they lost their jobs. Similarly, their wages were at the mercy of their employers. As the Royal Commission concluded after its extensive investigations:

> The worker has at present no effective redress against a deduction unfairly imposed by an employer, or too often by a subordinate of the employer or manager. Nor, short of a strike, has he any effective means of enforcing the payment of wages after he has earned them.[55]

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[55] Legis, B 18, 1933. The payment of Wages Bills was passed the next year, but did not bring about any practical change in the situation.

CHAPTER III

The Working Conditions

The next discussion the subject demands is regarding the nature of the work of the textile labourers, the working conditions, and the industrial relations. All these were inextricably linked up with the conditions of the Depression, and influenced by the Depression policy adopted by the DCM.

The atmospheric conditions in textile mills, and the nature of work in each department are very nicely described in Textile Technocracy by Dr. Darb B. Unwalla (Bombay, 1958), in chapter two. His research dates from the fifties, but the conditions he describes were doubtlessly present in the thirties in a more negative form, given the fact of improved technical processes and legal controls in the fifties over the thirties. It would be impossible to reproduce all his details here, but the main features may be kept in mind: With the exception of the mixing room, the working place is extremely hot and humid, often to the point of seeming unbearability (a constant 105 degrees F., with 50 % humidity in summer), especially in the carding and sizing sections. In some departments, noise and ventilation are additional problems, the atmosphere being excessively full of fly and dust. Some operations demand an intense strain on the eyes, like a frame tenter's who has to locate a break from numerous strands before him and piece them up. Lighting conditions are usually not ideal for such jobs. Finally, the technical and maintenance

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services are inadequate so that the cleaning of machines is neither very efficient nor very regular and mostly they are attended to only when they actually break down. This obstructs work, reduces incomes from piece-work, increases strain, and danger from accidents.

The Inspector of Factories, Delhi, would visit each industrial establishment at least once, and often twice, a year. In 1928-29, cooling, ventilation, and humidification were unsatisfactory in the textile mills, and draft rules were circulated for suggestions, framed as a result of experiments in the four textile mills.[1] "The managers were found willing to co-operate in making improvements where possible." These rules were notified the next year, and by 1931, the two larger textile concerns (the Birla Mills, and the DCM) were equipped with the "most up-to-date air-conditioning plant available," and the results were being carefully watched. Water supply and lighting were reported to be almost constantly satisfactory, but the sanitary arrangements posed a serious problem. So it continued year by year, till in 1935: "Sanitary conditions show a very slight improvement over the previous year, the improvement being due to the constant attention paid to this side of inspection by the officers."

From this evidence we know that the Factory Inspector had no major complaint against working conditions in the DCM.

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[1] The following information is from the Delhi Administration Reports, 1928 to 1930-39.

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Had there been any, it would surely have been mentioned, although these Administration Reports hold a strongly anti-worker bias.[2] We do not learn anything more particular from any of our other sources. Complaints about "atmospheric conditions" did not come up at any of the strikes from the workers either, or from a labour leader in the Legislative Assembly.

What did come up, however, in both strikes and legislative debates, were issues related to working conditions, such as accidents, fines, hours of work, and wages.

Apart from the few skilled workers who had migrated from Ahmedabad and Bombay at the beginning of the Depression, all those who started at the DCM were unskilled and illiterate, and were taught the requisite techniques on the job. Even upon their familiarization with the processes, they were never paid the compliment of being competent.[3] Accidents are a noted feature of the textile industry; the debate can be, and was, as to how far they were avoidable. As always, employers warned against the backward Indian workers being treated like their

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[2] E.g., in 1934-35: "There was a serious strike in the DCM which continued for many weeks and report has it that it was due to outside influence" (with no other comment on the event.) "Ignorance among the working classes and the absence of leadership have probably hindered trade unions from carrying on any effective movement." In 1937-38, on the subject of the increase in accidents: "Most of the accidents were due to the carelessness of the workers themselves."

[3] Of this, there are numerous indirect references. As Shri Ram at the 1935 Board Meeting, said about the new Lyallpur Mills: "...it will be at least two or three years before it will be nearly as efficient as even in Delhi."

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Western counterparts, being coddled by legislation and so on, when they were so much less competent. But the Industrial Surveyor, the Inspector of Factories, and legislators, were agreed as to the main causes of accidents:

(a) The ignorance of workers about the machinery they handle and the lack of arrangements by the management for teaching them;

(b) The introduction of modern machinery not followed by the introduction of trained workers;

(c) Measures of economy due to the Depression, resulting in the non-maintenance of accessories (belting, guards, etc.) and adequate safeguards.

(d) The carelessness of workers, produced largely by overwork. "Long working hours, low wages, ... insanitary houses may have brought about his deterioration in health, and he may go about his work in a semi-conscious state."[4]

The migratory nature of the worker was ascribed as the primary handicap in developing proper training, but given this difficulty, the onus of the responsibility lay with the employers and the factory Inspector who had to survey the safety measures. According to the Chief Inspector of Factories, Punjab, also in charge of Delhi, the inspection staff was inadequate for the purpose, and employers have shown "little interest in elaborating on the measures adopted by the inspection staff for the prevention of accidents."[5]

The reasons for this indifference were, first, the belief that no resources at all could be diverted from the business of

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[4] Ind, B 31, 1929; quotation in Ahmad Mukhtar, Factory Labour in India (Madras, 1930) p. 52.

[5] Ind, B 53, 1931.

direct production during the Depression. And second, the belief that the accident rate was more a function of the worker's intelligence and fatalistic outlook than anything-else.

What weakens the latter argument is the fact that it was the workers' representatives who responded enthusiastically to a Government enquiry on the desirability of the establishment of safety organizations, co-operation between employers and workers; lectures, demonstrations, and other educational measures. The employers were cool about all these schemes, as well as about the extension to factories of the Indian Mines Act, which enforced certain duties to prevent accidents, enforceable by prosecution. What they feared most, apart from the expenditure involved, was the growth of workers' organizing ability, and the "danger of external influence tending to operate to the disadvantage of peaceful spirit between the employer and his worker."[6] So no improvements were made over this period, including in the official inspection service. The workers were merely reminded that if they had grievances, they could see the Inspector at the time of his visit and establish the cause of accidents.

According to the Chief Inspector of Factories, Punjab, there was no occupational disease among the textile workers in

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[6] From the Industrial Surveyor, Delhi, to the Chief Commissioner, on the opinions of important factory-owners in Delhi, Ind, B 53, 1931.

Delhi except chronic bronchitis, which was also confirmed by the Chief Medical Officer, Delhi Province.[7] Separate statistics of absenteeism due to sickness are not available. What is known is that workers were not granted, not only the holidays with pay recommended by the ILO at its nineteenth session, but even regular leave without pay. Wages stopped as soon as a man went off work. In the absence of any type of sickness insurance, he generally returned to his village where he could find some kind of security, and indigenous methods of medical treatment. Any legislation on the subject was severely opposed by the Secretary of the DCM, together with other employers in Delhi. Like the rest of the Punjab Chambers of Commerce, Lala Shri Ram "could consider sympathetically the question of allowing to such of their employees as have worked for not less than a year a fortnight's holiday without pay but with the assurance that on their return they would continue to do their former work."[8] While the employers gave "sympathetic consideration," and the Government "brought (it) to the employers' notice," no rules or legislation was made. The status quo on the subject was maintained, viz., there being no provision for paid or even well-defined unpaid leave for the workers, they stayed away when they needed to, and suffered the consequences of fines, forfeiture of deposits, or dismissals.[9] On all these

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[7] Ind, B 54, 1929.

[8] Ind, B 45, 1935; Ind, B 31, 1929.

[9] Ind, B 78, 1933.

counts, in fact, the absence of a system of leave suited employers perfectly.

The reasons given by the DCM for opposing a leave system were the two which are by now becoming familiar to us: (a) the migratory character of workers. This, as the Superintendent of Industries, Delhi, pointed out, was a valid complaint only "so long as the workers are not given any sense of stability of their occupations. If workers can be assured of a number of holidays with pay, they will be naturally tempted to complete the period of work which will entitle them to such leave benefits." [10] (b) The DCM's "financial difficulties due to the serious competition that most of the Indian industries have to meet from such countries as Japan, Italy, Czechoslovakia, etc...."[11]

Another method of meeting these "difficulties", as we have noted before, was to keep the mills running 24 hours a day. According to the Delhi Administration Reports, the DCM worked two day and one night shift throughout the period 1928 to 1938. The working hours per shift were, however, reduced from 60 per week to 52 ½ in 1931 for day operatives, and 48 for night. This was increased the next year to nine hours per day, and eight and a half per night, and stayed at that level till 1938. The Indian Factories Act of 1934 laid down a week of 54 hours

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[10] Ibid.

[11] From the Secretary, DCM, 17th July, 1935, in ibid.

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for non-seasonal factories, and the DCM took "full advantage of the legislation." As predicted by Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh, the limit was "accompanied by a reduction in the earnings of employees" since the majority were paid piece or time rates.[12]

This scheme of cutting down costs was very effective; as late as 1936, Lala Shri Ram was protesting against those "inefficient" employers who preferred a shorter working day.[13] Similarly, he was adament about the need to maintain the maximum working days, seven a week. In 1937, after the conclusion of a general strike in Cawnpore, he hoped that the employers had not accepted the one intolerable condition of not running the mills on Sundays.[14] The effect of Lala Shri Ram's excellent entrepreneurial vision was inevitably detrimental for the workers of the DCM.

In June 1937, the Government of India issued a circular based on the ILO's twentieth session, recommending that workers employed on continuous processes, deprived of two rest days a month, should be given extra days to rest and recuperate, or compensation for the deprivation of the rest days. The DCM

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12 Statement showing the details of Night Shift Working in the Cotton Textile Industry in Delhi, Ind, B 65, 1934; Also LSG/Ind 378, 1938; Ind, B 85, 1933, Ind, B 105, 1934; Ind, B 51, 1928.

13 Shri Ram-Singhania correspondence, SRC.

14 Ibid.

agents replied to this very forcefully:

> We are sorry we do not see the force of argument used by the Government of India, in as much as the additional pay will not help these people to recuperate their health...if we will be made to pay the two days wages, we will not be able to reduce their wages at all..... We therefore strongly object to the suggestion."

In a later note on the same subject:

> ....we don't think the time has come in India when we could think of being ahead of the general run of industrial countries, particularly of Japan, which is our greatest and worst competitor. There is also this fact to be considered that while in Europe there is an Industrial population who has for generations been working as Industrial labour, living on slums of towns and factories (sic), and as such need rest and change, in India the factory labour is very migratory and they almost every year or two go to their villages for long periods, particularly at crop times, and so do need special holidays for rest and change.[15]

That they did need regular holidays is perhaps proved by the strike of 1934, when they demanded that the mills be not run on Sundays. To demand regular leave protected by legislation was probably beyond the scope of their power to organize, as the Superintendent Industries, Delhi, opined. For the workers it was truly a vicious cycle: they protested that they did not get adequate holidays or leave, and excused their absenteeism on that ground; the employers used the fact of absenteeism to excuse their opposition to any scheme for leave or sickness compensation.

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[15] The two, dated 29th July 1937 & 20th Sept 1937, were probably the replies to two separate Govt. circulars, the first suggesting monetary compensation for the holidays not given, the second to suggest giving two holidays. Both alternatives proved unreasonable to the DCM, and the Chief Commissioner commented on the forcefulness of their response. Ind, B 44, 1937.

Of all the measures taken by the DCM, the one most happily explained by the fact of the Depression was additional work given to the labourers. In the section on wages we have already noted how productive capacity was sought to be increased without proportionately increasing the cost of the labourers to the company. Indirect evidence of this is further found in two letters of Shri Ram's sons to Padampat Singhania, whose abilities in industrial management were valued by the whole Shri Ram family. On 12th November, 1934, Murlidhar wrote: "My father has asked me to increase the production and reduce the cost...." Could Singhania give some ideas ? On 24th March, 1936, Bharatram wrote: "I have been able to get 85 % efficiency for the last week in this small shed. Still I am not satisfied as the weavers have too much work to do..... give me some more advice, so that the weavers may not have to work so hard."[16]

Apart from the weavers working harder, in the frame department, one man looked after two frames instead of one after 1933,[17] and the average number of hands per 1000 spindles was reduced (see Table III.1).

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[16] Shri Ram - Singhania correspondence, SRC.

[17] Ind, B 65, 1934.

Table III. 1

Average no. of hands per 1000 spindles in Spinning, from Blow Room to Ring Department

Year and Month	Average no of hands
April '32	16.07
June '32	15.90
April '33	15.30
July '36	12.96
Dec. '36	12.08
April '37	11.99
June '37	12.25
Dec. '37	12.28
Jan. '38	12.33
April '38	11.69
June '38	11.82
Jan. '39	12.14
April '39	11.93
June '39	11.94

Source : Documents in SRC.

Welfare measures for the workers:

Since the majority of workers were originally from outside Delhi, either from the surrounding agricultural areas, or from the Punjab, Rajasthan, and U.P., one of their main problems was to find accommodation in Delhi. The Government and the Municipality expressed concern at the workers' plight, but neither took any steps towards removing it. The Delhi Improvement Trust was formed in 1937, but displayed no such "socialistic" intention as providing housing for workers.[18]

Because of the disturbances from a too rapid turnover of operatives, both the Birla Mills and the DCM made provisions for housing from the very beginning. It was greatly as a result of this that they could develop a stable labour force at all. The early DCM constructions were "huts"; the new buildings came up in our period first in 1929-30. There were about 1600 houses, and increase was apparently impossible because of the rise of construction costs and the difficulty of finding suitable land near the mills.[19] The quarters contained one room per family, which was 10' by 10' in size. Some were slightly larger, but never over 10' by 12'. They had a projecting verandah or a narrow enclosed courtyard. They had common latrines and taps. While the light and ventilation were commented upon as being improvable, the sanitary

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[18] Report of an Industrial Survey Conducted in 1950 in Delhi State (Delhi, 1952) pp. 12-13.

[19] Ibid; T.N. Sharma, Interview, 19th March, 1977.

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conditions were really unsatisfactory, and grew worse with the years, with an increase in the number of persons inhabiting the same area. The drainage system was defective, as a result of which the colony was described as horribly dirty, and overcrowded.[20] The Company blamed the Municipality for faulty sewerage, and continued to eulogize their quarters the while.

There was much sense in their claim that the workers in the Company quarters (about 20 % of the total) were better off than in the slums where the others lived. These were described as filthy bastis, about which the government became alarmed, and started proposing development by 1934.[21]

Although the Government and employers constantly described the company quarters as having a "nominal rent", the workers did not consider it nominal. In the early thirties, all the items in their cost of living index had gone down in price, except for tea and house rent. The latter was Rs.3-12-0 in 1926, and the same in 1934. With a fall in their earnings, this was felt a burden, especially by the poorer workers who earned Rs 17 on an average. In the 1934 strike, one of the demands was that house rent be reduced by half, for it constituted too large a deduction from their already inadequate wages.

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[20] From the Chief Medical Officer, Ind, B 54, 1929; Also Ind, B 8, 1933; Ind, B 8, 1932; RCL Evidence.

[21] That is, they "brought it to the notice" of Municipal bodies, and proposed giving a grant for development, Ind, B 62, 1936.

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The housing scheme of the DCM is one of its most frequently mentioned achievements, both in Government files and in secondary material. The reason offered is that in the 1920's and 1930's, when it was common for the Indian employer to be purely exploitative and indifferent to his workers' welfare, some exceptional men in the country like Jamshedji Tata, Anasuyabehn Sarabhai, and Lal Shri Ram, pioneered a labour welfare movement. Long before the Government took action on the subject, such employers were philanthropic enough to be concerned about workers' difficulties, and efficient enough to realize that workers, if looked after, would be loyal and hard-working.[22]

The latter aspect, that of efficiency, is self-evident: "The bigger mills while always housing their workers have come to more and more realize that good housing and comfortable surroundings for their operatives is not a one-sided advantage and ample proof has been forthcoming that factory workers do appreciate and reciprocate the good intentions of their employers."[23]

The first aspect is less clear-cut. Philanthropy, or charity, or welfare, implies the service of others for their own sake, not for the server's. The housing scheme of Lala Shri Ram plainly brought him adequate, and even excellent, returns. Without having the precise number of houses, we can

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[22] A discussion in K.N. Vaid, Labour Welfare, pp. 96-7.

[23] Ind, B 8, 1932; T.N. Sharma gave similar evidence.

calculate that approximately 1600 of them, at an average monthly rent of Rs 3-12-0, brought revenue of Rs.72,000 a year.[24] This was nothing if not a profitable investment by the Company. In his annual report to the shareholders in 1937, the Secretary declared: "You will be glad to see that the income from rent which is charged at a very low rate has increased to Rs 73,429-10-9 and we hope that soon it will be enough to pay the dividend on the Preference Shares."[25]

On the accompanying chart (Table III.2) are shown all the "welfare" measures of the DCM started in this period. Of these, housing clearly does not belong to this category of "welfare" although always labelled as such. The second important one, education, is also questionable. The school that was set up in the DCM premises for the children of the workers was run by the Municipal Committee, and to Lala Shri Ram goes only the credit of arranging for it to be there.[26] A night school for the workers themselves is mentioned as being started in 1933-34.[27] This, too, may have been a Municipal venture, with only the required building provided by the mill-owners, for the RCL evidence clearly mentions two schools of the Municipality being set up in the DCM premises.[28]

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[24] The average rent from Cotton textile Working Class Cost of Living Index Numbers, Delhi City, Ind, B 65, 1934. The no. of houses varies between 1800 in some reports (Ind, B 31, 1929) and 1,473 in some (Report of an Industrial Survey in Delhi State....)

[25] Balance Sheet of the DCM, 1937.

[26] Ind, B 54, 1929.

[27] Annual Factory Report for 1933, Ind, B 65, 1934.

[28] RCL Evidence, p 121

TABLE III.2 Welfare Schemes of the DCM

Year	Housing	Hospital	Schools	Play Ground	Fair, trip, etc.	P.F. Bonus, etc.	Cooling etc.	Others
1928-29								
1929-30	Constructed.							Workers Union-; Mutual Relief Fund
1930-31	"	Scheme		Scheme		PF. ~~described~~ discontinued; bonus with condition		
1930-32					Annual Fair		Air conditioning plant.	
1932-33	"	Eye test room; Maternity ward						
1933-34		Dispensary; Creche	A school Night for boys; day for girls	Gymnsium Cricket, foot-ball volleyball, hockey, boxing, Wrestling	Trip to Ajmer			Library(?)
1934-35	"							Gazette
1935-36					'Circus'		Shower baths; Radio	
1936-37								
1937-38								

Source: Compiled from Annual Factory Reports of the Delhi Province & Delhi Administration Reports.

No details of the hospital are available, but there is repeated allusion to the fact that workers could and did use the medical facilities of the Municipality or the Government. This is first stated in a 1929 report;[29] next in the evidence given to the Royal Commission on Labour:

"The city and suburbs are well provided with hospitals and indigenous dispensaries where free medical aid can be obtained. The DCM employs a compounder to render first-aid when necessary but the location of an up-to-date municipal dispensary in the neighbourhood has saved the mills any further expenditure on medical relief."[30]

This was the Bara Hindu Rao dispensary, and the indigenous ones were the Ayurvedic and Unani Tibbi College Hospital, close to the mills' "coolie lines." The Annual Factory Report undoubtedly means the Bara Hindu Rao unit when it mistakenly attributes to the DCM "an up-to-date dispensary.... equipped with the latest apparatus capable of dealing with every type of patient. A room for testing eyes has recently been added.."[31] Had such a place belonged to the Company, it is reasonable to suppose that the fact would have been mentioned in the Reports showing the action taken on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour. On the other hand, what was reported in 1937 was that of the three medical officers serving the DCM, "the Government bears the entire cost of two and half of the

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[29] Ind, B 54, 1929.

[30] RCL Evidence, p 120 [31] Ind, B 8, 1934.

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third appointment," and "The existing hospital accommodation in Delhi city where labour and industry is mostly concentrated is open to the public including the labouring classes. This is considered adequate for the purpose."[32]

Among the most publicized welfare measures of the DCM were also the provisions for the recreation and entertainment of the workers. A "scheme for a playing field" is mentioned in the Delhi Administration Report of 1930-31; in the next year is mentioned that a plot of ground was set aside for recreation; in 1934-35 that "Sport and recreation - cricket, foot-ball, hockey, volley-ball, wrestling and boxing - is strongly encouraged." It is difficult to imagine that the facilities provided could have served the purpose they were declared to serve. Workers earning an average wage of Rs 17.00; exposed to arbitrary treatment regarding employment and conditions of work; weak, undernourished, overworked; living in a filthy and overcrowded environment are not generally known to enjoy cricket and hockey. In fact, apart from wrestling, the very choice of games makes it seem as if the facilities were meant more for the staff or the officers than for the workers. Today, for example, one may confirm that the DCM workers do engage in sports, and it is significant that the most popular is "dangal" (wrestling).

The welfare measures of the DCM had been started off in the twenties "by setting apart one day a year when sweets,

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[32] Ind, B 73, 1937; and see also Industries files B 78, 1933; B 51, 1934; B 55, 1935; B 62, 1936.

clothes and amusements are provided for all employees and their families."[33] This evolved into the annual fair for workers, which Lala Shri Ram decided to hold regularly after the first strike in 1930. It was often brought up by him and sometimes by the Government as the best example of the outstanding work done by the company for the employees.

On the day of the fair, the mills were closed, and each worker given thirty-two coupons of half an anna each which they could spend on the food and amusements that vendors set up in the mills premises. "One of the chief attractions was Lala Shri Ram's personal presence and participation in the fairs," according to Shri Ram's biography. A cinema theatre also existed, and was, apparently, used. The President of the Delhi Municipal Committee complained that welfare work in Delhi "falls short of actual requirements. The Delhi Cloth and General Mills were first in the field but they have simply confined themselves to the provision of occasional cinema shows and the organization of an Annual Workers Day which is much appreciated and has proved a success."[34]

Unfortunately, we do not have the testimony of workers as to how they felt about the welfare work. In the absence of any written records or commentary from them, we may judge their responses only by a specially careful consideration of their

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[33] Delhi Administration Report, 1933-34.

[34] Ind, B 54, 1929.

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actions, and a searching inquiry into the validity of the written records of all the other parties involved. Our data brings us to the conclusion that, regarding wages, schemes for welfare, benefits, workers had a different set of priorities, and a different logic, than their employers. Our best sources are the details of the demands they presented during strikes, and the very fact of their organizing and acting in an atmosphere so explicitly hostile to such ventures. Apart from that, and the reports of others about the state of mind of the workers, we find isolated, significant, pieces of information. The Chief Commissioner visited the DCM for the annual fair in September, 1934, during which occasion he was given ~~him~~ a letter saying that "wages were reduced by many tricks and the fair held only to deceive the public." The letter was anonymous, therefore, destroyed, but this mention of it remains on file.[35]

The different perspective of workers was demonstrated best of all on the occasion of the strikes. Before 1930s, the opinion of the authorities was that "Whatever little is done for the welfare of workers is undoubtedly appreciated and the millowners admit that they get a fair return from the workers in the shape of loyalty and increased production."[36] Then came the first ever strike, which startled Lala Shri Ram

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[35] Ind, B 68, 1034.

[36] From the Inspector of Factories, Punjab, Ind, B 54, 1929.

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into incredulity. He did not take the actual demands seriously, however, and reacted with a few more "welfare measures." (See Chapter IV). In 1934, the workers were on strike ~~on strike~~ again, for mostly the same demands, such as wage stabilization, the right to organize, etc. The Chief Commissioner wondered: "It is not clear why the DCM, which treats its employees with unusual generosity, has been specially selected for this attack."[37] Lala Shri Ram justified himself to the Chief Commissioner with a note of the various welfare measures taken by him, and a list of the "many distinguished visitors" who had commented favourably on the mills. Among them were: Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh (Superintendent of Industries), Johnson (Chief Commissioner), G.S. Bajpai (Secretary, Government of India), Beckett (District Judge), Layard (Deputy Commissioner), Sir Frank Noyce (Member, Industries and Labour Commission), Sir Harold Butler (Director, ILO, Geneva), Asaf Ali (M.L.A.), and Devdas Gandhi (son of M.K. Gandhi).[38] Then Lala Shri Ram described, as the peak of his concern for workers, the special trip to Jaipur and Ajmer for 250 mill-hands. They were apparently the better paid millhands, for, though subsidized, the trip cost Rs 8-8-0 per head. It lasted from 24th to 25th May, when "the Special left Ajmer at 7.30 p.m. so that it would reach Delhi in sufficient time to enable everyone to attend the mill in good time."[39]

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[37] H C, B 1(1), 1934.

[38] Lala Shri Ram to the CC, Ind, B 68, 1934; The Statesman, 1st Jan., 1938.

[39] Ind, B 68, 1934.

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Here again it is surprising to find that an event for which Lala Shri Ram and the DCM took all the credit was, in fact, mainly the project of the BB & CI Railway. The latter published a brochure after the event to publicise the project. They advertised within it that special care was taken to choose a route that would be attractive to, and an inclusive price that would be suitable for, the particular customers they were catering for. This opportunity, and the cheap rates, had to be only used by the employers.[40]

No matter what aspect of the workers' condition we take up, we come back to the wages. Among the welfare measures, too, there were some financial ones, which either cut further into the earnings of the labourers, or put such restrictions on their basic rights in return for pecuniary advantage that they were unacceptable. These measures were the Provident Fund, the Bonus, and the Charity Fund.

The Provident Fund scheme existed in the DCM since 1920, had been stopped in 1930 upon the workers' demand, and was re-started in 1934, under what conditions is not clear. In 1937, it was submitted to the Government for legal recognition. On studying it, the Chief Commissioner wrote to the Chief Inspector of Factories: "I have the honour to observe that the Provident Fund Rules of the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Ltd., contain a number of unusual provisions, some of which are open

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[40] Ibid.

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to serious objection..." Among these were:

Rule 1: The minimum deposit was eight annas a month, and the scheme was compulsory for all, including those earning Rs 7 a month. The Chief Commissioner pointed out that this kind of compulsion, could hardly be appreciated by the workers, especially the lowest paid.

Rule 2: The subscriber had no right whatsoever over the fund while in the service of the company, whereas the company was entitled to deduct from the fund any amount that may be due to it by the worker for any reason, except fines. On the contrary, as the Commissioner noted, the Provident Fund should be the subscriber's property, and advances made from it to the contribution did not strictly comprise a loan. If that was the only form in which he was permitted to use it, a high rate of interest was not justified, since the advance consisted of his own money.

Rule 9: For "dishonesty...mischief, intimidations, or for engineering or abetting strikes or otherwise tampering with the labour of the company, for insolence or disorderly behaviour towards other servants of the company" the employee would forfeit not only the company's, but his own contribution plus interest. Jenkins indignantly noted that an employee should be entitled to all his own contribution plus interest, upon leaving service, not forfeit it for a reason such as the above. The Chief Commissioner could not go beyond the strictly legalistic parameters of the situation to note that the aim of this clause was obviously to better control the workers. Once a growing part of the worker's earnings was (compulsorily) in the Company's hands, the risk of losing it must have been a very heavy one to take.

Rule 12: Any dispute arising between the company and an employee contributer relating to the Provident Fund, would be submitted for arbitration to the Board of Directors, whose decision would be final and binding on both parties.[41] The glaring unfairness of this was commented upon by the Commissioner.[41]

The DCM Agents proved very unwilling to change these rules as the Chief Commissioner insisted that they should.

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[41] Ind, B 89, 1937.

The correspondence began on 17th February, 1937, and by 13th July, the DCN Agents reluctantly agreed to some of the Government's conditions. How exactly the existing rules were modified is not clear, but the Company added two new clauses of their own. The rate of interest given by the Company was reduced from 6 % to 4 %, and the interest paid by workers for "loans" increased from 7½ % to 9 %. "The reasons," they wrote, "are obvious." The Government's reminder that borrowings from a contributor's own deposits constituted "advances" and not "loans" at all went unheeded.

The Agents' strongest argument was that the scheme was "very much appreciated by the employees...if they borrowed from outside then they would have been required to pay something like 20 or 30 %."

The rate of outside interest mentioned was probably correct, except that the company, too, obtained money from the Provident Fund deposits at a far lower rate than it would have got from outside, which was not mentioned. And here was another vicious cycle: the worker still had to turn to the Mahajan. We find details of 37 workers with outstanding loans (advances) against them, ranging from Rs 119-4-0 to Rs 1141-50-0. The amount deducted from their wages was Rs 10 to Rs 50 per month, and easily worked out to half the pay in hand on an average. As a result, they had to borrow from the Mahajan regularly to fill in the gap.[42]

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[42] Ibid.

Whether the scheme was appreciated by the workers also appears doubtful. In a letter to the Chief Commissioner on 15th June, 1937, they wrote: "Sir, we are poor men and God knows how these funds are deducted from our small salaries, and now the company wish to swallow the money (sic). We are always illegally forced...We are tired of these rules and the result is that we are unable to fulfill our household requirements."[43]

Another compulsory contribution referred to is one anna per month for the "mill's charity fund." What exactly this was is not clear, but it was discontinued upon the workers' demand after the June 1934 strike.[44]

The most novel scheme of all was the Bonus. In 1930-31, DCM made a profit of Rs 11.22 lakhs (compared to Rs 7.21 lakhs in the previous year), and 135 % of the share capital was paid out to the shareholders as dividend. Rs 40,000 was given as bonus to the workers and staff members, in return for an undertaking that "if they involved themselves in any anti-mill activity the Company would have the power to recover the amount of bonus from their salaries."[45]

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ind, B 68, 1934. The Hindustan Times, April 25, 1930. Even in that year: "The strikers also say that they want control of their charity fund."

[45] Balance Sheet, 1930-31. Hoshi, p. 227, 543.

Along the same lines as the fair and the theatre was the DCM Workmen's Gazette, started in January 1931, with the following objectives: (i) to strengthen the relations between the workers and the employers; (ii) to impart moral teachings to the workers; (iii) to acquaint the workers with the events in the industrial world in general, and the textile industry in particular; (iv) to keep the workers informed about their own activities.[46]

The effort was a brave one, but doomed to failure on all counts. It was impossible to strengthen worker-employer relationship by an agency like the Gazette. That could be strengthened only with the workers becoming actually more satisfied with their side of the bargain. Similarly, to report on the workers' co-curricular activities in sports or mela could never replace a discussion of their more serious problems. To give them moral pep talks did not mean either to educate them or to improve their conditions. The 'best' of the Gazette's objectives was the communication of 'news' about the textile industry, to drive home to the workers the fact of their being but one component of a larger system, and likely to suffer if the whole did. ~~This seemingly~~, And here it was the workers who failed to respond by repressing their own interests in appreciation of the sufferings of the larger whole; or, in other words, to be bullied psychologically into

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[46] Joshi, p. 545. Old issues of the Gazette were used in Joshi's biography as recently as three years ago. A whole year's attempt to trace them, however, have been unsuccessful; they are either lost, destroyed, or hidden from researchers.

passivity. They were not in a position to appreciate that the negative changes in their earnings, working conditions, etc., were only a small part of the bigger phenomenon of the Depression. It was of small comfort to know that the DCM had more welfare schemes in hand than most mills in Bombay, or that it paid higher wages than Madras. Such a comparitive treatment, as mentioned before, ~~is~~ was a theoretical concept for workers in the thirties. Therefore, in spite of the experiment of the Gazette, what did improve with time was not demonstrably the workers' relations with the employers, but their relations among themselves, resulting in the capacity to organize for their rights, as they understood them.

The Standard of Living of the Workers:

To understand the lives and deeds of the labourers, we have to measure their standard of living. "To judge the latter, the conditions of housing, the degree of indebtedness of workers, the legal or illegal deductions from pay made by the employers or jobbers or moneylenders, and conditions of public health have all to be taken into account."[47] The deductions from pay, and some facts about the workers' health, have already been discussed, in the following section we shall look at the remaining two or three aspects to round off our study of workers' conditions.

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47 A.K. Bagchi, Private Investment in India 1900-1939 (Cambridge, 1972), p. 149.

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The workers' housing conditions were universally deplored. Delhi Cloth Mills are located in Bara Hindu Rao, in the heart of the old industrial area of the city, and typically, the worst slums of the city grew up close to it. The company housing catered to 20 % of the workers. Unsatisfactory as it was regarding sanitation and living space, it left the vast majority of the workmen to find homes in yet more crowded and insanitary busteen. Basti Harphool Singh, in the Sadar, was one such, the deteriorating condition of which forced the government to consider some action. From 1935 onwards, the opening up and proper planning of such congested areas became a goal of the government and municipal committee, as quoted in reply to questions about workers' housing annually, in the Reports on the action taken on the Recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour. The Delhi Improvement Trust, set up in 1937, also felt obliged to consider the matter, though the size of the problem precluded anything beyond periodical discussions:

> Industrial development in itself is of no particular interest to the Trust, but in most old cities, and Delhi is no exception, industries have grown up hapahazardly and are responsible for much of the overcrowding which the Trust must endeavour to remedy. For example, if the textile factories of Delhi could be moved to a more suitable site where the workers and their families could be housed in quarters of modern design it should be possible to improve conditions in and near Delhi city very considerably.[48]

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[48] LSG/Local Bodies, 1330, 1938.

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The housing prospects, then, were "hardly conducive to general health of the operatives. He often shows a poor physique and appears contented with a low standard of comfort."[49] The poor level of housing and health was a direct result of the low wages earned by the workers. At the same time, it was indirectly responsible for the low wages, insofar as "health is one of the chief factors gab governing the efficiency of a worker. Unless the labouring classes are well-fed by a corresponding increase in their wages it appears a difficult problem to affect any appreciable improvement in this behalf" (i.e., their efficiency).[50]

Similarly, both cause and effect of their low wages was the indebtedness of labour: their indebtedness was caused by the low wages they received; in turn, the indebtedness had a negative effect on their health, their efficiency, and consequently, the wages they earned.

Many of the industrial labourers who migrated from the villages did so because they were in debt, and □□ many of the second generation in the cities were born in debt. The Royal Commission estimated that "in most of industrial centres, the proportion of families or individuals who are in debt is not less than 2/3 of the whole. We believe that in the great majority of cases, the amount of debt exceeds three months'

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[49] From the Industrial Surveyor to the DC, Delhi, Ind, B 54, 1929.

[50] Chief Inspector of Factories, Punjab, to DC, Delhi, Ibid.

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wages and is often far in excess of this amount."[51] The root of the problem in the cities was that the wages of male workers could be attached for the payment of loans, and the employer used as a collector of the debt, up to half the employee's salary, or Rs 20 less than the salary, whichever was the smaller sum. In such cases, the claims of the creditor were the first charge upon the wages of the debtor.[52]

This was the practice which the Royal Commission sought to abolish, by diminishing the worker's power of credit and by making loans to him an unprofitable investment. All creditors were against this move, including the employer, and more so employers like the DCM, where the company tried to cover much of the workers' loan requirements. The Secretary of the Delhi Cloth and General Mills replied strongly to the proposal:

> The employer has often got to advance money to the workers and especially the new hands. It will be impossible to give liberal advances to the workpeople if they can evade payment by leaving the service and joining some other industrial concern. The immunity from attachment of pay should be given only after the worker has served for a definite period in any one factory and the break in service should debar him from the privilege but in no case should he get the immunity against the employer's (previous or present) debt which please note and obligo.[53]

It is probable that in Delhi with its five cotton mills, the position of mistries and jobbers was not as powerful as in

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51 Introduction of Mr. Joshi's Bill relating to Indebtedness, Legis, B 17, 1933.

52 ILO, Industrial Labour in India, p. 242.

53 Recommendations of the Royal Commission on Labour regarding the question of arrest and imprisonment for debt, Ind, B 68, 1933.

the larger centres like Bombay where there were 70 to 80 textile mills. They could not have had the same potential of offering and taking away employment in Delhi; secondly, the paternalistic policies of the DCM managers took away another sphere of activity to a large degree: loans and advances to the workers.

The jobbers had been essential in an earlier period to recruit labour, but during the Depression, there was no shortage of men, and those searching for a place applied directly at the mill gates. Their main task remained to teach the labourers how to watch the machines, and to act as an informal leader to them. In the 1930 strike, one of the demands was: "mistries must be good to workers." In the same strike, only the mistries, out of 6000 employees, reported to work. In 1934, they spearheaded the breaking of the strike. Their role as liaison men between the workers and employers declined with the growth of trade unions and worker leadership but not their oppression to the same degree. It is significant that they were chosen, probably all through, office-bearers of the management-controlled DCM Workmen's Union.[54]

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[54] S.D. Mehta, The Cotton Mills of India, 1854-1954 (Bombay, 1954), p. 70. Mehta states that in the DCM there was a "sizeable measure of workers' confidence in their jobbers," but his reason for believing this is "the election by the former of the latter to various institutions in the mill." He is referring mainly to the DCM Union, which, as we will see in the next chapter, was far from a workers' body, and leadership of it would denote solidarity with the employers rather than with the workers.

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To present a cost of living index is not a difficult task, since there is only one proper set of figures relating to the subject. According to the local officials themselves, the biggest gap in the statistical information of their Province was the working class budget, and there was talk since 1929 of attempting to fill this in. Inquiries were made in connection with the visit of the Royal Commission, but only an incomplete report was made (see Table III.3). Then in 1934 was undertaken a detailed "Enquiry into unemployment and wage cuts in the cotton textile industry," upon the rash of strikes in Bombay led by "extremist agitators" using "assertions of wage cuts and unemployment" for their purpose.

Obviously the Government could be made interested in working class conditions only when the workers might present a political threat. The cost of living index as drawn up by the Industrial Surveyor is given in Table III.4.

It confirms the far less specific note found in the DCH Gazette of July 7, 1931, where a worker writes: "...The poor worker at present hardly earns Rs 16 a month. Rs 3 are deducted as house rent by the Company. In remaining 13 they have to spend after milk, vegetables, cloth, barber, cobbler, fuel, spices, and interest of Mahajan."[55]

The first feature that may be established with certainty is that the cost of living fell to 87.6 in 1934, from an index

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[55] Joshi, p. 547.

Table XII.3

Family Budgets

	Skilled (Rs)	Unskilled (Rs)
Food	16-0-0	17-0-0
Clothing	10	9
Shelter	3	2
Thirst	2	2
Medical aid	2	1-8-0
Education	2	0-8-0
Luxuries	3	2
Miscellaneous	4	3
Total	44	37
	(modified to 38-0-0)	(modified to 32-0-0)

Source: Royal Commission on Labour in India, Evidence Vol II Part I (London, 1930).

of 100 in 1926. This decrease, however, was less than that in wages in the same period discussed in Chapter II, and most clearly set out in Table II.5. The second feature was the low standard of living, compounded by the fall in earnings. As the Chief Inspector of Factories, Lahore, reported of Delhi:

> The standard of living of the labouring classes is low: this is due on account of their poor earnings. Their wages are hardly sufficient to fetch for them and their families the bare necessities of life. The food of an average worker is far from being nourishing and he is invariably found in dirty clothes...[56]

[56] Ind, B 54, 1929.

The other comments on the subject are similar without exception:

> From a consideration of the various existing factors contributing towards the depression in the level of the actual wages earned by the industrial operatives, it is no wonder that most of the families are hardly able to make both ends meet.[57]

Here the "various existing factors" are significant. They bring us back to one of the important themes of the whole chapter. Since this depression in the level of actual wages occurred <u>in spite</u> of a fall in prices and the cost of living, the various factors contributing to lower wages would have to be, firstly, a direct reduction of wages, and more importantly, the cuts and deductions from wages under different guises during the Depression.

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[57] RCL Evidence, p. 136.

TABLE III-4

Cotton Textile Working Class cost of living Index Number of Delhi City

Articles	Unit of quality	Weights prop.to total expenditure	Prices per unit of quantity July - 1926	June 1934	Index Numbers June 1934
Wheat	Maund	46	6 - 6 - 0	3 - 10 - 3	57.1
Rice	Seer	3	0 - 3 - 3	0 - 2 - 9	84.6
Dal (Mung)	"	1	0 - 3 - 9	0 - 1 - 3	33.3
Spices - mixed	"	14	1 - 8 - 0	1 - 2 - 0	75.0
Salt-common	"	1	0 - 1 - 0	0 - 1 - 3	125.0
Gur	"	2	0 - 1 - 6	0 - 2 - 0	133.3
Sugar	"	3	0 - 8 - 0	0 - 4 - 0	50.0
Tea	Packet of 1z	2	0 - 2 - 0	0 - 2-0	100.0
Ghee	Seer	19	2 - 0 - 0	1 - 8 - 0	75.0
Oil(Mustard)	"	3	0 - 5 - 0	0 - 7 - 0	80.0
Fish(Tengra)	"	2	0 - 5 - 0	0 - 3 - 6	70.0
Meat (Mutton)	"	3	0 - 6 - 0	0 - 4 - 0	66.0
Vegetables (Onions, Garlics, Pumpkins, Marrow, Potatoes and Soa-Palak)	"	1	0 - 2 - 6	0 - 1 - 6	60.0
Total All-food Index No.		100			77.6
House Rent Index No.		Per Month	3 - 12 - 0	3 - 12 - 0	100.0
Fuel & Lighting					
Fire wood	Maund	29	1 - 0 - 0	0 - 1 - 0	75.0
Kerosene oil	Bottle	6	0 - 3 - 0	0 - 2 - 6	83.3
Charcoal	Maund	58	1 - 4 - 0	1 - 8 - 0	120.0
Matches	Dozens	7	0 - 4 - 0	0 - 3 - 0	75.0
Total Index No.		100			88.3
Clothing					
Dhoties	Pair	38	2 - 12 - 0	2 - 4 - 0	81.8
Shirting male	Yard	4	0 - 6 - 0	0 - 4 - 0	66.7
Shirting female	"	5	0 - 6 - 6	0 - 5 - 0	76.9
Saree	Pair	40	2 - 12 - 0	2 - 5 - 0	80.4

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Pajama cloth, male	Yard	6	0 - 7 - 0	0 - 5 - 6	78.5
Pajama cloth, famale	Yard	7	0 - 7 - 0	0 - 5 - 9	82.1
Total Index No.		100			77.7

Miscellaneous

Barber	Shave & Haircut	8	0 - 2 - 0	0 - 3 - 0	150.0
Soap	Bar (1 seer)	11	0 - 7 - 0	0 - 4 - 0	57.1
Medicine	Mixture	23	0 - 8 - 0	0 - 8 - 0	100.0
Drink & Drug	Bottle	34	0 - 14 - 0	0 - 12 - 0	85.8
Pan, Supari, biri.	Per 100	23	10 - 10 - 0	0 - 8 - 0	80.0
Travelling to and from native place	Per mile	1	0 - 0 - 4	0 - 10 - 3	93.7

Groups	Weights proportionate total expenditure	Groups Index Nos. for June 1934
Food	37	77.6
Fuel & Lighting	12	88.3
Clothing	27	77.7
House Rent	14	100.0
Miscellaneous	10	94.4
Total cost of living Index No.	100	87.6

Source: Ind.B. 65, 1934.

CHAPTER IV

Industrial Relations

To study the industrial relations system of the Delhi Cloth and General Mills, we have first to look at the larger contextual society in which it operated, and the distribution of power in this society. That is, we have to study the general political and economic situation within which the actors of the industrial relations system functioned, and their respective prestige, position, and access to ultimate authority. The actors would be: the government agencies, the management, and the workers. The role and place of each of these and their relationship with the others has to be first clarified.[1]

The Government of India maintained a dual position on the subject of labour. It was open to the recommendations of the International Labour Conferences; did not discourage forthcoming debates or legislation on subjects related to labour; appointed a Commission in 1929 to enquire into the existing conditions of labour in India; kept Inspectors of Factories, Industrial Surveyors, and Officers of Public Health. These things barely touched the fringe of the workers' problems. In fact these efforts ~~They~~ were to a large extent the concomitants of a certain status as a civilized nation and an advanced, humane, government, that the British liked to claim.

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[1] John Dunlop in his Industrial Relations System (New York, 1958) explains the systems view of studying industrial relations. He deals with an advanced stage of industrialization, and his framework is not directly applicable, but some ideas may be gleaned from it for our particular study.

At the same time, as many officials and quasi-officials kept pointing out, the practice of the government was of official non-interference. Sir Harold Butler, Director of the International Labour Office in Geneva, after long consultations with officers and industrialists in India, summed up this attitude in a speech in 1938. The solution of labour problems, he announced, "must be a matter between employers and workers.. ..The salvation of industry in India did not lie in legislation. The two parties must directly settle the question between them."[2]

The declared preference for non-involvement on the part of the Government suffered from all the drawbacks of a laissez faire situation: viz., that in a condition of inequality, non-interference implies injustice to the weaker side. In the case of employers and labour, laissez faire was practised in the U.S. for almost a century before its inherent unfairness evoked protest and action. The general explanation of such 'laissez faire' lies in the underlying loyalty of the legislators to the interests of industrialists rather than workers; some extent of ignorance; some of faulty deduction supported by indifference. In the case of the British Government, it was all three, emphasized by the inability to attend to justice rather than its own survival.[3]

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[2] The Statesman, January 9, 1938.

[3] This simplified summing-up is made because it seemed interesting to draw conclusions purely on the strength of the evidence for this particular study; a more detailed or referenced discussion of the British Government's pro-capitalist bias is obviously not relevant here.

From a careful reading of the files in what used to be the Chief Commissioner of Delhi's office, it does not seem that the Government bore the workers any ill-will. The Government was a machine for maintaining law and order, and as such, hostile to any action which might upset discipline, and indifferent to the motives of the actors. The main thrust of hostility towards workers of workers' organizations was against them as potential provocateurs, and agressors on the discipline of the system.

Government's interference was sought by the employers to protect their own interests against the workers, in the guise of protecting the wider interests of industry.[4] This is another familiar feature concurrent with the early stages of industrialization in a developing country; the case of the U.S. again occurs as the most striking example. In colonial India, the employers held a view almost identical to that of the Government on the subject of discipline in the society. Brig Nath Syal, Chairman of Delhi Factory Owners' Federation, announced at their Annual General Meeting of 1939:

> Industrial unrest thrives on a soil propagated by communist teachings and certain hooligan elements in society always welcome disturbances of the peace for their own ends....We would urged an effective check being exercised over this prmg propaganda and we would suggest the appointment of a labour officer.

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[4] When the Delhi Factory Owners' Federation applied for a license in 1935, official correspondence revealed that it was "primarily a Traders' Union and have merely inserted a few vague clauses regarding promotion of commercial interests to bring the Association within the Act." (Commerce, B 62, 1935)

"Of strikes, we may say," he quoted.

"And which'll win ?" the wight enquired
A question stupidly inspired
Since all must be the loser.[5]

Especially during the time of economic depression, and heightened Nationalist activity, the industrialists claimed to be (a) particularly vulnerable regarding production and sales, therefore not to be disturbed on any other count; (b) engaged in activities of importance for the nation, therefore deserving of special indulgence. As a result, they chose one of three courses of action: One, to fulfil the minimum of government's requirements regarding treatment of workers; second, to ignore the regulations or recommendations which they felt to be too burdensome, three, and most often, to simply foil the necessary legislation at an early stage.

Examples of all three responses have been mentioned in the foregoing sections. Table IV.1 collects the different subjects on which legislation was proposed and/or enacted, and the response of employers to each. Three categories have been made according to the above description. 'A' consists of those regulations or proposals which were not easy to defy, but were complied with to a doubtful degree of satisfaction. Government was itself aware of the minimum done in regard to these primarily working conditions and labour welfare measures, but expressed its helplessness in the face of the employers' recalcitrance.[6]

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[5] Ind/LSG, 61, 1939.

[6] Ind, B 47, 1929.

Table IV.1

Legislation, and Proposals for

A. Reduction of dust, humidification, ventilation, lighting, health.

B.	Employers' Response
1. Accident Prevention	Workers' intelligence and outlook poor, Workers' organisations suspect, "Western" methods not applicable.
2. Payment of Wages - re., fines	Industry already helpless because of Depression; Fines for mischief essential.
3. The Indian Trade Unions Act	Findings of Courts of Enquiry ignored by employers.
C.	
1. Sickness Insurance	Employers' contribution a premature imposition on industry, therefore injurious to labour; Workers poor, conservative, un-committed.
2. Regulation of period of wage payment	Workers' mobility & debt would increase, loan & advance facilities decrease; employers' clerical work more.
3. Holidays with pay	Heavy tax on industry; nature of workers migratory.
4. Restriction on Hours of work	Workers do not demand it; rarely a cause of strikes.
5. To reduce indebtedness - Immunity from attachment of pay	Workers can look after themselves, will borrow anyway; employers should be protected.
D.	**Result of schemes in operation**
1. Payment of Wages Act - re., arrears of pay	System defective, workers lose arrears.
2. Workmen's Compensation Act	Employers' and government co-operation lacking; workers lose compensation or are under-compensated.

Sources: A - Annual Administration Reports
B 1 - Ind B 53, 1931 C 1 - Ind B 31, 1929 Draft
2 - Legis B 18, 1933 2 - Ind B 52, 1933
3 - Annual Reports 3 - Ind B 45, 1935

D 1 - Ind/LSG B 26, 1937
2 - Ind B 2, 1937, B 2, 1934, B 2, 1935.
4,5 - Ind B 68, 1933.

Category 'B' consists of those measures which were successfully ignored by the employers, or which, for lack of their cooperation, could not be made effective. When both the authorities and the employers were apathetic, a law as good as lapsed. The best example on record is the Payment of Wages Act, passed partly to expedite the payment of delayed or deducted wages. Mian Fazle Karim, a Vakil and trade union leader of Delhi, wrote to the Chief Commissioner in 1937 that the Act was not serving its purpose. While the processes of law ran their leisurely course, employees filing applications were dismissed, and, unemployed, returned to their villages, from where it was impossible for them to pursue their cases in the city. The District and Sessions Judge, Bhandari, replied to the Chief Commissioner upon the latter's query on the matter that the Act was new, and time was needed by Counsel to study the legal points of each case. Jenkins was perturbed, and could see the justive of Fazle Karim's complaint, but took no action apart from having "a suitable reply sent to Mian Fazle Karim."[7] Employers could be fairly confortable that their ignoring any particular provisions would disturb the government only within certain limits - perhaps to the point of finding a suitable reply.

Similarly, the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926 provided machinery for the settlement of trade disputes, but it left the employer free to ignore the findings of the Courts of Enquiry

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[7] Ind/LSG, B 26, 1937.

when he chose. He often chose to do so, and the Act did not prove to be of material benefit to the workers.[8]

To the category, 'C', belong the proposed Bills for sickness insurance, leave with pay, minimum wage, relief of indebtedness, period for the payment of wages to be restricted to seven days, which were not passed. The Government asked the "concerned parties" their views on each. The Punjab Chambers of Commerce, the Delhi Factory Owners' Federation; the Secretary, Delhi Cloth and General Mills; the Delhi Piece Goods Association, each gave a strong and negative reply. The bills were dropped. The attitude was summed up in the Chief Commissioner's statement to the Secretary, 22nd October, 1937. Any legislation, he suggested, should wait "until more liberal views are held. Such experience as I have had of the working of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, indicates that there is real difficulty in enforcing measures intended for the benefit of workers in respect of which factory owners are hostile or apathetic."[9]

In the case of the long planned Minimum Wage Bill, the government was warned repeatedly in advance that any effort at legislation would prove unpopular. The FICCI "threatened": "any considerable attempt by the state to raise wages by law is likely under the gold or any fixed exchange standard, to

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[8] See H.R. Soni, Indian Industry and its Problems (London, 1932), p. 316.

[9] Ind, B 41, 1937

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increase imports and reduce exports, and therewith to contract profits and employment."[10]

The last category, 'D' consits of those schemes which were already in operation, but all we hear of them in this period is regarding their inefficiency of operation - for the workers. The Annual Reports on the working of the workmen's Compensation Act show how few of the total number of applicants ever received compensation, and how small a fraction of what they were theoretically entitled to. And the documentary evidence tells only half the story, for very limited applications were made by workmen for compensation under this Act, partly due to ignorance, but mostly due to the fear of victimization by their employers.[11]

So passive was the government in this respect that it was the employers in fact, who first provided labour welfare in India. While the bulk of employers failed to make the connection between a satisfied labour force and higher production, there were some who did, even if clumsily. Among these, together with Tata, Kirloskar, and Sarabhai, Lala Shri Ram tried to develop a labour programme in the 1920's and 30's. Labour welfare activities had been introduced first by mills in inland centres like Delhi as an inducement to attract and

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[10] FICCI Proceedings, 1938, p 33.

[11] R.P. Dutt, Labour Movement in India (India Today Series No.5, no publisher no date), p. 15, Chapter II of the same work describes, working conditions in India with reference to the inadequate legislation on the subject.

stabilize a work force. As that was gradually achieved, it was understood that "welfare" might stimulate employees towards higher production and increased loyalty for the company. The welfare programmes of the "progressive" firms were far more than the minimal requirements of the law. Housing, for example, was not obligatory, but was provided by many firms; how far it may be regarded as a "welfare" measure has already been discussed./ These firms, incidentally, were the same that were also progressive is some other management aspects - like sales and marketing.[12]

See chapter III, particularly pp 65-66.

The welfare schemes were inspired by paternalistic concern, based on management pride, and were thoroughly authoritarian. That is, the foremost aspiration of workers was definitely ignored, viz., their desire to be their own spokesman. Lala Shri Ram was in most ways the example par excellence of the paternalistic employer. "He believed that trade unions were external to the plant community. They were power centres with goals of their own...A good management was not seen as a union substitute, but a union redundant agency...he thought trade unions were a western concept."[13]

This was an assumption fraught with risks for industrial peace, particularly as most of Lala Shri Ram's attitudes were

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[12] K.N. Vaid, Labour Welfare in India (Delhi, 1970), pp. 96-7; Charles Myers, Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India (Cambridge, 1958), p.51, 93-7; Social & Cultural Factors Affecting Production of Industrial Workers in India (UNESCO, 1961), pp.33-4; Joshi, op. cit., p.531.

[13] Joshi, p. 533

not such as to render trade unions redundant. A sampling of them makes the point self-evident:

> The immediate result of better wages, I can speak from experience, is increased absenteeism.[14]

> Lala Shri Ram did not relish the idea of employees putting a price on their services. This was his prerogative and he thought he paid a good price for the right talent. Loyalty, competence and adaptability were the major considerations - in the order stated - in fixing wages, and in granting increments and promotions. Loyalty was determined by an individual's social background, recommendation and performance. Competence was a function of one's ability in meeting targets. Adaptability was seen through the absence of bellyaches and strife in work relationships. The evaluators were senior loyal men who had superior intuition.[15]

> Lala Shri Ram preferred a wage policy that would lower the cost of production, pay the workers a fairly good salary and adhere to the legal provisions of the State within which the Company operated.[16]

> High wages and monetary awards were only one of the tools employed by Lala Shri Ram to increase the productivity of the workers and the efficiency of the managers. He believed that just as a child would get tired of the same toy after some time, so the workers also would lose interest if the same scheme was continued for too long.[17]

Lala Shri Ram made many elaborate attempts, in fact, to make trade unions superfluous in the DCM, and, when unsuccessful, resisted a recognition of them as long as he could. The details are discussed later in the same chapter.

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14 Ibid., p. 540

15 Ibid., p. 531-2

16 Ibid., p. 538. Of course, the State did not have any minimum wage laid down, so it was up to Shri Ram to decide what a "unfairly good salary" was.

17 Ibid., p. 540. In the case of all the above extracts we must remember that the author believes that Shri Ram paid a good labour price always, something that we have seen in Chapter II not to be a fact.

The example of the DCM management is a good index to the limits of sophistication in industrial relations which accompanied industrialization in the country. The retarded rate of the latter in turn retarded the progress from absolutism to benevolence to strict legality in the employer-employee relationship which accompanies industrialization.

Trade Unions were late in developing in India altogether, but in Delhi, the first unions were organized only in the late twenties. The primary reason for their lateness was the very reason for their growth: Government's rigid refusal to interfere on behalf of the workers, and the employer's equally rigid stand that his decisions on all matters must be totally unchallengeable. Therefore, as an author on the subject pointed out in 1934, the future, for workers, lay only "in the rise and development of a sound and living trade unionism."[18] There were other features that characterized the late 20's and 30's which were significant for the growth of trade unions in that particular period:

(1) The gradual integration of workers into urban and factory life, especially in a centre like Delhi where there was comparatively less overcrowding, competition, and heterogenity; and where employers like Shri Ram in their "enlightened self-interest" attempted to some extent to create a

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[18] Dr. R.B. Gupta, "Labour Recruitment and Wages", Indian Journal of Economics, 1934, p. 465.

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stable labour force.

(2) The diversion of attention of political and public men to the potentiality of the working class awakening to its interests, and their subsequent leadership of workers' organizations. This, over a period of time, may be seen to be "inevitable" in a colonial country struggling for national independence, in which no class is separately powerful enough to ignore the potential support of other classes.[19] In Bombay, Calcutta, or Cawnpore, communists were at the forefront in organizing workers; Delhi had a plethora of Congress leaders disproportionate to its size, and it was these that provided a new factor which had been missing earlier - leadership.

(3) The Depression which led to wage cuts, victimization, unemployment, and fall in the standard of living, created tensions in the industrial relations system which were difficult for workers to theorize about, or "take in their stride." However, this factor would not make inevitable the development of trade unions or an aggressive mentality but for the presence of the first two factors.

What we know for Delhi is comparable to "the three tendencies among Cawnpore labourers" in this period: (a) the creation of a permanent labour force; (b) an increasing number of floating unemployed labour, and consequently, gradual

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[19] See V.B. Karnik, Indian Trade Unions, A Survey (Bombay, 1960) p. 20.

reduction in industrial wages; (c) political leadership.[20]

The strict conditions for the growth of the trade unions laid down by Webb are not to be found anywhere in the country at the time, viz.

1) Literacy and co-operation,
2) Sympathy of the public,
3) Legal recognition of the trade unions.

We are therefore justified in foregoing an analysis of the existing trade unions in comparison with this ideal. The Indian trade unions may be taken seriously without this comparison being possible, inasmuch as they were largely "continuous associations of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the condition of their working lives."[21] The continuity was broken, as a rule, but the aim of the associations remained consistent as long as they lasted.

The trade unions that involved the DCM workers, together with their date of founding, their purpose, membership, and fate, are set out in Table IV.2. In Table IV.3 are shown their founders, office-bearers, and the respective loyalties of these to parties and groups. Table IV.4 sketches the strikes in the DCM with their leadership, grievances, terms of settlement, and other results.

on pp 108 a-b

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[20] Shitla Prasad Saksena, "Cost of Living, Wages, and the Standard of Living of Industrial Labour at Cawnpore," IJE, 1936-37, p. 44.

[21] In Ahmad Mukhtar, Factory Labour in India (Madras, 1930), p. 110, S.D. Punekar, Trade Unionism in India (Bombay, 1948), p. 11.

Table IV - 2

Facts about Delhi Textile Trade Unions connected with the DCM.

S.No.	Trade Union	Founded	Registered	Membership	Funds	Strikes and other activities
1.	Mazdoor Sabha	1929	Sept., 1931	20-25 till 1936; then 500	Nil	DCM strike, 1932
2.	DCM Workmen's Union	1929	Sept., 1930	3000 +	Nil	DCM Strike, 1930. 'Welfare'
3.	Delhi Labour Union	1934	May 1934 ?	Unknown	Unknown	DCM strike, 1934.
4.	Textile Labour Union	1936	July 1938	"	"	DCM Strike, 1939

Source: Annual Reports on the working of the Indian Trade Unions Acts; Annual Industries Reports, 1928-38, Delhi Archives.

Table IV. 3.

Table IV. 3 Some facts about the founders of Trade Unions connected with the DCM.

S.No.	Trade Unions	Founders	Loyalties	Office-bearers	Loyalties	Aim
1.	Mazdoor Sabha	M.A. Ansari Shanker Lall	"Establishment Congress"	F.H. Ansari Arif Hasvi J.N. Sahni T.N. Singh M.A. Ansari	Local Congress Political activists, Journalists, and Lawyers	To organise labour, to fight grievances.
2.	DCM Union	Lala Shri Ram	DCM	S.S. Yusuf Bisham Singh Nabi Raza Khan	Worker - Leaders*	To keep away outsiders
3.	Delhi Labour Union	Sibnath Banerjee Hariharnath Shastri	Communists; AITUC Leaders	Narain Das Gurg, Fazle Karim Indra, Satyawati, Nabi Raza, Sher Khan Brij Raj Kishore	Congress-Socialists, DCM and Birla Mills worker.-leader	Organization of workers
4.	Textile Labour Union	Satyawati Brij Kishen Chandiwala	Congress - Socialists	Chando Bibi Ajit Das Gupta Bishan Singh	'Radical' Socialists	To better organize, and represent cause of, workers.

Source: Fortnightly Reports + Home Confidential Files, DA; HT and the Statesman.

Even though the Union was a Company one, these leaders had Congress + Socialist- Sympathies.

The first important point that strikes us about the trade unions is that for a relatively small work-force of 10,000, their number in this ten year period is large. This could be due only to the failure of each union and the possibility of superseding it by founding another. And the failure was due to three broad causes: (a) employers' and government's enmity and concentrated efforts to abort the unions; (b) the workers' own problems in maintaining the level of organized activity necessary; (c) the failure of the leaders to live up to their ideologies. This factor was strengthened by the fact of local jealousies and rivalries among the political figures who were the trade union leaders.[22]

The second significant fact about these trade unions is that three out of five of them remained unrecognized for the major part of their existence. The DCM employers maintained throughout that the DCM Union - the Company Union - was the only authorized agency to speak on behalf of the workers. At the same time, it is important to note that the unions progressively strengthened ~~in~~ their claims to represent the labourers. From an attitude of immediate dismissal, Lala Shri Ram's stand changed to one of helplessness, where he tried numerous indirect methods to wean away his workers from the growing attractions of unionism, to, finally, a position of articulated, mutually beneficial relations with the union leaders.

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[22] The same point is made very expressively in Radhakamal Mukherjee, The Indian Working Class (Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1945), pp 305-6.

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The Unions did not originally seek recognition by the government; only the two Company Unions got immediately registered. For the rest, registration would be no asset, since it gave them no additional privileges, but laid them even more open to retributive action by acting as evidence.[23]

The majority of the Unions had no funds, no strict organisation, and no fixed membership. The last was mostly hinged to the flexible politico-economic situation, including the magnetism and membership drive of particular leaders. The lack of funds was a natural consequence of the poverty of the workers and the relative unimportance of union subscriptions compared with other needs. And the lack of a bureaucracy was a consequence of both these. The one exception was the DCM Union, which had no funds for another reason - all the needs of the Union were supplied by the Company itself; the officers were elected and the membership steady, but about both the genuineness of elections as well as about the voluntary nature of the membership, there is doubt. The same was true of the Birla Mills Labour Union.

A third noteworthy fact about the Unions of this period was that, again with the above two exceptions, they were all

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[23] The Delhi Labour Union's date of registration, if there was any, is in doubt. The Mazdoor Sabha and the Textile Labour Union got registered approximately 2 years after being founded, but it made no change in their status or functioning. Also see B. Shiva Rao, The Industrial Worker in India (1939), p. 162.

founded by Congressmen, albeit of differing shades of opinions. But the brunt of the union work, namely, the strikes, and the resulting victimization, was borne by the workers themselves, as shall be further discussed in the next Chapter.

The last, connected, feature we note from these tables is that on each occasion, the major grievances at each strike were related to wage cuts; unfavourable working conditions, especially over-work; inadequate leave; strict fines; and arbitrary treatment by employers.

According to the Annual Reports on the Registration of Trade Unions in Delhi, there was no Union registered in the Delhi Province until the Mehtar Labour Union in January 1930. In the previous year had been formed, however, a union important enough for the Report to discuss as outside its purview (i.e. not registered) under the heading "other developments of interest". This was the Delhi Mazdoor Sabha, and its objectives were:

"to organize industrial workmen for their economic, mental, social, moral, and material welfare, to secure fair and equitable conditions of life and work, to provide for sickness, maternity, death, accident, old age, and other benefits, to redress the grievances, to provide for education, to work for the establishment of cordial relations between the employer and the employee, if possible, and to relieve the distress of its members in cases of strikes or lockouts."[24]

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[24] Industries, B 50, 1929.

The Union was formed "by common consent", according to the reports of the Hindustan Times for 14th and 28th January, 1929. A largely attended meeting of Delhi labourers was held at Roshanara Gardens, which was exhorted by Congressmen to unite and improve their conditions. A number of workers spoke of their grievances. A sub-committee was formed to draw up a constitution, and a fortnight later, elections were held. A textile committee was appointed separately under the presidentship of Lala Shankar Lall.

It is possible that some kind of a textile union existed already; if it did, it existed only in name, for no one had noted it; there is only one indirect, mention of it, in the Fortnightly Report of the Chief Commissioner for 18th January, 1929. "The Delhi Textile Labour Union which is growing and becoming a well organised concern held two meetings....." Its designation was changed to "Mazdoor Sabha" to include all workers, not only textile. "The Union seems to be a result of the programme decided at the last Congress conference at Calcutta. The Union will be a tool of the Congress party."[25]

In spite of its apparent political character, the Mazdoor Sabha had the support of workers and was received with suspicion by the employers. In the beginning of 1929, it led a strike in the Birla Spinning and Weaving Mills, caused by the dismissal of three operatives for alleged negligence, but in

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[25] H-C, B 1(1), 1929.

fact for having joined the Mazdoor Sabha. Lala Shankar Lall intervened on their behalf, and a satisfactory arragement was made. Upon the repetition of the strike for the same complaint, an arbitration board with four members each from the millowners and the Mazdoor Sabha was composed.[26]

The newly formed union was relatively silent during the following year, a fact which was attributed by the government to the preoccupation of its leaders with political matters. This was likely, but there are also mentions of the unionized workers being drawn into participation in meetings and processions, in both 1929 and 1930. The Delhi Administration kept musing on how the union was a part of the Congress programme to utilize labour in Civil Disobedience.[27]

In 1930, the workers were approached by another organization as well, the Hindustani Seva Dal. From rural propaganda, this organization turned to factory hands "on their 'bad treatment' lines, and that there will be an increase of this policy is certain, the idea being to make them dissatisfied and work them up gradually to higher political disaffection. The labourers being asked (sic) to join the almost defunct Mazdoor Sabha."[28]

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[26] Home, B 36, 1929.

[27] Fortnightly Reports for 1929 and 1930; Hindustan Times, February, April, 1930. Also, Sri Dharam Pal Gupta, brother of Deshbandhu Gupta, and current Editor of the Tej, in an interview on November 4, 1977.

[28] See ~~next~~ page 109.

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Table IV.4

Facts about the Strikes in the Delhi Cloth Mills.

Strikes	Grievances	Responses
1930, April 23-25.	1. Rates of superior cloth to be adjusted to normal wage level.	
	2. No double deduction for absenteeism; dismissal only for three days' absenteeism.	Lala Shri Ram's assurance to workers that all grievances would be duly redressed.
	3. Fines for defective cloth not to exceed a certain amount.	Representatives of workers to confer with authorities.
	4. All advances to be made in cash.	
	5. Provident Fund to be discontinued.	
	6. Mistries' treatment to be humane.	
1930, May 20-30.	1. Workers discharged in April to be reinstated.	Some cannot be - not enough jobs for all.
	2. Police not to take action.	Police action denied.
	3. Rules re: absenteeism to be made.	Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh to frame appropriate rules.
	4. Rules re: defective cloth to be made.	"
	5. Provident Fund to be discontinued.	Provident Fund question to remain open.
	6. Wages to be regularized.	Wages to be adjusted to Birla Mills rates; others to be determined by Mehtab Singh.
	7. Draft rules of Union to be approved by both parties.	
	8. Men of the essential services may not strike.	
	9. In disputes, Board of Arbitration to be appointed, with an equal number of representatives of both parties.	

(Contd.)

1934, April 26-May 3.	1. Annual increments.	No mill can afford it. In fact, wages being reduced everywhere.
	2. Minimum salary of Rs 25 for Folding Dept.	"
	3. Machine cleaning not to be paid for out of workers' wages.	Everywhere the custom.
	4. House rent to be reduced by half.	Already below market rates.
	5. Wages to be distributed twice a month.	No objection.
	6. Four loom weavers to be paid proportionate to their work; 1929 rated for all.	Better cotton, machinery, & working conditions now; all wages good.
	7. A full day's holiday once a week.	Religious holidays of all communities given.
	8. Eight hours' working day.	-
	9. No dismissals or fines until guilt proved by Union.	Company not prepared to recognize Union - has own Union.
	10. Permission to be given to Union office-bearers to examine conditions of labour.	"
1934, June 4-6 (approx.)	Reinstatement of dismissed workers, and most of the economic demands of the April-May strike.	No clear response to demands, except reduction of house rent by 8 annas. Complaint of external & political interference; protest of Company concern for workers; excellent reports by many VIP visitors.

Source: Ind B 47, 1930; Ind B 68, 1934; H T April-May 1930, May-June 1934.

On April 23, 1930, the DCM workers struck work, the first ever time in the history of the DCM. The strike lasted for only two days, but recurred on 20th May for ten days. The details of the workers' demands are set out in Table IV.4. The most significant feature of this strike was that no union is mentioned in connection with it, but that some union and union leaders did exist is clear. The Mazdoor Sabha was the only union in existence, and since it had already associated itself with two strikes in the Birla Mills, and a minor one in the Khalsa Spinning and Weaving Mills, and since the majority of its members were textile workers, including DCM workers, it seems probable that it was involved with the DCM strike.

But doubts arise because firstly, the Delhi Administration reports with pride that "Immediate steps were taken to thwart the Congress workers' efforts to gain influence over them (DCM workers)", and "this (the strike) had to be most carefully watched and handled lest vigorous Congress efforts to gain a foothold among them should prove successful."[29] Secondly, Lala Shri Ram himself did not leave any recorded complaint of outside or political leadership. He took it to

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[28] H-C, B 1, 1930. The Hindustani Seva Dal was "the Auxiliary Volunteer Organisation of the Indian National Congress," formed in 1923 at Cocoanada, and extended to Delhi in 1928. Here, its work was concentrated on expanding Congress membership among the masses. The Mazdoor Sabha, called "defunct", had a membership of 300 in 1930, and an office on Queen's Road, both impressive features by Delhi standards. Home, B 65, 1930.

[29] H-C, B 1, 1930.

be a workers' protest, with grievances that he tried to reply to one by one, without accusing them/workers of being led away by mischievous outsiders, and finally reached an agreement with the workers. This was in utter contrast to 1934, when his chief complaint to the Government and main defence against the strikers was that they/~~workers~~ had been aroused by "outsiders."

The interesting questions about this strike are: Who led the strike ? How was the Congress kept away ?

In answer to the first, we have to retrace our steps a little to 1929, when, alarmed by the arrival of trade unions in Delhi and the strikes in quick succession in the other two textile mills of the city, Lala Shri Ram founded the DCM Workmen's Union. It was very straightforwardly "managed" by the company: its funds and facilities provided, its constitution written, and its office-bearers nominated, by the management. Either this Union "revolted", and by actually standing up for workers against the employers in 1930, disappointed all Shri Ram's expectations from it.[30] Or some other combination of the workers had been made. This would be impressive if true, considering the unity, and ultimate success in holding out, of the strikers. For the very same reason, viz., that such spontaneous unity and strength were incredible, it is not very probable. Therefore the more likely explanation remains

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[30] This is the interpretation held by Joshi in his biography of Shri Ram. He writes: "Lala Shri Ram's experiment failed. Within months of the establishment of the union, in April 1930, DCM workers went on strike." p. 542.

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that the Mazdoor Sabha acted as the agent that had brought the workers together, but that this particular strike was neither planned, nor led, by the top office bearers of the Sabha.

How was the Congress "kept away" ? The first possible explanation has already been offered: that the year 1930 was a particularly demanding one for Congressmen, and they ignored labour activity in their political preoccupation. The Government contributed all the time to the preoccupation with arrests and police action. The President and Vice-president of the Mazdoor Sabha were eminently "Nationalists"; in the history of 1928-1938, they were not known to have ever played an active role in labour work. The strike may also not have been taken very seriously by the Congressmen. It was very sudden; additionally, it was kept in a low key all through - first by the threat of police action against the workers (including prompt and forceful strike-breaking); second, by the administration taking immediate steps, in concert with Lala Shri Ram, to placate the workers. On the very next day of the outbreak of the strike, 24th April, Sardar Singh Mehtab Singh, the Government Industrial Surveyor, rushed to the mills, and promised the workers to look after their demands, and frame fresh rules to replace the undesirable ones. This was originally so hastily done, that even good intentions were not obvious, and the workers re-struck less than a month later. This "very awkward complication" was initially given the 'police treat-

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ment'; then negotiations were made, but with a greater degree of finesse on the part of the employers, for it took the workers much longer to realize that their main complaints were not going to be attended to.[31]

In order to judge the Mazdoor Sabha, we must keep in mind the following:

(1) It was the first union of the textile workers in Delhi with an organized attempt at a constitution and a plan of action. As such, the evidence we have of the support given it by the workers, the strikes it organized or supported almost immediately upon being formed, and its continuous existence for 4-5 years at a time of high trade union mortality, are all very impressive. We have to accept the facts of the 'readiness' of workers to organize, and a hard core of real grievances ẋ on which organized protest could be based.

(2) Of its founders, Dr. Ansari was an all-India figure and Shankar Lall among the most prominent of local Congressmen.[32] Yet it was not affiliated to, or patronised by, the INC, in any sense, as was true of all trade unions in the country. It was these particular Congressmen, as well as the other office-bearers who became the "leaders" of the labour organization, not ɑ the Congress as an institution.

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[31] "Industrial Strike in the Delhi Mills", Ind, B 47, 1930. After the 1934 strike it was admitted by the management itself that the promise of revising weavers' wages had not been fulfilled so far, because of the sheer complexity of the task. Strike Enquiry Committee Report, See p. 12

[32] See Table XV.1

(3) The above two features are reflected in the government data, which, biased as it is towards over-wariness of all political threats, paints a contradictory picture of the Mazdoor Sabha. On the one hand, it is seen as part of a diabolical plan to entice the labourers into the nationalist movement, and a successful plan because of the gullibility of the illiterate and ignorant workers. On the other hand, it is described as a failure and as defunct in any period of comparative inactivity. The truth lies between the two views, both understood imaginatively. The Mazdoor Sabha was certainly motivated partly by the Congress ~~ma~~ plan of "contact with the masses". But this had little effect on its functioning, or on its main activity, strikes. More importantly, it was the first experience of textile workers in Delhi in discovering their own strength through organization.

The second textile union, in chronological sequence, is the DCM Workers' Union. It was founded in 1929 by Lala Shri Ram in an attempt to keep the spectre of labour discontent away from his mills. According to Joshi: "Lala Shri Ram took the initiative in light of the growing trade union activities in the country. He thought it would enable the workers to express their problems more openly in an organized manner.... Lala Shri Ram hoped to insulate DCM workers from the violent movements outside." (pp 541-2)

For this purpose, the constitution of the Union had many extraordinary features, among them the strict prohibition of

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all outsiders into the Union, including the textile workers of other mills.[33] Also, "A member of this Union cannot under any circumstances be a member of any other union" (15); "All amendments in the rules of the union shall in the first instance will have to be got approved (sic) by the secretary of the mills" (44); "The union shall see that the pay of the present work people is not reduced for the equal quantity of work. It will, however, take no objection to the mill authorities recruiting fresh labour at lower rates or wages." (48)

This last clause effectively provided for legitimate lowering of wages, since to protest against that was to forfeit whatever security of employment existed. The legal procedure for going on a strike was so involved that there was an effective bar on that possibility. And the company kept securely in its hands all the essential decision-making aspects of the union's functioning.

As a result, we do not hear of any activities of the DCM Union, apart from in the Delhi Administration Reports where it was said to be engaged in "welfare" year to year. The first strike in the DCM in 1930 demonstrated the inherent contradictions which made such a union impotent:

"The management took a firm stand and declared a lock-out until the strikers 'came to terms'. It took the stand that the strikers had violated the agreement (of the Workmen's

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[33] See Appendix I for the full constitution.

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Union) in resorting to strike without notice to the Union panchayat. The strike, they declared, was illegal, Soon after, though, they changed their minds and decided to meet the workers' demands."[34]

Upon the occurrence of a strike in 1934, under the auspices of the Delhi Labour Union, Lala Shri Ram struck to the stand that both were illegitimate since the only representative body of the DCM workers was the DCM Union. This, as Joshi regretfully adds, "left little room for negotiations." The workers' main grievance was reduced wages, and that, as we have noted, could not be complained against 'legitimately' according to the constitution of the union. Five-sixths of the workers were on strike, leaving the DCM Union their representative only in name. It was Lala Shri Ram, almost certainly, who was responsible for the 'fake' letter to the Chief Commissioner asking for police protection, supposedly from the President of the union:

"Inspite of all possible efforts on the part of our Union to avert the crisis, the so-called Delhi Labour Union have, after all, been partially successful to disturb our labour. We are so grateful to you for posting police pickets to assist our workmen to come to their work...The situation is assuming serious proportions and we would beg you to please give ample protection to our labour."[35]

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[34] Joshi, p. 543

[35] Ind, B 68, 1934.

The artificiality of the company union was recognized even by the two investigators called in by the DCM to report on the strike. Depty Mall Jain and Zakir Hussain reported:

> The last but by no means the least, point we should like to emphasize is a more living organization of the Delhi Cloth Mills Labour Union...It is only natural that common workers cannot have any confidence in a union financed by the employers. The DCM Labour Union should be entitled to have a membership subscription.. ..The second essential...is the association with it of some responsible outside social workers. We are quite alive to the misgivings which such a proposal may naturally arouse in the employers' mind. But we think this association of outside element (sic) will prove doubly advantageous. It would give the new union a much needed lead and it would prevent the exploitation of labour by irresponsible demagogues.[36]

It is unclear whether the third labour union, the Delhi Labour Union, was re-started after the death of the original Labour Union (the Mazdoor Sabha), or first started in 1934. The union of this new name came into being in early 1934. The responsibility for this seemod to be largely that of the AITUC, and some "Communist-revolutionaries", like Gauri Shankar and Shiv Nath Banarjeee, both formerly accused of the Meerut Conspiracy Case. The office-bearers of the union were "local vakils, Congressmen....and former members of the defunct Naujawan Bharat Sabha,"[37] among them Raghubir Singh, Advocate; Narain Das Garg, Advocate; Fazle Karim, Bar-at-Law; Gulal Chand Gupta, Advocate; Kedar Nath Goenka, DDCC Secretary; Pandit Indra; and Smt. Satyawati, both Congress activists.

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[36] Report of the Strike Enquiry Committee, 1934, Joshi, pp. 247-8.

[37] Ind B 68, 1934.

In the country on the whole, there was increased militancy and x unionization at this time, as can be seen from Tables IV.5 and IV.6, where the number of workers involved, and working days lost, are the highest in 1934 after 1929. On 28 January 1934, the All India Textile Workers' Conference, Bombay, resolved to resort to an all India general strike of textile workers, "in view of the brutal offensive started by the textile employers all over India against the textile workers as a class, exhibited in (a) the inhuman wage cut, (b) intensive rationalization and (c) increased unemployment, and in view of the inadequacy and futility of the local and political strikes.

What followed in Delhi may be interpreted to be initially part of this all India plan. Employees of the two major textile mills became members, and at a general meeting the decision to go on strike was taken. The demands were formulated, and presented to the DCM only, with an ultimatum of five days. At the end of the period, when no satisfaction had been received, workers' meetings on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th April resolved to go on strike. "Outside" leaders are not mentioned as being present at these gatherings. The meetings were addressed by the workers themselves, and by all accounts they seem to have taken over charge of the union. The leading among them were Nabi Raza Khan, the Vice-President; Sher Khan, the Assistant Secretary; Brij Raj Kishore, another Vice President; (all 3 ex-employees of DCM) Kazi Khan, and Ambika Prasad, both ex-employees of the Birla

(Contd. p 12a)

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TABLE IV.5

~~REGIONAL~~ REGISTERED TRADE UNIONS IN INDIAN PROVINCES

Year	No. of Regd Unions		No. of Unions submitting Returns		Membership		Central Fund – Income		Central Fund – Expenditure	
	U.P.	Delhi	U.P.	Delhi	U.P.	Delhi	U.P.	Delhi	U.P.	Delhi
1930	5	2	5	2	12,738	2,676	5,999	8,327	6202	7,468
1931	6	3	6	2	12,843	4,043	5,604	102	6003	33
1932	6	4	6	2	9,895	3,482	4,337	75	~~6422~~ 6852	~~5,326~~ 32
1933	6	10	5	8	9,823	11,749	4,998	7,941	6422	5 6326
1934	5	10	4	9	7,811	10,581	4,932	4,002	4,974	4,077
1935	8	12	7	10	8,978	7,702	2,238	7,811	2,468	5,944
1936	10	14	10	~~15~~ 13	10,310	8,259	4,017	12,094	3,643	9,138
1937	10	15	10	14	10,081	10,608	3,803	7,965	3,708	6,762
1938	18	18	16	17	23,414	15,310	8,781	8,299	6,291	7,029
1939	35	23	23	22	11,759	21,492	7,451	15,430	7,147	12,988

SOURCE: Puneker, pp.380-84, Table 2A, ApplII.

(U.P. is included here to provide an interesting comparison to Delhi)

TABLE IV . 6

Industrial Disputes in India, 1928-38

Year	No. of disputes	Workers involved	Man-days lost	Analysis of diesputes by demands					
				Wages	Bonus	Personnel	Leave & Hours		Others
1928	203	506,851	31,647,404	109	1	44	6	43	27
1929	141	531,059	12,165,691	54	2	55	3	27	31
1930	148	196,301	2,261,731	69	4	34	7	34	36
1931	166	203,008	2,408,123	69	2	39	20	36	23
1932	118	128,099	19,22,4307	68	3	31	2	14	14
1933	146	164,938	2,160,961	95	2	19	5	25	20
1934	159	220,808	4,775,559	107	1	24	6	21	32
1935	145	114,217	973,457	91	2	21	10	21	25
1936	157	169,029	5,358,062	96	1	24	6	30	31
1937	379	647,801	8,982,257	234	4	73	12	56	51
1938	399	401,075	9,198,708	209	3	92	21	74	51

Source: Punekar, Table No5, p.391.

Mills. The resolution they adopted was:

> This meeting of the labourers of the Delhi Mills holds that the Delhi Labour Union is the representative body of the labourers, and is recognized by them as such, and that the workers' Union is not, and cannot be, a representative body of the labourers. This meeting further showing its confidence in the Delhi Labour Union, holds that anything that the Union does for the betterment of the labourers will be accepted by them and that the labourers will be prepared to go on strike at any time the Union asks them to do so.

On the next day, the 26th April, two thirds of the DCM workers struck work. The next afternoon even more deserted their places, and in the evening, a procession of 2,500 was taken out. On the 28th, events took a more serious turn as the strikers picketed the Mill and lay down on the road when 750 labourers were being brought in lorries. The police cleared off the picketters, and a few sustained minor injuries. The meetings that evening condemned the police and the mill authorities. The next two days saw a continuation of these events: scuffles between the police and the picketters, minor injuries, processions and meetings near Bara Hindu Rao, and a dozen workers also taken into custody. There was a "pitched battle" between strikers and loyal workers being escorted in by the jobbers, as a result of which about a hundred were hospitalized, a lathi charge was made by the police, and a "strong passe of police" posted in the mill area to present further picketting. By the 2nd May, the DCM had publicly started hiring strike-breakers, as they had been reported to be planning since the beginning of the strike. By the 3rd or 4th May, the Mills were working normally.[38]

38. See next page.

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The noteworthy features of the strike are the following:

(1) As in 1930, the workers displayed impressive unity and consistency. There is no mention, even in the prejudiced government files, of dissension or trouble in organising their ranks; rather, mention of "mammoth" or "large" meetings, and unanimous resolutions. It was only the jobbers, in fact, who remained consistently loyal to the company. The strike continued full strength till at least 3rd May, when it was broken only with the help of new recruits and police patrolling. There were instances of clashes between the police and the workers, and injuries sustained by the latter, while fresh recruits were ushered in.

(2) The main technique of the DCM to get the workers back to work was not quick promises of redressal of grievances as in 1930, but the threat of dismissal. On 2nd May, Lala Shri Ram made public his intention of gathering new labour to keep his mills running. Those strikers who returned to work immediately - without any conditions - would be reinstated and pardoned. The rest would be replaced. According to the Draft, "The decision of Lala Shri Ram to recruit new labour force for the DCM seems to have worked well, for, in spite of the resolution of the strikers' committee not to return

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38 The Hindustan Times, 26 April, 1934. All the above information about the strike is from Ind, B 68, 1934; H-C 1 (1), 1934; and The Hindustan Times, April 26.30, 1934.

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to work until their demands were conceded, many workers went to the mills to resume work."[39] And as the Statesman reported:

"As a result of the notice issued by the management of the DCM on Wednesday (May 2), over 4000 workers resumed work yesterday, the remaining 2000 being still on strike. About 200 new hands were employed yesterday."

And on the next day,

"Recruiting had to be stopped yesterday, and 100 men had to turned away because there was no work for them...."[40]

Those replaced and unemployed, numbering between 100 and 250, continued to hold meetings till 9th May, ~~wx~~ but were ~~immediately~~ unsuccessful in obtaining justice, immediately.

It seems justified to conclude that, short of accepting the workers' demands, or dismissals, the management could not have persuaded the workers to return. S.N. Banerjee wrote to the Hindustan Times on the 29th or 30th:

> Out of the three shifts the mill is working only one shift and out of three lines only one is being worked and that too partly. Out of a total of about 3000 workers not more than 200 workers (excluding jobbers) could be induced or forced by the mill officials to go to the mill in spite of the fact that puris and kachoris were distributed in the mill and also in spite of the fact that the management and the other high officials in the mill canvassed from door to door in the different mohallas.[41]

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[39] Page 207, Vol. 3.

[40] The Statesman, May 4-5 [41] Hindustan Times, May 1, 1934

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(3) The police were at duty more conscientously than in the 1930 strike. They had been summoned from the very beginning and undisguisedly supported the employers by threatening workers and breaking the strike. The greater enthusiasm shown on this occasion was because of the initial leadership by "outsiders", and the government's conviction that "the whole agitation is an artificial one," communist-revolutionary in nature. On 5th May, the Chief Commissioner reported with satisfaction to the Secretary, Home and Industries:

"The Labour leaders, who advocated this strike, have suffered a severe blow to their prestige and profess that their failure is due to government having aided with the capitalists. All that Government have done during this dispute is to post extra police..."[42]

The employers, on the other hand, justified the use of the police as necessary to protect the loyal and well meaning workers against the "molestation and violence" of a few. This argument was convincingly refuted by S.M. Mahmud, the General Secretary of the Delhi Labour Union.[43]

(4) The strike of 1934 brought out with finality the fact that so far as the DCM management was concerned the most unacceptable demand of the workers was recognition of their right to unionize. Of their ten demands as they were originally formulated, the fifth was that there should be "no

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[42] Ind, B 68, 1934

[43] Hindustan Times, May 31, and June 5, 1934.

dismissal until guilt was proved by the union," and the sixth was "permission to office-bearers of the union to examine conditions of labour." These were probably reckoned to be too unrealistic, and were left out in the letter to the Secretary of the DCM. Of the eight demands presented, the last was phrased:

> For the better and effective working of the Union and in the best interests of the mill it would be advisable to afford every facility to all the members or at least to some of them to visit the mill with a view to get first hand and direct information in connection with their being penalised in any way. It is fervently hoped that a favourable consideration will be given to all the above...[44]

Lala Shri Ram disregarded all the other problems presented by the workers, and responded:

"Before we reply to them, we will request you to please let us know if your body is only a private institution or whether it represents the majority of the workers of Delhi Cloth Mills...We will....advise you to address the DCM Workers' Union in this respect..."[45]

As we have described earlier, the technique of dismissal was used by Lala Shri Ram to drive his point home, but the dismissed workers reacted by forcing a closure in the beginning of June again. On the 3rd or 4th, a few men who were on hunger strike apparently from some days before, tried to stop workers

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[44] Letter from the General Secretary of the Delhi Labour Union, 18th April, 1934 in Ind B 68, 1934.

[45] Ibid. During the course of this strike, not merely a majority, but upto 5/6 of the DCM workers were with the Union questioned by Lala Shri Ram.

from entering the mill gates. The police arrested them. At the ~~next~~ second shift, the same scenerio was repeated. On the next day, many women joined the ranks of the picketters and the police entered the fray again. The Secretary of the Labour Union wired to the Viceroy alleging mal-treatment of the hunger-strikers by the mill authorities. Shri Ram telegrammed to the Chief Commissioner who was out of Delhi, soliciting "action". "Outsiders and unemployed workmen...are at large, Menace is beyong control stop no hope of running mills from tomorrow."[46]

Of course, the workers had more grievances than one, when they struck again. As the Industrial Surveyor analysed the situation, "General economic discontent seems to be at the bottom of the strike." The discontent arose from the fact that the management had not implemented its promises regarding the grievances of the earlier April-May strike. In reply to this, Lala Shri Ram insisted only that a "satisfactory arrangement" existed for going into workers' grievances "which is admitted even by labour leaders of the standing of ~~the~~ Mr. Shanker Lall Banker of Ahmedabad. The immediate provocation of the June strike had been victimization: it was "engineered by outside agencies mainly consisting of those workmen who were victimized after the 1930 strike and those who were not reinstated after the recent strike."[47]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ind B 68, 1934.

After 1934 there was no strike in the DCM in that decade. The Textile Labour Union, founded in 1936 by the Socialists of Delhi, was successful in organizing strikes among the Gold and Silver Thread Workers, and the Birla Mills' workers, in the years 1937-38. Of all the unions of this period, this was probably the best organized, with a regular subscribing membership, a simple, confident, aim - "to organize the textile labourers that they could fight for their immediate demands" - and a constitution (see Appendix II). Its founder was primarily Satyawati, who, after returning from the Lucknow Congress in April, inspired by its proceedings, attempted to replace the Mazdoor Sabha.[48] Her complaint was that the Mazdoor Sabha had not become a body of the workers in spite of all her attempts; in fact she and her comrades were not encouraged to work in it by the Secretary, Shankar Lall. When elections for the new union were held, Satyawati was chosen the General Secretary; two Birla Mills workers the Vice-Presidents; and Bisham Singh formerly of the DCM, a veteran trade unionist by then, the President. The other office-bearers of the union were all "semi-professional" labour leaders like Satyawati herself, i.e., Vakils and traders, who took a consistent interest in labour affairs, Bhal Singh, Shivom, Shiv Narain, Hukam Singh, Har Dhyan Singh.

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48 The Lucknow resolution went: "The Congress is of opinion that it is desirable to develop closer association between the masses and the Congress organization, so that they may take greater share in the shaping of Congress policy and in its activities, and the organization might become even more responsive to their needs and desires..." The Indian National Congress, 1934-36 (Allhabad, 1936), pp. 78-79.

Those applying for registration were, however, six Birla Mills employees, and one from the DCM.[49]

On 20th May, 1936, the Textile Labour Union addressed to the Labour Sub-Committee, AICC, Allahabad, some complaints about the treatment of workers in the Birla Mills and the Delhi Cloth Mills. The complaints about the DCM were given more space: from 7th May, weavers were suffering a 25 % wage cut, i.e., those getting a 12 pies per pound rate now received 9 pies. This cut had created a lot of dissatisfaction among the workers in general, and a strike was imminent. Over two months later, the situation remained unchanged. Another letter from the Textile Labour Union to the AICC noted: "Our union is organized on the basis of class struggle. I have already informed you in my last letter about the wage cut move of the DCM, I may further mention that it has been creating a great discontentment among the labourers of the concerned Mill and the strike is expected next month. I hope your committee will consider the matter seriously and will help the labourers of the DCM in their struggle against the move of the wage cut."[50]

By November of the same year, a change in position was noticeable. The complaints of both Birla Mills and DCM workers were still taken up, but now with the emphasis on the former.

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[49] K.N. Vaid, Growth and Practice of Trade Unionism in Delhi (Delhi, 1962) p. 30. Vaid, dismissing all the other unions of this period as unimportant, regards this one as a genuine beginning of organization in Delhi. p. 32.

[50] L 2, 1936; L 5 (kw), 1936 (Congress files in Nehru Memorial Library)

Shivom wrote to the Chief Commissioner on 9th November 1937:

> The complaint of the textile mill labourers of the city against the systematic reduction of wages, beating, and suspension for small damages in addition to fines, non-observance of the Factory rules in regard to hours and conditions of work, and victimization of workers for legitimate Trade Union activities has been long standing. Of late these have become numerous; with the result that the workers have asked us to call a strike against the Mills particularly the Birla Mills at an early date unless the grievances are redressed forthwith.[51]

The letter produced a display of nervourness on the part of Jenkins, the Chief Commissioner, and W.M. Vacy-Ash, Chief Inspector of Boilers and Factories and Electrical Inspector, Delhi, and rapid correspondence on the subject that a strike should be avoided. What action was taken following this is not recorded, but most likely it was of the nature of "persuasion" of both labour leaders and employers to come to some sort of terms.[52]

This being hardly an adequate explanation, the most interesting question about this union, and these years, remains: why did no strike take place in the DCM ? Four hypotheses may be offered:

(1) Since we have emphasized that the previous strikes were all securely grounded on economic problems, it is only correct to first ascertain whether such problems had now disappeared. According to the Annual Factory Reports, the wages of all textile workers were stable over the period 1934-38, with those

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[51] Ind, B 29, 1937.

[52] Ibid.

of spinners and reelers rising in the last year to Rs 23 from Rs 22, and to Rs 13 from Rs 12, respectively. Only the wages of weavers continued to fall, from Rs 40 in 1935 to Rs 38 in 1936, Rs 36 in 1937, and Rs 35 in 1938. (See Table II.5) That they were temporarily adjusted is not known, but since it was a matter that publicly threatened a strike for so long, it seems likely that they were. The ball had been in the employer's court since the first announcement of the strike, many months earlier, and it was out of character for Lala Shri Ram to take no action in such a situation. It is very possible that the Birla Mills management failed to react to the threat, and Lala Shri Ram did. The precautionary measures Shri Ram took were probably both positive and negative ones. The DCM profits that year (1937-38) were phenomenal, 156 % of the previous year's (Rs 19, 19, 852, as compared with Rs 12, 33, 172).[53] Although there is no automatic correspondence between high profits and workers' earnings, it seems that a fairly generous bonus was promised to the workers. In January 1938, Chando Bibi, the new President of the Textile Labour Union, threatened G.D. Birla with another strike, and reported of the DCM workers, "....they will get one lakh bonus this year."[54] Lala Shri Ram also announced other plans: a combined Insurance and Pension Scheme, an Employees' Benefit Fund, and the appointment of a Labour Officer to see to the "engagement and

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[53] Statistics from the DCM, Bara Hindu Rao, Delhi.

[54] P 9, 1937-38.

dismissal of staff and thus remove most of the real and imaginary grievances of the labourers.[55] Nothing is being ~~desired~~ claimed for these schemes, and only the last scheme began functioning immediately, but the very decision for the others was an appropriate offer in those times.

(2) Reacting negatively, Lala Shri Ram probably made the risk of dismissal, or forfeiture of wages, much more threatening. The workers had already learnt the needful lesson from the past strikes in the DCM; in 1937-38, a combination of less provocation, and more evident danger in striking, worked together to make the action undesirable. The Payment of Wages Act was in force from 28th March, 1937, but according to the DCM Secretary, "had produced a very bad effect on the workers as much as they are damaging the products very much more. Those who will not behave well, may have to be turned out."[56] This plan of action was probably made known to the workers. In addition, the best testimony to Lala Shri Ram's attitude on the subject is his letter to Padampat Singhania, already referred to in Chapter II, where he observes:

"The troublesome people...will either overstay their leave sometime or absent themselves without leave or give half work or less work and then after convincing people that they have broken the rules that apply to all workers, turn them out."[57]

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[55] Board Minutes of the DCM, 1937.

[56] Ibid. [57] Shri Ram-Singhania correspondence, SRC.

(3) Lala Shri Ram had become no more tolerant of trade union activities than in the past, but he seemed to have formed a kind of distinction between different sets of trade unions, and trade union leaders, and developed an understanding with one set. The clear demarcation between the different Congress groupings will be made in the next chapter; suffice here to say that the Textile Union by the end of 1937 had been "captured" by the Workers' League of two "radicals", Chando Bibi, and Ajit Das Gupta. These were Congressmen were in disrepute for their radicalism, reprimanded by headquarters for the same; boycotted by their colleagues; and accustomed to working independently. In the Textile Labour Union, they found their strength shown, with neither the press nor the Congress supporting them. Pandit Indra, editor of Vir Arjun, the most widely read Hindi daily, criticised them severely in an editorial on February 5, 1938;"The result of such strikes as led by such so-called sympathisers of labour can only be the strengthening of the employers' position. The reason is obvious - at the beginning of such activities, it is not considered...whether the field is ready, whether enough weaponry has been laid by for success..."[58] The editorial was one of a series, all attempting to discredit the new union leaders.

The interesting part of the gradual isolation of the Textile Labour Union is the involvement of Lala Shri Ram in local Congress electioneering and politics. There are at

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[58] P 9, 1937 (Translation mine)

least a dozen letters on file pointing out the fact that DCM workers were made Congress members with the help of the management, and then made to vote for a candidate of the management's choice. The letters are from one group of disgruntled Congressmen or the other, all competing for greater local leverage under the easily-used argument of working out the Congress programme of closer contact with the masses. This occurred, according to the far from well preserved correspondence, at least in August 1937, October 1937, and January 1938.[59] It seems a system whereby Congressmen interested more in office than in labour achieved what they aspired to, (Chando Bibi and Ajit Das Gupta remain clear of this category for they never contested for office, and had no other interest but labour organization); and the management ground to ashes a possible conflagration among its workers by detaching the usual labour leaders one by one.

(4) The organization of the Textile Labour Union, with the additional force of such hostility, was simply not strong enough. The Fortnightly Report comments that the DCM was left out and the Birla Mills chosen for a strike (the implication being that being that both were similar as targets). The government's answer to its speculation is that the union did not feel strong enough to attack both mills together, or in quick succession.[60]

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[59] Ibid.

[60] H-C 1 C, 1938.

CHAPTER V

Labour and the National Movement

The study of DCM labour participation in the nationalist movement is based on two essential considerations: The textile workers of Delhi first organised themselves and went on strike in this period; and the founders of all their Unions were Congressmen. Secondly, the Congress undertook a mass-contact programme in this period, which included organising labour, and bringing it within the Nationalist Movement.

The questions that arise from these facts may be enumerated as three:

How far was the Congress nature of Trade Union leadership beneficial, or detrimental, to the workers' interests ?

How far did the Congress leaders merely use the workers as a means to extend support for themselves ? And

How spontaneous was the workers' support of the Nationalist Movement ?

This chapter is divided into 3 parts in an attempt to answer the above questions.

The first question may be further broken up for convenience as follows: What did the workers want ? What did they achieve ? What part did leadership play in this, and what did other factors ?

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What the workers wanted may best be judged from their demands during strikes, and the first trade unions and consequent strikes date from the beginning of the Depression period. Therefore, by studying Table IV.4 (see pp 108 a-b) we can get a direct idea of the outstanding demands of the workers, and the extent to which they were fulfilled. It is easy to see from this table that while on some of the issues like the payment of wages twice a month, the workers were given at least momentary satisfaction; and on some others, like house rent and damaged cloth, they were met with a sort of compromise; on all the major issues like wages, hours of work and holidays, conditions for fines and dismissals, right to organize and strike, - the workers were simply put off. There is no evidence of the Government Industrial Surveyor framing new rules in response to the workers' demands.

Theoretically, the strikes may be judged "successful" only if the workers' demands had been met and they had ~~been~~ to an added strength for further agitation for whatever new demands that formed themselves. However, in the India of the 1930's, the disputes which were thus successful were at the most, taking the general estimate of Karnik in Strikes in India, p 153, 10 % of the total. As discussed in the previous chapter, the standard of living of the workers, and consequently, of organisation to protect their interests, was so low, and the Government/legal balance tilted so greatly in favour of the employers, that it was impossible for the workers to fight their battle to the end, and still

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keep secure their employment.

Therefore, we may state that "reasonable" success in the 1930's was to get the workers' grievances by and large considered at all; no retrogressive steps taken, if no immediately progressive ones; a few of the demands met by a compromise; and some steps taken by the management to attempt to prevent a similar protest recurring. Even when these attempts were of the nature of mere illusions or distractions, they constituted an awareness on the part of the employer of the weaknesses of the industrial relations system and some response to them. At the early stages of industrial development, a trade union may reach nowhere near the goal it is founded to achieve, but the founding of the union itself is the essential first step, and constitutes success at that stage.

Based on this understanding, we can venture that the DCM strikes of 1930 and 1934 achieved a fair degree of success "reasonable" at that time. The strike of 1930 was followed up by the DCM with a whole battery of welfare measures, including a school; hospital; cinema; DCM Gazette, to improve relations with the workers; and Bonus, in turn for an undertaking that the equivalent from their salary would be deducted if they engaged in any "anti-mill activity" (see Table III.2). After the 1934 strike, a part-time Labour Officer was appointed; the DCM Gazette was expanded; and medals and certificates were given to those who had remained loyal.

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These may be understood as being diversions to subvert the one demand most difficult for the employers to accept, viz., the workers' right to unionize. To further fight the latter likelihood, Lala Shri Ram had founded the DCM Workers' Union in 1929. He was not as successful in any of his efforts as he could have wished. As Joshi himself points out: "It is doubtful if such a policy served any interests of the management. It only reflected its fears and indicated how it was still grouping for a fundamental stance vis-a-vis its workmen." (p. 543) Not only were the workers' demands repeatedly brought up in successive strikes in 1930 and 1934, the workers' strength in organizing, in struggling for recognition, and in fighting victimization, progressively increased over the period. This has been traced in Chapter IV. One of the most eloquent proofs of the unwilling acceptance of the management of the fact of workers' unity on a common cause, was the replacement of direct dismissal by indirect victimization (see Shri Ram's letter to Singhania, p. 130) and efforts to woo Congress leaders away from labour unions.

In the same chapter have also been discussed two other significant features: that the founders and original office-bearers of the unions of this period were Congressmen; but that, during the strikes, it was the workers who conducted the day-by-day activities themselves.

When these Congress leaders did participate in the strike, it was to re-assert sympathy with the Delhi strikers, to urge the employers to accept their demands, to lend their determi-

nation, and to re-emphasize the overall nature of the working-class war against the capitalists. During the April-May 1934 strike, for example, workers' meetings were occasionally enlivened by the oration of Cogress leaders. At the liveliest of these meetings, on April 28th, many comprehensive resolutions were passed. Smt. Satyawati declared that unity was a great pleasure, that "The labourers were quite peaceful and it was their legitimate right, to place their demands before mill-owners." Hariharnath Shastri resolved that this time, the fight would be to the finish, and that the mill authorities should accept the strikers' demands. Pandit Indra proposed the motion preceded by the explanation that: "....without a grievance nobody would go on strike. The grievances were genuine and it would add to the prestige of the mill-owners if they agreed to the demand of their workers." There were other similar resolutions by Narain Das Gurg, Sardar Raghbir Singh, and Diwan Chaman Lall, and Shouts of "Long Live the Workers of the World".[1]

Since "success" for the workers may be judged separately as (a) having their demands fulfilled, and (b) laying the foundations of organization, we can judge the achievements of Congress leadership separately on both scores. The workers' demands were clearly not accepted; could the Congressmen involved have accomplished more in this direction ? Given

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[1] Hindusthan Times, April 30, 1934. Also, Hindusthan Times, April 29, 1934; Statesman, May 3, 1934.

their local standing, and their success in other activities like picketting, hartals, and electioneering, they probably could have - had they put their strength behind the workers. The Fortnightly Reports of the Delhi Province for the years 1930-32, give ample evidence of such success, as for example, in the Chief Commissioner's words: "...one cannot shut one's eyes to the fact that compared to pre-agitation standards, the market for foreign cloth at any rate, is at a standstill."[2]

The question of why these Congress leaders did not put their strength behind the workers would lead us to consider many factors which can only be mentioned here. As for example, the support given to the local Congress organization by the local business men, as to Lala Deshbandhu Gupta by Lala Shri Ram.[3] It was always a clandestine agreement, for the businessmen were not anxious to court the hostility of the government. Chando Bibi, perhaps the only truly "radical" Congress leader of the period, broke away from her colleagues on this, among other issues, and refused to be a part of the Congress organisation at all.

The AICC itself, after passing some resolutions regarding the just cause of workers, stopped short of further involvement. In May, 1934, for example, its Working Committee

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[2] See also G 94(i), 1930; p 35, 1932.

[3] H-C, 1(1), 1932; Evidence given by contemporaries of the two in interviews: Dr. Yudhvir Singh, J.N. Sahni, J.K. Khanna, Brij Krishan Chandiwala, Dharam Pal Gupta,

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resolved:

"The Working Committee sympathizes with the Textile workers who are on strike in Bombay, Nagpur, Sholapur, Delhi, and other places, in the sufferings and privations which they have undergone and are undergoing and hopes that the employers will take early steps to give satisfaction to and arrive at an equitable settlement with the workers".

This attitude at the centre was faithfully reflected at the local level. Congress success in fighting for the workers' cause was proportionate to its limited efforts in that area.

Regarding the second aspect of "success", i.e. the level of organization of the workers, there can be little doubt that the Congress did make a contribution although its work suffered from the handicap of Government hostility. In the years of Civil Disobedience and intensified nationalist activity, the Government had a clear case for repression of any associations at all connected with the Congress. Consequently ~~the~~ police force was generally used in all the labour strikes in Delhi, and the workers' real demands, including their problems in organising against employers, could be effectively ignored. As Nabi Raza told his co-workers in the 1934 strike, the labourers suffered because their patrons were "undesirable persons in the eyes of the Government".[4]

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[4] Ind, B 68, 1934

However, even had the workers' organisations been impeccably ~~a-~~-political, the Government would have proved no less retributive towards these other threats to the law and order situation. In fact, what the British Government feared the most was an indigenous working-class movement; what it feared second was a Congress-led labour movement. At the same time, the backwardness of labour, arising from its poverty and illiteracy, plus the economic insecurity of the times, made a possible workers' movement still-born. Unfortunately for the workers: with no indigenous workers' movement; and only an apparent, not a real, Congress-led movement, they nevertheless had to face the Government wrath.

One probable by-product of a-political labour agitation would have been further exercises like that of the Labour Enquiry Committee, and the promotion of Liberal, Company, and Government controlled trade union activity.

On the employers, the positive and negative influence of Congress advocacy of labour balanced itself even. Positively, the status and comparative independence of the Congress gave it a security and maneuverability which the employers could not threaten or destroy, as they could have a purely workers' organisation. Negatively, even while responding on the surface, the employers could trifle with the workers' demands, in the knowledge that the consistency or longevity of the agitation would not be great.[5] The

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[5] P 9, 1937; H C, B 1, 1930; H C, B 1(1), 1934, ~~pp 166-7, pp 169-71~~, Punekar, pp 166-7, 169-71

strength of the Union or the strike was essentially that of the workers - Congress "leadership" did not fool, of all people, the employers.

The extent to which the workers benefited from Congress championship of their cause, then, was to the extent that Congress was willing to go. The Congress formed the Unions, which was an indispensable first step in labour organisation; the workers also picked up the most useful techniques for the time: picketing, Satyagraha, hunger-strikes; and the inevitable clerical, accounting, and communication work essential in unions was given the necessary attention, which it may not otherwise have received.

But the application of the Union was made only by the workers and their own leaders (who may be in the Congress, but were not Congressmen first).[6] They gained the advantage of having the outspoken support of the most powerful organisation in India at the time; which was by far the best of the three alternatives, of Congress support, indifference, or opposition. But in terms of getting their grievances redressed, the workers gained nothing from the Congress but a little publicity and some organizational pointers - <u>and they could have</u>.

The second question may be also put as: How far were the Congressmen careerists and merely using labour to serve their political ends, and how far were they genuinely concerned about labour ? What were the reasons for either attitude ?

6. To 'be in the Congress' meant, finally, to sympathize with the goal of Independence. Some worker-leaders, as well as some staff-members sympathetic to the management, were 'in the Congress' From Interviews.

What the Congress desired was ever-extending support. That "special efforts should be made by Congress workers to enrol a large number of members from the depressed and working classes..." was a resolution passed as far back as 1921, but in 1928, the AICC session moved beyond this for the first time by unofficially taking note of certain strikes and labour grievances and expressing sympathy with them.[7]

The Congress policy vis-a-vis labour in this period was unambiguous:

(1) It had begun to win over the "masses", but this, both statistically and in its interpretation, meant the peasants, and its preoccupation with the latter overshadowed involvement with labour.[8]

(2) Because it was a front that sought to represent all the classes of India, it sought to promote unity between them by ignoring class and other conflicts. At every level, national to local, there was a consequent tussle of ideology: the leftists or socialists versus the Moderates. While both were "for" the masses, the former were dedicated to the labour cause to the extent of involving themselves personally in it, while the latter frowned upon such involvement.[9]

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[7] Indian National Congress 1928 (Allahabad 1929)

[8] P 9, 1937. Note also Jawaharlal Nehru's message to the Arjun: "The outstanding problem of India is the peasant problem...."

[9] Statesman, September 29, 1937.

(3) The goal of independence was the first one, before which all other problems, including the redressal of workers' grievances, were secondary. At times of intensified Congress activity, as during the Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-32, or the Provincial Elections, 1937, the workers' cause was relatively ignored in practice, although a "United Front" of the Congress and labour was formed. This single-mindedness of pursuit was true of the Socialists, too, the reason why they continued to belong to the Congress.[10]

In Delhi, both the enrollment of peasants and workers, and trade union activity was taken up by Congress in 1929. During the years 1929 to 1938, there was a continuing attempt to make the Delhi workers Congress members.[11] The Congress files claim great success in this; the Government files mild success; that the numbers increased is indubitable.[12] That workers should be made primary members seemed the only method that Congress succeeded in devising for labour "to unite and get strong." The scheme favoured by trade unionists was one of representation on the District Congress Committees of approved trade unions; then on Provincial Congress Committees in the ratio of 1 : 1000; and on the AICC as 1 : 8000.[13] The

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[10] See also Werner, Parties in Indian Politics, pp 25-6.

[11] G ∅, 1929; Hindustan Times, Jan-Feb, 1929.

[12] Congress Fortnightly Reports, p 26, 1937; Government Fortnightly Reports for 1937-38.

[13] Resolution passed at the 16th session of the AITUC, Bombay, 1936, in File L 1, 1935.

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scheme was never worked out. Even in 1936, when contact between the INC and labour was the closest, Jawaharlal Nehru denied seats to labour but "urged labour to make its weight felt by enlarged primary membership of the Congress".[14]

In Delhi in this whole period, the influence of the Communists/Socialists as a separate group/party was negligible. Even where their programme was ideologically unadjustable to the official Congress platform, no break occurred. As Satyawati put it:

> We know how difficult it will be to change the capitalist mentality of the Congress, knowing the elements that dominate it. But what we can do is to organise the peasants and workers and to wait for the day, which should not be far, when with the organised support of the masses, we may be able to convert the Congress to the creed and ideology of Socialism.[15]

The Government of India noticed the tendency for the political and Communist revolutionaries to join hands, and described Jawaharlal Nehru as standing at about the meeting point.[16] The local Nehrus of Delhi create some confusion for a present day researcher by their vocabulary and the contemporary labels they were given. While struggling with this, we may demarcate them into three categories of "official Congress", "Socialist Congress", and "radical Congress". (See Table V.1 for the 3 respective divisions)

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[14] Hindustan Times, May 17, 1936. Also see Hindustan Times, January 1, 1938.

[15] Hindustan Times, January 20, 1936. See also Sibnath Banerjee's speech in Hindustan Times, January 2, 1938.

[16] H C, B 19, 1929.

Table V.1

The Congressmen and Congresswomen of Delhi

Name	Born in	Congress work	Labour work	Profession
Dr.M.A. Ansari	1880	In National Movement since 1912; President INC 1927; President DPCC 1929; President DPCC and DDCC 1931.	Founder-President, Mazdoor Sabha, 1928.	Doctor
Shankar Lall	1885	General Secretary DPCC, 1918-30	"Sadar Sahib" of Mazdoor Sabha, 1936.	Trader; General Manager of Tropical Life Insurance Co.
Yudhvir Singh	1897	"Prominent political & social worker" publisher Navjiwan & Khadi Sandesh.	Mentioned briefly as office-bearers of Mazdoor Sabha, 1929-30	Doctor and Publisher.
Depty Mall Jain	-	Treasurer, DDCC - 1931	On Enquiry Committee, DCM strike 1934	Lawyer
Deshbhandhu Gupta	1901	Secretary, DPCC, active in Civil Disobedience Movement.	Associated with Mazdoor Sabha & Delhi Labour Union.	Editor of Tej.
Indra Vidyavachaspati	1891	Secretary DPCC 1929, member DPCC 1936, 1938, President Naujawan Bharat Sabha	Associated with Delhi Labour Union.	Editor of Arjun.
Satyawati	1906	Founder of Delhi Congress Socialist Party, one of Congress leaders, Commander of Mahila Sewa Dal.	In Mazdoors Sabha, Delhi Labour Union, Founder of Textile Labour Union.	Husband officer in Birla Mills
Brij Kishan Chandiwala	1905	Ardent follower & Secretary of Gandhi	Co-founder of Textile Labour Union.	-
Arif Hasvi	1888	"prominent leader of DDCC"	Association with Mazdoor Sabha.	Journalist

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Table V.1 (Contd)

Name	Born in	Congress work	Labour work	Profession
Parvati Devi	1888	"Prominent Congress worker"	Probably associated with Satyawati in labour work	
Memo Bai	1894	Commander, Lady Volunteer Corps		
Chando Bibi	1895	Congress volunteer, Delegate AICC 1934	Associated with Delhi Workers' League, President Textile Labour Union, 1938.	DCM shareholder.
Fazle Karim	-	Congress volunteer	Secretary TLU, 1937; President Mazdoor Sabha, 1934-35, associated with Delhi Workers' League	Lawyer
K.S. Shivom	-	Delegate AICC 1934	Jt Secy, TLU, 1936, co-worker with Chando Bibi	Lawyer
F.H. Ansari	1895	Congress leader during Civil Disobedience Movement.	Labour work with other Socialists	Lawyer

Source : Prabha Chopra (ed.), Who's Who of Delhi Freedom Fighters, Vol I, (Delhi, 1974); Interviews; XXX Congress files (see bibliography).

In the first group may be included Dr. Ansari, Asaf Ali, Shankar Lall, Depty Mall Jain, Deshbandhu Gupta, and others who were office bearers of the Congress Committees off and on throughout the period, especially 1928-32; and accused by their Socialist colleagues of being in league with the capitalists and against the workers. They were nominal office holders in Trade Unions, too, but were notoriously not labour leaders.

Their rivals in both labour and Congress organizations, became, gradually, from 1931-32 onwards, the "Socialists", Indra, Satyawati, Hukum Singh, Raghbir Singh and Brij Krishan. They were the "friends of labour", and had a genuine standing among workers of all types.[17]

The third group were the "disreputable" Congressmen, such as Chando Bibi, Fazle Karim, Ajit Das Gupta, K.S. Shivom, and Farid-ul-Haq Ansari. Their chief preoccupation was labour, and they were known to the Government as "professional agitators". The Textile Labour Union was run by them in 1937-38, and the strikes in the Birla Mills that followed the founding of this Union were the only ones in our period in Delhi in which the leaders were as active as the workers.[18] Although they were freedom fighters and Congressmen, they were regarded not as "purely Congress leaders" and had little influence in

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[17] H C, B 137, 1936

[18] LSG/Ind B 2, 1937; H C, B 2(1), 1937; H C, 1 C, 1938; Hindusthan Times, April 30, 1934.

the District and Pradesh Congress Committees.[19] Chando Bibi, like most of the Socialists and Union leaders, desired Congress identity, but after re-moulding it closer to their heart's desire: "No doubt the sentimental nationalist jargons are pleasing to the ear. These slogans may stir our heart, but the effect is only temporary. These have... no significance to the hungry masses and the toilers of the soil, who are economically depressed and oppressed by class domination." At the same time, "To reach our goal we have to organize the workers and peasants and other exploited sections and mobilize public opinion. We have to enter the Congress, and make a united front with the leftist forces both within and outside the Congress..."[20] The Socialists desired mutual tolerance and respect for the Red flag and the Tricolour, and increasing disappointment with the Congress made them shift their stand further towards Socialism. For this they were openly chastised by AICC Secretary Kriplani, when same and even by Jawaharlal Nehru, who said of Chando Bibi: ".... it is highly improper for a person connected with the Congress to attack it in the manner she did."[21]

The motivation of the Congress leaders in organizing labour agitation, and what they did or did not gain from it, may be understood only in relation to these differences.

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[19] H C, B 1 (3), 1935.

[20] Hindustan Times, January 2, 1938. For a similar speech by Ajit Das Gupta, see The Statesman, December 19, 1933.

[21] P 9, 1938-39.

The first two groups were certainly "using" labour in so far as they were following the official Congress policy of obtaining the workers' support for its political ends, while relegating to second position the interests of this class. As with other classes, economic gains were promised after Independence. The complication arose because of the "backwardness" of labour, which made it difficult to get their support without taking up their immediate economic problems. Upon this, most "Moderates", like Shankar Lal, discontinued the effort. Their places were taken by their "Socialist" colleagues, who could bridge the gap to labour by their new version of Congress activity. The two methods by which the scope of the Congress could in fact have been broadened were bypassed: viz., that workers' organizations be given representation in the Indian National Congress, and that their economic demands be taken up.

Given the backwardness of workers, to engage their loyalty was a relatively easy task; and one with a minimal risk involved. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi made the suggestion that the Government confiscate the property of certain Congressmen, for

> Men of means who are perfectly prepared to go to prison and pose as martyrs..... would shrink at once from the liability to heavy fine and from the attachment and sale of their property.
>
> But no action, as we know, was taken on this.[22]

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[22] H C, B 56, 1930.

The gain, in return, was handsome for those with primarily political ambitions: the association of the largest and most advanced section of the Indian urban masses with the nationalist movement; and, privately, a new dimension to their status.

The radicals, or extreme Socialists, had the interests of the workers as a class at heart, and their ideological stand was clear. Their gains were smaller. They were unsuccessful in reaching a new position whereby their appeal to the workers could also successfully take into consideration the unavoidable national issue of independence.

This was not a deliberate shortcoming so much as a failure caused by diverse factors: The backwardness of the labour movement; the nature of the times (even their Utopia had to presuppose Swarajya); the momentum already reached by the Congress as a heterogeneous movement; the fact of its leadership, including at district level, not being of the working class.

In conclusion, then, we can say that although there must surely have been the element of philanthropy and humanitarian concern behind the actions of the Congressmen involved in labour at that time; the nature, goal, and social base of the Congress preluded anything but a political use being made of labour. Even the Socialists, and the Radicals, who were closer to the workers' interests, could not and did not resist the un-Socialist sweep and flow of the National Movement in the 1930's.

The third question may be clarified as follows: What would be "spontaneous support" for the National Movement by the workers in the 1930's ? How did they in fact react to Congress ideology, and why ?

Support would mean giving to the movement according to capacity. The middle classes, e.g., became members, held office, decided policies, and donated funds. The moving force behind this support was clearly self-interest, in that they stood to gain from the defeat of Imperialism.

The workers stood to gain, too, from a victory over the Imperialist Government. They also became members of the Congress, voted in District Congress Committee elections, and their only public activity - strikes - was associated with the Congress. But all these facts are deceptive as regards the true extent of their support to the National Movement.

Workers became Congress members only when it was the declared policy of the Congress to seek them as members. Then with the rights of 4 anna members, they voted for the DPCC. They were bribed, persuaded and pressurized, and there is no record of their electing one of their own or one of their choice. The report on the election of the DPCC, 10th Jan 1938, analyzed very frankly: "Usually he (4 anna member) has no active sympathy with the Congress and its work. He pays 4 annas and becomes a member because somebody asks him to do so and not because he takes a genuine interest in the Congress."[23] Some-

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[23] P 9 (i), 1937-38

times they were even made members so that their votes could be obtained by a particular candidate. F.H. Ansari's complaint on this score was echoed by all the radicals: "The local Congress Committee is going from bad to worse. The tactics which they adopt every year in enrolling members from The Birla Mills and The Delhi Cloth and General Mills is also known to you. Thus they have so far been succeeding in monopolizing the Congress Committee to the detriment of the work and keeping out all the best workers."[24]

These members were often very appropriately called "bogus members". Plenty of allegations exist on file about the violation of rules in thus seeking support from primary members, but the guilty w are nowhere mentioned. Shankar Lall would seem to be capable of such practices, but on October 1, 1937, he complained to Jawaharlal Nehru: "As usual a number of members have been enrolled from the Delhi Cloth and Birla Mills. Last night at about 8 o'clock 50 copies were received in the office of the District Congress Committee without any payment at all."[25] In their vote for the Congress no distinction is made in any records between Hindu and Muslim workers, ~~except to override the distinction~~.[26] As a movement Congress had no competition in Delhi, and the workers had no alternative body to support.

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[24] Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Aug 27, 1937, in p/9, 1937.

[25] Ibid.

[26] The Congress Socialist, Feb 24, 1935; 9 kw, 1936.

.../-

This is partly the explanation, too, of their joining in the processions and hartals organised by the Congress. The other part of the explanation is most likely that the leaders of the hartals, etc., were also trade union leaders of one time or another.[27]

The important question is as to the complimentary role played by Congress ideology and the workers' needs, since, as discussed in the previous section, the workers' economic and political backwardness necessitated that an appeal to them be considerate of their economic needs.

When response was elicited by the Congress in organising the workers, there are three possible explanations of the phenomenon: The response could be due to the attractiveness of the very fact of organising, and the dynamism of an experienced leader. Or it could be due to the consideration of their concrete grievances by the leadership. Or it could be due to the striking of a sympathetic chord via the rhetoric of socialism.

The data suggests that the second was the most likely explanation, viz. that the workers responded because of the consideration given to their grievances. Of all these conditions, this was the only one that remained constant. Even when (i) a magnetic leader and the prospect of organising; and (ii) the rhetoric of Socialism, were lacking, the workers'

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[27] Especially in the Civil Disobedience days, under the auspices of the Mazdoor Sabha, H C, B 1, 1930.

interest in their cause was constant enough to provoke an attempt at action. Usually, there was a combination of two or more factors, but never did merely leadership, or organization, or ideology, motivate the workers.

There was not a single political strike in Delhi.

In conclusion, we find that the workers' support for the Nationalist Movement was neither spontaneous nor far reaching. The reason for this lies with both the parties: On the leadership side, the movement never became one of the masses; on the workers' side, their sheer poverty and ignorance prevented them from going beyond the economism which was their only motivating factor in the period we have been looking at.

Appendix I

The name of the Union shall be the Delhi Cloth & General Mills Co. Ltd. Workmen's Union.

2. The aim of the union are:-

(a) To organise the workmen of the mill for their economic, mental, social, and moral welfare.

(b) To provide work people in case of sickness, maternity, accident, death, old age etc. etc.

(c) To secure adequate compensation, under the workmen's Compensation Act for the work people injured while on duty.

(d) To get the legitimate grievances of the work people redressed.

(e) To provide education to workmen and their families.

(f) To work for the establishment of cordial relation between the employer and the employee and try to make the Delhi Cloth Mills a model mill in every respect.

(g) To settle disputes between the employer and the employee by negotiation.

(h) To promote and establish cooperative organisations for the general welfare of the members of the union.

(i) To relieve the distress of its members in case of strikes or lock-outs.

(j) And to do all other things necessary for and incidental to the above mentioned aims and objects.

3. All workmen of the Delhi Cloth & General Mills Co. Ltd., only shall be eligible for membership.

4. No person who is not in the employment of Delhi Cloth & General Mills Co. Ltd., Delhi, shall under any circumstances become a member or an officer of the union.

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5. Any person shall ipso fact cease to be a member of or officer of the union as soon as he is dismissed by the Delhi Cloth & General Mills Co. Ltd. Delhi.

6. No person who has ever been convicted under the Indian Penal Code shall under any circumstances be a member or an officer of the Union.

7. Suitable office premises, staff and stationery for carrying out the objects of the union shall be provided by the mills.

8. The affairs of the Union shall be managed by an executive committee consisting of one representative from each department of each shift of each mill.

9. Workmen who are in the service of the Delhi Cloth Mills for a continuous period of four years shall be eligible for election as office bearers or members of the executive committee.

10. There shall be one president, one Vice-President, one Secretary and one Treasurer.

11. There shall be no subscription of any sort chargeable from the members of the union.

12. There shall be no entrance fee to the Membership of the Union.

13. The re-entrance fee shall be Rs. 1/-.

14. Any member who has once resigned his membership can join the union within six months of his resignation.

15. A member of this union cannot under any circumstances be a member of any other union.

16. Persons joining any other union shall cease to be the members of this union as soon as they apply for membership in any other body.

17. The President shall preside at the executive and general meetings of the union. He will have to guide, conduct

..../-

and control all the meetings of the union and will generally supervise the affairs of the Union.

18. In absence of the President, the Vice-President shall discharge the duties of the President.

19. The Secretary will issue notices, convene meetings and keep minutes of the proceedings of all meetings. He shall also keep such books and records as may be necessary for the purposes of the union and see that all rules of the union are observed by the union.

20. The quorum of the Executive Committee shall be 2/3rd of the total strength of the Executive Committee.

21. The quorum for the ordinary and emergent General meeting shall be 1/4th of the entire strength of the union.

22. The quorum of the adjourned meeting of the Executive Committee shall be 1/3rd of the total strength of that committee.

23. The quorum for the adjourned general meeting shall be 1/10th of the entire strength of the union.

24. Secretary shall call a meeting of the executive committee whenever necessary or on a requisition signed by at least 1/3rd of the members of that committee.

25. The secretary shall call an emergent general meeting of union on receipt of a requisition signed by at least one fourth of its total members.

26. The notices for all meetings shall be issued so as to give clear two days and seven days for the Executive and General meetings respectively.

27. At an adjourned meeting, no business other than that which has already been circulated for the meeting adjourned shall be transacted.

28. There shall be at least one General meeting every year.

..../-

29. The office bearers and members of the Executive committee will be elected every year at the annual general meeting.

30. Vacancies occuring during the year through resignations or otherwise may be filled up by election in the executive committee.

31. The retiring members and office bearers shall be eligible for re-election.

32. The executive committee shall appoint suitable sub-committee consisting of not less than 7 members for each of the main departments of the mills.

33. All complaints received by the union shall in the first instance be referred to such sub-committees, who will go into the complaint and send a written report to the executive committee and a copy of it to the mill manager.

34. On receipt of the report of the sub-committee, the executive committee shall refer all general grievances in writing to the manager of the mills giving him reasonable time to remove the same, which in no case will be less than 6 clear days.

35, In case, the manager fails to take satisfactory action in the matter, the executive committee will have to refer it to the mill secretary giving him at least ~~xx~~ 10 clear days to redress the grievances.

36. In case the Secretary does not take satisfactory steps in the matter, the case may be ~~xx~~ referred to a Board of conciliation consisting of ten or less elected representatives of the work people and an equal number of nominated members on behalf of the management.

37. The Board of conciliation shall commence their work within reasonable time.

38. In case of a tie among the members of the Board of Conciliation the matter shall be placed before an independent umpire selected by a majority of the board of conciliation.

.../-

39. The award of the board of conciliation or of the umpire as ~~to~~ the case may be shall be final and binding on both parties.

40. Any member who acts in prevention of the rules of union or goes on strike without the sanction of the union by a majority of 3/4th of its members, he shall be liable to such disciplinary action as the executive may deem necessary and forfeiture of all his dues by the company.

41. In case of a strike, the essential services, clerical, staff, building workmen shall under any circumstances be called off. (sic) The work people from the Dye and Bleach House will not be called off unless the stock in process has been cleared.

42. The union may by a majority of 3/4th of its members present alter or amend any of its rules in an extraordinary general meeting specially called for that purpose and confirm in the subsequent general meeting of the union.

43. The notice for the extraordinary general meeting shall be served so as to serve 15 days clear notice to the members.

44. All amendments in the rules of the union shall in the first instance will have to be got approved by the secretary of the mills. (sic)

45. No labour strike shall be declared by the union unless it has been authorised by 3/4th of the total strength of the union in general meeting.

46. The keeping of discipline in the mills shall entirely be the business of the mill authorities.

47. The election of the office bearers will be by counting of votes from each department in their separate general meeting.

..../-

48. The union shall see that the pay of the present work people is not reduced for the equal quantity of work. It will, however, take no objection to the mill authorities recruiting fresh hands at lower rates or wages.

49. In case the union amends its rules against the approval of the secretary of the mills, the company will have the right to withdraw its recognition of the union.

50. The union may be dissolved if 3/4th of its members present so desire in their general meeting.

51. The union shall not under any circumstances incite other workmen of the company directly or indirectly.

Source : Draft, Volume 3, Appendix I.

Appendix II

Constitution of the Textile Labour Union, Delhi

Aims and Objects:

1. To secure effective and complete organization of the workers of all grades and departments working in the Textile Mills, Delhi Province.
2. To secure fair and equitable condition of work and ensure for them a living wage.
3. To provide labourers in case of sickness, maternity, accident, dealth and old age and to secure compensation under Workmen's Compensation Act for the labourers injured while on duty.
4. To secure legitimate grievances of the labourers redressed.
5. To provide free primary and adult education for labourers and their families.
6. To work for the establishment of cordial relations between the employees and the employers.
7. To settle disputes between the employers and employees by negotiations and failing in that, to adapt to other means such as strike and arbitration.
8. To promote and establish co-operative organization for a g general welfare of the members of the Union and their families.
9. To bring about to a satisfactory and speedy conclusion of authorised strikes and to relieve the distress of its members in case of strikes or lockouts.
10. To ensure the enforcement of all legislative and Trade Union enactments for the protectment of the labourers.
11. To promote the civic and political interest of the work people.

..../-

Appendix II (Contd.)

12. And to do all other things necessary for and incidental to the above mentioned aims and objects.

Annual subscription of the Union - 4 annas.

Organization: An Executive Committee of maximum 35 members, with a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer.

Regular accounts of income and expenditure to be maintained and audited - funds to be "applied for any of the purposes laid down in section 15 of the Trade Union Act."

All complaints received by the Union will be referred to the Sub-Committee; a written report will be prepared; the Secretary will refer to the employer giving him not less than two days to remove the same. If he fails to take satisfactory action, the Executive Comittee may take any action. A strike is authorized by a two thirds majority of the members of the Mill concerned.

Source: L 5 (kw), 1936

Abbreviations

DA	Delhi Archives
HT	The Hindusthan Times
IJE	Indian Journal of Economics
Ind	Industries file in DA
L	Labour file (Congress) in NML
LSG	Legislative file in DA
NML	Nehru Memorial Museum Library
P	Provincial file (Congress) in NML
R & A	Revenue and Agriculture file in DA
SRC	Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources
G	General file (Congress) in NML
H C	Home Confidential file in DA
AICC	All India Congress Committee
DDCC	Delhi District Congress Committee
DPCC	Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee
INC	Indian National Congress
RCL	Royal Commission on Labour

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1. Triloki Nath Sharma, Managing Director, Elgin Mills, Kanpur. Ex-employee of DCM of over 45 years' standing. April 17, 1977.

2. Rajendra K. Gupta, Provident Fund Officer, DCM, Bara Hindu Rao, Delhi. Old connection with DCM and familiarity with Provident Fund scheme. April, 1977.

3. K.S. Shankara, Babar Lane, Delhi
Youth and Congress Leader in the 1930's.
October 20, 1977.

4. Vishwabandhu Gupta, Tej Office, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, Delhi - Son of Lala Deshbandhu Gupta.
November 1, 1977.

5. Dharam Pal Gupta, Tej Press, Naya Bazaar, Delhi - Brother of Lala Deshbandhu Gupta and Congress sympathizer in the 1930's.
November 4, 1977.

6. Yudhvir Singh, Kucha Brij Nath, Chandni Chowk, Delhi
Congress office-bearer in the 1930's, Gandhi-ite.
November 8, 1977.

7. J.N. Sahni, Rattenden Road, Delhi - Editor, Hindustan Times until 1933, labour worker.
November 13, 1977.

8. J.K. Khanna, Congress worker and labour activist in the 1930's.
November 16, 1977.

9. Brij Krishen Chandiwala, 23 Mahadeo Road, Delhi - Gandhi-ite, Congress Socialist, labour worker in the 1930's.
December 2, 1977.

10. Dr (Mrs) G. Saran, X-1 Hauz Khas, Delhi
Daughter of Chando Bibi.
December 1977.

11. A.K. Saksena, Industrial Relations Department, DCM, Bara Hindu Rao, Delhi. Familiarity with Industrial Relations in the DCM.
December 1977.

12. Lala Bharat Ram, DCM, Bara Hindu Rao, Delhi

Errata:

Pages 108a and 108b had to be created because Table IV.4 was left out by mistake.

There is no page 16.

There is no footnote 11 in Chap II, p. 22.