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Workers in the Indian Railways and the Strike of 1974

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Abbreviations

AIDEF	=	All India Defence Employees Federation
AILRSA	=	All India Loco Running Staff Association
AIRF	=	All India Railwaymen's Federation
AITUC	=	All India Trade Union Congress
AIREC	=	All India Railway Employees Confederation
BNR	=	Bengal Nagpur Railway
BMS	=	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha
BCMWS	=	Bombay Cotton Mills Workers
BSP	=	Border Security Force
CCGE	=	Confederation of Central Government Employees
CITU	=	Centre for Indian Trade Union
CRP	=	Central Reserve Police
CPI	=	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	=	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DA	=	Dearness Allowance
DIR	=	Defence India Rule
GIP	=	Great Indian Peninsula
HMS	=	Hind Mazdoor Sabha
INTUC	=	Indian National Trade Union Congress
JAC	=	Joint Action Committee
JCA	=	Joint Council of Action
JCM	=	Joint Consultative Machinery
MISA	=	Maintenance of Internal Security Act

NCCRS	=	National Co-ordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle
NFIR	=	National Federation of Indian Railwaymen
NFPTE	=	National Federation of Post and Telegraph Employees
PNM	=	Permanent Negotiating Machinery
SIR	=	Southern Indian Railway
UTUC	=	United Trade Union Congress
WREU	=	Western Railway Employees Union.

Introduction

The General strike of the Indian Railwaymen in May 1974 was not an ordinary incident in India's political and economic life. The strike was not just an industrial dispute but it had become a major political issue in the mid-1970s. It was not just a strike of mere two or three days but it lasted twenty long days and the strike it is believed by many totally halted the economic and political pace of the country. Railways had to suffer a loss of one hundred five Crores. People faced lots of inconveniences. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands railway workers had joined the strike. Ranging from skilled to unskilled, educated to illiterate, lower to higher income workers had participated in the strike. The discontentment that was growing among the workers on various issues since independence like wage parity, bonus, etc. had led the railwaymen to fight against the railway authority. The entire working class of India was swept with this strike storms, workers from North to South and East to West had participated in the strike. The consequence of the strike was not at all good. Millions of workers lost their jobs due to the strike. Thousand of workers were arrested and beaten bitterly by the police and paramilitary forces. Women and children of the striking workers were thrown up from their houses and were physically tortured. The workers were forced by the police to join their duties. Government unleashed violent repression over the workers and imposed authoritarian rule in India. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of workers employed in the other industries – public and private – supported the railways workers' struggle and the railwaymen also got the sympathy of the common people of India in this struggle against the government. In April and May 1974 people talked only on the strike issue in homes, workplaces, everywhere. And the strike of May 1974 affected the normal duty life of the Indian people in almost all the Indian towns and cities. In many places the railwaymen also took violent measures to fight against the authoritarian torture of the government such as at Howrah station, the workers burnt few wagons and passenger compartments.

The aim and objective of this study is to locate the place of the railway workers' strike in the entire history of labour movement in India. This strike was the struggle between the Indian bourgeoisie and their opposition, i.e., the working class. The basis of the relationship between labour and the employers was power. One could have established

one self over another if the bargaining capacity of the former was stronger. An individual worker cannot bring any change or fight against any opposition but if thousands of workers back him and can introduce and fulfil their common demands. As a class they represent themselves more prominently and exercise social power. The Associations of the workers, e.g., the trade unions provide the necessary framework and platform to represent workers' demands. The two most important trade unions working in the Indian Railways – All India Railwaymen's Federation or AIRF and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen or NFIR played a positive and at the same time negative roles during the strike. The NFIR in almost every sphere of railwaymen's struggle opposed the workers for whom it was set up. The railway workers branded NFIR as the "official strike-breaking unit". As it had a very close link with the Congress Parliamentary Party and its President Mr. A.P Sharma was also a member of the same party of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. AIRF, on the other hand was also not capable of mounting any general mass movement because it lacked a mass support-base. In spite of this, the railway workers are still known for its united strength, as they are highly unionised and famous for their organised struggle. It was quite surprising that the first strike action after industrialisation in India started was launched by the workers working in the Howrah Railway Station in 1862 for reduction in working hours. Before independence up to 1900, the movements of the railway workers were sporadic and not a very organised effort, thus they did not have any mass social appeal. However, there were several attempts taken by the railwaymen in the pre independence period up to 1975 for bringing the nationwide general strike in 1948, 1960, and 1968. There were so many local, zonal strikes and also even separate categories of railwaymen e.g., loco men's strike in May 1972, November – December 1973, they launched their organised struggle to get their demands fulfilled, as a result of the growing discontentment of the workers. Since independence the railway workers as a central government employees were deprived of many facilities and even exploited. The trade unions, in the process of buying and selling of labour power, developed their own interest, which is separate from the workers' and employers' interests. The trade unions especially like the NFIR represented its interests quite separate from the workers. Ironically the railway workers was not able to express their demands and desires or to influence the policies of the management and government. The trade unions were not organisationally and structurally very strong in the railway front during that period. Therefore, several category unions represented sections of workers emerged and the railway workers were

long
history

segregated. The political connections of the trade unions should not also be overlooked because it is a special characteristic of the Indian trade union movement.

To understand the exact importance of the railwaymen's strike of 1974, it may be mentioned that it came about at a time when the entire economy was in a grip of a grim crisis with the trading community running riot with the market, essential commodities and prices and with no signs of the government being able to stem the rot; in a way, the disruption of the vital artery of the nation should have come as a boon to the market operation who really made hey even before the strike threat materialised (Mainstream, June 1974). The economic condition of the country during late 1960s to early 1970s was really bad. India was hit repeatedly by the inflationary crisis and the central government was unable to control this crisis situation in the Indian economy. The Lok Sabha General Election was also going to take place in 1975 and the political situation of the country was also out of control of Indira Government for many reasons e.g., the Naxalite Movements in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh already threatening the central government. And the strike of Indian Railwaymen took place at this political juncture. Some scholars even argue that the strike was one of the so many reasons for bringing the National Emergency in June 1975 by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Therefore, the importance and significance of the strike in national political and economic spheres was immense and far-reaching.

*contribution
to emergency*

But surprisingly, as we know that though, the railways were the heart and life blood of the Indian economy, hence, a twenty days long strike could even stop the single heart beat of the nation's economy but there are mere constructive and reliable studies found in this area. The strike is of immense importance. Railways faced great loss and in many places daily life was disrupted, as the power station could not able to provide required electricity to the local areas because of the halt of the commodity traffic of the railways. Though the railway strike held an important position in the entire labour movement of the country, still we could not find many resources on this issue. There are few works, but they lie scattered. However, the strike was one of the most important event and this would be understood by the way that as soon as it was called off the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet discussed in detail the question of wages and income at the national scale of the industrial workers in general and central government employees under public sector industries in particular. Another important feature of this strike which has been ignored by

all most all the studies, was that the entry of new generation of workforce in the trade unions provided new and fresh political awareness and enthusiasm which helped the movement to get a mass character for social change. These aspects of the railway strike have not been touched in the works that analyse the Railway strike.

Though very few works are found in this area, but Stephen Sherlock's works are the most valuable and reliable document of railway workers' movement. Sherlock has two works one was published in 1989 in the form of article in 'Economic and Political Weekly' and the other was published in 2001 entitled as – "The Indian Railways Strike of 1974: A study of Power and Organised Labour". The later work is an extension of the first work that tried to locate the real reasons for the strike of 1974. This book is divided into three parts, which contain ten chapters. First, Sherlock deals with the conditions of the railway workers and their relationship with the management since 1925 to 1970. In this Chapter he discusses the origin of the railway trade unions and their activities in Indian political scenario. Then he deals with the different trade unions, working in the Indian Railways e.g., central, zonal, and local and mainly the activities of the category unions that sprang up in the period 1970-72. The craft or category unions had challenged the recognised unions and interestingly Sherlock shows that the former was more successful in struggle than the latter that had failed to secure any positive demands. The second part of Sherlock's book contains the nature of the leadership in the railway unions, their responses towards the workers grievances. The reaction of the Railway Management's to the trade unions and the workers' conditions in 1973-74 is also described in this book. Sherlock argues that the building of unity of the vast work force of the Indian Railways was quite a difficult task for the trade unions, which lack major support base. In the last part of his work he gives a detailed description of the strike struggle of the railway workers in 1974. The workers had not fully prepared for launching a general and indefinite strike. But they fought a heroic struggle for their rights. Sherlock sketches the political reactions and implications of the strike, how the opposition and the ruling government utilised the strike for their own political ends. Sherlock calls the strike as the "Politics of Class". Both the government or the management and the trade unions played a game with the innocent workers during the strike period from May 8 to May 28, 1974.

The present study attempts to find out the answers to some questions that had not been answered or partially answered by others. First, the study raises and answers the following questions:

- (a) Why did the strike take place or what were the real reasons behind the strike?
- (b) How did the central government meet with the strikers? If the central government was severe on the strikers what was the reason behind that?
- (c) What were the causes behind the failure of the strike? Why did the workers fail to secure their demands?
- (d) What were the organisational inadequacies of the railway trade unions? Did these inadequacies contribute to the failure of the strike?

Why did different sections of trade unions show different political colour during the strike?

- (e) What were the tasks of the railway trade unions after the withdrawal of the strike?

Apart from the central questions other questions that these study tries to answer is whether the trade unions had launched the strike to retain their position or to secure the legitimate rights of the workers? This study also tries to locate how far the strike was tenable and justified?

The above stated questions are answered in the different chapters of this study:

- (a) In the first chapter we try to find out the real cause for the establishment of the Railway industry in India in the mid-19th Century.
- (b) In the second chapter, we will identify the problems of industrialization process in India after the independence and locate the development of the railway industry till 1974.
- (c) In the third chapter we will try to enquire how, the trade unions prepared themselves for the strike of 1974.
- (d) And in the fourth chapter we will try to find out the causes of the governments' violent reaction towards the strike and governments' attitude against the striking workers. We also look at the possible causes for the failure of the strike since the unions called off the strike unilaterally.

The study had been arranged in the following manner in the subsequent chapters.

The first chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section will discuss the history of industrialization in India i.e., the establishment of different industries in general like plantations, coal mining, textiles etc. In the second section we will discuss the formation of railway industry in particular from the period of 1853 to 1947. The third and fourth sections will give a detail description of the emergence of a new class in India – the industrial working class – in the above series of industries and their nature, peculiar characteristics and the conditions as we know that India was an agricultural country and the establishment of railway industry gradually turned it into an industrial country.

The second chapter has also four sections. In the first section we will discuss the industrial policies of the country after independence till 1974 and how the government through the five-year plans initiated rapid industrialisation in India. The second section deals with the development of railway industry as a public sector enterprise under the Government of India's industrial policies. The third and fourth sections of this chapter will try to find out the conditions of the industrial workers and specifically the conditions – working and health of the railway workers in the whole arena of industrial working class and the causes of their grievances from 1947 to 1974

The third chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first section we will observe the emergence, growth and activities of the railway trade unions from pre-independence era to 1974. We will try to locate the political affiliations of the different railway trade unions, their position and attitude towards the workers. The second section of the third chapter will describe the preparation and launching the railwaymen's general strike in May 1974 and the nature of the strike itself.

The fourth chapter has three sections. The first section will attempt to look at the attitude of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Government towards this strike and the nature of the violent repression unleashed on the workers. In the second section we will try to analyse the impact of the strike in the economic, political and social spheres of the country. The last section of this chapter will deal with the necessary tasks of the trade unions working in

the Indian Railways, after calling off the strike, for their immediate recovery. This study will also try to find out the real causes behind the failure of the strike.

In the last chapter of this entire study, we will briefly present a summary of the study and then arrive at a conclusion.

This study, however, is mainly based on primary sources and materials like, newspaper reports, publications of different trade unions e.g., AITUC, CITU, UTUC, AIRF, NFIR, CPI etc, different letters of trade union leaders to the Government of India and Railway Minister or to other trade union leaders etc. It also takes recourse to the reports of Labour Bureau under the Ministry of Labour; Railway Board and Railway Year Book under the Ministry of Railways; reports of Economic Survey; Budget Reports and Proposals under the Ministry of Finance; Reserve Bank Bulletin etc. This study has also consulted the secondary materials like books; journals; articles etc. But there are very few secondary materials on the strike. Probably the best account of the strike is contained in Sherlock's two works of 1989 and 2001.

Stephen Sherlock's work has helped this work a lot since this is the only reliable secondary source on this issue i.e., the railwaymen's struggle and their movement of 1974. Besides this, there are few articles written on the general strike of May 1974 in different journals. For the industrial and railway history of India there are several works on the issues of industrialisation, emergence of new industrial working class in the pre-independence period. But after 1947 no major work is available on the railway workers' conditions, which was the main cause of their discontent.

CHAPTER I

Industrialisation, Railways and the Railway Workers in Colonial India

Introduction

In this chapter an attempt will be made to analyse the process of industrialisation in India with an emphasis on the contribution of the Indian Railway industry to the entire process that started from the second half of the nineteenth century. Since with the growth of industrialisation, the working class in India emerged from the second half of the nineteenth century an effort will be made to look at the working class and more particularly the working class employed in the Railways. The arrangement of this chapter is as follows. In the first section we discuss the general process of industrialisation, in the second section we deal with the origins and the growth of the Railway industry that initiated and propelled the process of industrialisation, in the third section the condition of the Indian working class in general is analysed and then an attempt is made to look at the condition of the Railway workers in the fourth and final section. The period that we cover in the chapter is the period from 1853 till independence.

I

Industrialisation in India: The Colonial Period

Industrialisation in India, in the real sense of the term, started with the establishment of the Railways from the 1850s. In this chapter we shall discuss the industrialisation process in India as a whole from the mid of the 19th century till independence. We find that it started with the building of the Railways in the colony and for running the railway industry successfully many other industries e.g., coal textiles etc. opened up. Soon after, other industries like, cotton textiles, tea plantations, jute etc. were established in different parts of the country mainly with British capital. During the East-India Company's rule there were no such big industries, the Company was mainly a trading company. They just

procured Indian products at a cheaper price and sold it at a higher price in different parts of the developed world for a profit and hence did not take any initiative in building any industry in the colony. But after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 when the British Parliament ultimately took the control of the Indian administration then the British Indian Government took the initiative of establishing industries. In this chapter we will also focus on the different communities that dominated the industrial economy of the colony; the industrial policies of the British India Government and how the traditional industries - cottage and handicraft industries were destroyed.

The entire period of British economic domination over India can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase started from 1757 that is, after the Battle of Plassey, the East India Company monopolized the Indian market and this continued till the early 1850s. The second phase started from 1858 that is, after the Sepoy Mutiny that erupted in 1857. The period 1858-1914 saw the zenith of that system of exploitation (exploitation by industrial capital) and finally the period of 1914-1947 marked the end of colonial exploitation of India by the British and the beginning of neo-colonial exploitation of India by advanced capitalism in general (Bagchi, 1982; p. 79).

During the East India Company's rule, the Company did not take any kind of initiative for the establishment of industries in the colonies; they were mainly 'traders'. In the entire 18th century, interestingly, with the spread of Company's domination, different Indian communities started taking interest in trade and lending activities throughout the country. The development of indigenous and European trade economy led to the gradual decline of Indian traditional economy and beginning of the process that can be referred to as commercialisation of peasant economy. By the late 1830s, the British enterprise and capital had already extended to the sugar manufacture, rice and flour mills, indigo and tea plantations, shipyards, mining, foreign trade, banking and insurance (Bhagwati and Desai, 1970; p. 20); though the development was only very limited. The Europeans mainly the Dutch, first started the establishment of tea plantations in the early 19th century. The East India Company was mainly involved in the trade of raw silk, opium and salt. They marketed these products largely in China. Therefore, to collect the materials from remote and distant places to the port towns and main administrative regions, the necessity of quick transportation and communication was felt. Thus, Lord Dalhousie took the first

initiative in the construction of the Railway industry in India in the late 1940s. The establishment of modern machine-based industries in India during the period of the British rule played a significant role in the consolidation of the national economy of the country (Desai, 1976; p. 102). However, the development of the transportation industry during the mid-19th century brought the whole world together, which transformed it into a single market.

The process of Railway construction in the mid-19th century provided the path for the growth and development of modern industries in the colony. Apart from Railway construction, the European started establishing other industries, like, coal mining, jute mills, cotton textile industries, plantation industries etc. in different parts of the country from 1850s onwards. In Western India the cotton textile industries came up and were predominantly owned by the Indian bourgeoisie (the landlords or the traditional Zamindars turned into capitalist entrepreneur). The Zamindars of Indian traditional village societies had accumulated money to invest in these industries. The British brought developed technologies from the West, as a result of the Industrial revolution to India from this period onwards. Thus, there were no problem of technology neither was there any problem of capital in India. At the same time there was a huge demand of the industrial products because these were cheaper than the traditional ones and India was then mainly the producer and exporter of raw materials. Therefore these industries found a vast market in India for their products. Apart from the Railways, another important field of capital investment in the early period of industrialization was indigo plantation. To meet the growing demands of tea, coffee and rubber- these industries were soon established. Between 1850 and 1855, cotton, jute, and coalmines were established. The following table will show the growth of these industries, which were mainly owned by the Europeans:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Jute</i>	<i>Cotton</i>	<i>Coal</i>
1879	-	56	-
1880	-	-	56
1882	20	-	-
1894-95	29	144	123

(A. R. Desai, 1976; p. 104)

The table suggest that by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century i.e. till the First World War, British and Indian capital investment in the colony had considerably expanded.

The growth in Indian industrial entrepreneurship came essentially from three communities - Parsis, Gujratis and Marwaris. The earliest entrepreneur appears to have been mainly the Parsis. It is this community that certainly initiated cotton textile and later steel making (Bhagwati and Desai, 1970; p. 29).

Industrial Control by the Communities

	No. of communities			No. of Directors		
	1911	1931	1957	1911	1931	1951
British	282	416	382	652	1,335	865
Parsis	15	25	19	96	261	149
Gujaratis	3	11	17	71	166	232
Jews	5	9	3	17	13	-
Muslims	-	10	3	24	70	66
Bengalis	8	5	20	48	170	320
Marwaris	-	6	96	6	146	618
Mixed	28	28	79	102	121	372
Total	341	510	619	1,016	2,282	2,622

(Davey, 1975; p. 99)

However, after the First World War, the economic policy of the government had changed towards the process of industrialisation. From 1927 onwards, the Indian tariffs system was governed by the Principle of Imperial Preference, which worked mainly to the benefit of the British product over both non-Empire and Indian production in the Indian market (Desai, 1976; p. 109). In spite of this policy of protection of British owned industries and financial houses the indigenous industries steadily developed. The indigenous industries tried to strike a balance between the two and also tried to check the drainage of colonial economy to the Western countries. During the years of world-wide economic depression huge amount of Indian exports of goods got a halt, but surprisingly the domestic industries had been growing without any break and found a vast market in the colony for their products. From this period only, capital-intensive industries took the help of financial and business houses, which were largely controlled by the foreign

enterprises. As a result, the banking and insurance companies started flourishing. These managing agencies supplied the finance, technologies, and trained staff etc., which were not easily available at that time in the colonies. They mainly provided the infrastructure facilities to the indigenous enterprises. These agencies, again, maintained close nexus with colonial governments. As the necessary equipments were supplied by the agencies they tried and were able to take decisions in their favour regarding industrial policies. Capital always intended to be invested where it could get the highest return. But due to the lack of government assistance and proper management a large amount of capital remained unutilised; non-invested and outside the production system of market. Very soon India was transformed into a market by the British industrial capital, her huge imports had to be matched by the exports of raw materials (Sen, 1992; p. 42).

It has been observed that during the late 19th century the production of heavy industries like, Tata Iron and Steel had reached its complete stage of developed industry within few years; as it was said that India had all those materials, resources and the environment to become a developed and modern industrial country by itself, without destroying the age old traditional handicraft and cottage industries. But what the Britishers first did in India was to destroy the handicraft industry of India. Soon they became sick since they could not compete with the heavy machine made products. Therefore, the history of whole 19th century India was the history of rapid decline of traditional cottage and handicraft industries, which would not stand before the cheap heavy industrial products of England. The Britishers established big factories and employed a large number of workers at a higher wage scale, though it was very low in comparison to the work load of industries in England, but higher than the incomes from the agricultural sectors and cottage industries, plantation industries, textile, mines and transportation industries.

Industrial Census of 1911

Industries	Persons employed
Tea Plantation	7,03,585
Cotton	5,57,589
Jute Harvesting etc.	2,22,319
Collieries etc.	1,42,977
Railway Workshops	98,723

(Gadgil : 1924; p.122)

After these followed the sawmills, stone and marble quarries, timber yards, iron foundries and petroleum refineries (Gadgil : 1924, p. 122).

The inflationary policies of the British Government led the war profits at its heights. The growth and development of industries in the early 20th century was facilitated by the Swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods. It forced the colonial entrepreneurs to invest and produce indigenous goods. The movement of Swadeshi and boycott, moreover, provided a vast market- for products produced by the Indian owned industries. There was also a revival of traditional handicraft and cottage industries, though in a very limited extent. As we know that a large section of the population in India remained outside the industrial sectors. They were the traditional artisans class of the village society who lost their age-old skill and efficiency for nearly half a century. They were now compelled to learn the technical skill of modern factories and joined the modern industries. The government of India granted the measure of fiscal autonomy after the First World War and it adopted a policy of "discriminating protection" with effect from 1924 (Davey, 1975). Therefore, Indian owned industries became incapable and incompetent against foreign competition. During and after the war, the British Parliament had compelled India to contribute not only its industrial products but also its economy for the sake of the war effort of Great Britain. And from this time only the inflationary crisis started to emerge. We can easily, then justify the reasons behind the economic conditions of India of present-day because it had its roots in the Imperial period we can not ignore these causes and conditions for the underdevelopment of Indian economy till now. Therefore, we can afford to quote, D. H. Buchanan that "with abundant supplies of raw cotton, raw jute, easily mined coal, and exceptionally high grade iron ore; with redundant population often starving because of lack of profitable employment; with a hoard of gold and silver perhaps to that of no other country in the world; and with access through the British Government to a money market which was lending large quantities of capital to the entire world; with an opening under their own flag British business leaders were developing both at home and in numerous countries, all sorts of capitalistic industries; with an excellent market within her own borders and near at hand in which others were selling great quantities of manufactures; with all these advantages, India, after a century, was supporting only about two per cent of her population by factory industry" (Buchanan, 1966; p. 451).

Industrialization in India in pre-independence era, through it was unbalanced and inefficient it played a pivotal role in the lives of the colonial people. It made them habituated with the urbanized life. It paved the way for establishing and making people acquainted with the town life and introduced the village dwellers with the hardships of industrial sectors. It brought various communities, different in culture, religion social and custom etc. together and under one umbrella, i.e., the industry. It led to the consolidation of the unified national economy which evolved in India as a result of the introduction of capitalist economy forms in agriculture by the British government, penetration of India by the commercial forces of the world and spread of modern transport during British period (Desai, 1976; p. 124). Above all the process of industrialization in the colonial period till the eve of independence (1947) had been the continuous process of introduction and form and firms of two distinct classes - bourgeoisie and the proletariat - in the modern industrial society of India.

II

The Railways in India (1850 to 1947)

In this section we are going to reveal the real intention and the real causes for the establishment of the Railway industry in the colony in early 1850s. Then we look at how, the Railways had served the political, administrative and above all the economic purposes of the Britishers. We focus on how heavy and other industries in England were benefited by the building of Railways in India? We will also find that in addition to serving the purpose of Imperialists, Railway exposed the people of villages and traditional societies to the world. It connected every corner of the country. It also helped to bring people of different culture, religion, language, race together.

In our attempt at finding the real causes of establishment of Railways in India, we must turn our attention to the social, political and above all economic aspects. It is true that Railways had revolutionised Indian social and economic life in the 19th and 20th century but in the late 1840s and early 1850s, there were not much initiatives in building Railways in the colony because the East India Company was quite doubtful about whether such a huge investment could get its return or not. And therefore, they did not want to take any risk as we know that Railway construction process was not only labour intensive

but also capital intensive requiring a huge amount of capital. Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor General of India, first took the venture of establishing Railways in India. Until 1856 the construction process was slow and tardy, but the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had hastened the process. After the Mutiny, the ruling power over India had shifted from the East India Company to the British Parliament. Mutiny signified the end of Company's rule in India. However, the British Parliament realised the necessity of Railways in India, not only because of imposing strong administrative system in the colony but also for getting and preparing a good market for British products in India.

In the late 1840 particularly in 1848, i.e., in the initial period of industrialization in the colony, the British capitalists were not much willing to invest money in the construction of Indian Railways. Because the East India Company came to India not as industrialists, but as traders and they sought short-term profit, which they could not get from the Railway industry. They were also doubtful whether the Indian people would accept it or not since during the mutiny the rebels defined Railway construction as the 'effect to black magic to tie India into iron chains'. Above all the Directors of East India Company also did not have any desire to build Railways in this country. Finally, in March 1849, the same month in which major British expansion by force of arms on the Indian sub-continent was completed with the annexation of Punjab - the East India Company agreed to build Railways in India with two private companies - Great Indian Peninsular Railway and East Indian Railways. The companies would build and operate their respective lines with a guaranteed five per cent return on their stockholders' investment assured by the revenues of the government of India (Kerr, 1997; p. 17). The first Railway line was constructed from Bombay to Kalyan via Thana and the first train ran from Bombay to Thana on 16th April 1853 and within 1954 the entire line from Bombay to Kalyan was constructed.

Since the Mutiny, the British Parliament wanted to develop the communication system of the colony. They had the desire to connect all the important cities mainly the revolt prone and tension areas because they felt that if they fail to suppress uprisings or rebellion strongly they would not be able to rule over the country. And to improve the colonial administration the Imperiliasts found that the Railways could only be the means of quick and good communication system, at the same time good transportation also. In

the pre-British India transportation system was very poor. Moreover, they employed and developed strong military bases in different parts of the country through the establishment of the Railways, which could help them to administer the country efficiently and effectively.

Apart from the political, administrative and military reasons, the real intention or the real cause of establishing Railways was not to develop the communication systems of the country but to get the maximum benefit from British capital invested in India. Due to the Industrial Revolution during the 18th century a large number of industries and factories were established in Britain and the products of these industries and machine-based factories, after some years, did not find the market that it required to sell their products. The English industrialists were faced with the problem of rapid disposal of the products of these new steadily expanding industries and securing raw materials for them from India and other parts of the world (Desai, 1976; 127). From this time, the British industrialists also forced their government to build Railways in the colony so that they could easily get the raw materials from the remote places quickly and send the finished goods to these places through Railways first. Therefore, the British government made an attempt to connect all the important cities mainly the port towns, e.g., Calcutta, Bombay and Madras Presidency.

Railways also helped to connect the remotest villages and places with the port towns. It brought the isolated villages to the reach of the world. Railways were the most quicker and easier means to collect raw materials and send them to the ports. It was also the medium of carrying British imported goods to every corner of the country. They did not make any favour by introducing Railways in the colony but it served their own purpose and interest. The routes from the ports were generally sketched with the intention of traversing the important agricultural tracts of the interior, so as to facilitate the export of agricultural produce from Bombay, for example, Ahmedabad and the Gujarat cotton, Nagpur with the Khandesh and Berar cotton tract and Sholapur, with the adjacent Karnataka cotton tract were reached before 1870 (Gadgil, 1971; p. 131). However, the Railway construction process in the early period was wholly initiated, directed and financed by the British. Some £ 150 millions of British capital was invested in India in the 19th century, investment in Railways, was the single largest investment by the British Empire

(Kerr, 1997; p. 4). At the same time British surplus capital also required and searched a market where it could be invested as a result of the Industrial Revolution. And British Indian Government began to construct the Railways due to the pressure of the English capital, thus, it found its outlet in India; because, Britain was no more a profitable market to launch any new investment of the accumulated surplus. Therefore, the Railways had been started and constructed to safeguard the economic interest of the British capital. It also helped the British Parliament to retain in its political and administrative power as the control of Railway administration remained fully in the hands of the British.

India government, even the later, the Government of India Act 1935 provided that the Executive Authority of the federation, maintenance and operation of railways shall be exercised by the Federal Railway Authority (Desai, 1976; p. 129). The heavy industrial products, which were necessary for Railway construction, e.g., rails, bridge and girders etc. were brought from Britain and the low cost materials like wooden sleepers etc. were manufactured in India. The ships, which carried those heavy products required for the Railway building was another beneficiary and this added to the profit of British companies. These companies manufactured the heavy products taking the raw materials from India at lower price and sold them again in India at higher price. Statistics reveal that the British imported products in the second half of the 19th century was far higher than today's imported products in India.

However, the Railways united the Indian people also, they could travel distant places in search of jobs. Railway unified the industrial people with the agriculturists. But it successfully destroyed the Indian traditional cottage industries, handicrafts and handlooms by introducing cheaper rates of products of British machine made industries. It totally revolutionised the Indian economy. Agricultural economy had turned into industrial economy. A large number of factories and industries were opened in India. The industrial sectors of India - Calcutta, Bombay, Gujarat, and Madras etc. were well connected not only with other but also with the every part of the country. The products of these industries were well carried by the Railways to the distant places quickly. It brought profits, within a short period of time not only to the British entrepreneurs but also to the Indian bourgeoisie

Railway Systems in India in 1918-14

Total mileage of railway open for traffic	34,656	
Total mileage of state lines worked by company	18,680	
Total mileage of state lines worked by state	7,231	25,911 total
Total mileage of state lines worked by the state and the companies	3,396	state-owned
Small private companies held the rest		

(Gadgil, 1971: p. 130)

Railways also brought a huge change in the agricultural areas. Agricultural products did not have any market earlier they had to sell their products only in small areas (adjacent areas) or only in their own localities. The agriculturists of the village societies of traditional India did not get the profit from the trade of agricultural products. But the Railways provided them the scope of trade since it was possible to carry these products quickly from one corner of the country to another. Therefore, the village people also found a market for their products. Before the establishment of the Railways due to poor transportation the agricultural products had been left immensely unutilised. Now the farmers started their production commercially. The Railways in India thus introduced commercialisation of agriculture. The agricultural economy became an integral part of the national and the world economy (Desai, 1976; p. 131). The Railways also facilitated the growth of industrial employment in India.

Growth of Industrial Employment in India (Per thousand of employees)

	1892	1899	1909	1919	1929	1939	1949	1954
Railways	259	309	510	713	818	709	901	966
Coal Mines	33	83	129	190	180	227	345	341
All Minings				249	364	413	519	594
<i>Factory Employment</i>								
Cotton Textile	121	163	237	280	338	499	653	661
Jute Textile	66	102	204	276	347	299	322	272
General & Electrical				30	53	58	136	150
<i>Engineering</i>								
Railway Workshops		52	93	134	136	104	108	118
Under Mines		13	15	24	22	31	84	67
Iron and Steel	12	17	24	21	32	41	60	77
Chemicals				2.8	3.5	4.8	18	23
Total Factory Employment	254	452	786	1171	1553	1751	2434	2590

(Bhagwati and Desai, 1970; p. 31)

However, through the Railway establishment, India had mainly become the producer and supplier of food grains and raw materials for Europe. The Europeans invested a lot of money for the Indian Railways as well as other industries and they gained in return ten to twelve times more than their investment.

Another important reason of expansion of Railway was to control the 'great famine' in the late 19th century. An early committee on Railway construction gave the following reasons why it should be pushed on vigorously in India:

- i) famine prevention;
- ii) development of internal and external trade;
- iii) growth of more remuneration of crops in tracts reached by railways;
- iv) opening up of coal fields;
- v) improvement of economic condition of the people (Gadgil, 1971; p. 133).

As we know that for running the Railways coal was, then necessary, so it forced the government to open up coal mines and added another sector of industry to the Indian economy and it again employed thousands of labourers.

In this way the Railway industry pioneered the industrialization process in India. It also generated the internal trade of the colony. It has been measured that the total mileage during 1924-32 was approximately at 38,039. The construction of Railways had shown a rapid increase in the industries throughout the late 19th and early 20th century and perhaps even to the 1940s.

The policy related to the Railways opened up the prospects of employment. It also facilitated the movement of goods in the domestic market. It had turned the agriculturists farmer into industrial workers. It also showed the rapid increase in carrying of passengers throughout the country because it was the cheapest means of communication then and not only then, even now it is cheapest means of transport. In the 21st century also Indian Railway provides the cheapest rates of passenger tariff. The number of passengers travelling by trains rose 48,000,000 by 1880; 114,000,000 by 1890 and 176,000,000 by

1990; in the next decade it increased to 371,500,000 by 1920, it was 520,000,000 and in 1938-29 648,000,000 in 49 years there was. Thus, a thirteen-fold increase was noticed (Buchanan, 1966; p. 189).

Railway Freight Carried

<i>Year</i>	<i>Million Tons</i>
1873	4.75
1880	10.5
1890	22.25
1900	43
1905	54
1910	65
1914-15	81
1919-20	87.6
1924-25	77.8
1926-27	85.8
1928-29	119.8
1930-31	110.6

(Buchanan, 1966; p. 190)

The proportion of the growth of Indian Railway industry as contributing to the economy had been more in comparison with some developed countries of the West. Railways paved the way for industrial development in the country. The developed transport system brought agricultural, industrial as well as economic specializations in the colony. As the Railway had opened up the Indian market to the Europeans, it did not protect or take any measure for the protection of Indians owned agricultural and industrial products, so the Indian manufacturers did not get any advantage and benefit from this process. Improved transport system, both internal and external there started a revolution in Indian economic and social life of India, but as it came from outside and imposed suddenly from above, and therefore, found the Indians unprepared for it. However, Railways facilitated the abolition of untouchability. It carried the un-touchable along with the touchable on the basis of equal payments of Railway fares. It brought mobility in the Indian population. It also carried progress in social, cultural and scientific fields. Railways provided the intermingling of people of various parts of the country, irrespective of their caste and creed, religion, race, linguistic differences etc. The journey of the Indian Railways, which started in 1853 continues till today. It must however be noted that so far as the policies of the Government is concerned with regard to industrial management,

service, freight etc. there had not been much change since independence i.e. 1947, which will be analysed in the following chapter.

III

The Indian Working Class (1850-1947)

The process of abolition of the feudal system and the development of capitalist economy in India did not resemble the case of the European countries. The British colonial rulers came to India first as merchants for trading but they ultimately became the ruler of the whole subcontinent. Marxist scholars have divided British imperialist exploitation in India into three distinct phases:

- i) the first period of merchant capital extends till the mid-18th century - i.e. the period of mercantile capitalism;
- ii) from the second half of the 19th century the second period extends, the period of direct exploitation. The real intention was to transfer India into a producer and supplier of raw materials and also as a market for manufactured goods; and
- iii) the third period started from the second half of the 19th century and it was the period of financial -capital.

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The British colonial rulers had successfully destroyed the traditional economy of the colony and did not even supplement it with the equipments of modern capitalist economy. So, the growth of capitalist economy followed a different path with strange contradictions, impediments and untold sufferings for the Indian people (Sen, 1997; p. 21). This development of capitalist economy provided the path for the emergence of the Indian working class. It was only in the first half of the 1850s with the establishment of Railway industry in 1853 in the colony that helped the process of generating a labour force (an industrial labour force) throughout the country.

Labour, as it was the most deprived and unfortunate class in almost all the industrial countries in its early period of development and India, therefore, had also not been any exception. The last two hundred years or so of the British rule in Indian subcontinent witnessed the formation and growth, though to a very limited extent, of a



wage earning industrial labour force. These labour were employed in the manufacturing enterprises, mines, transport and communication and plantation (Dasgupta; 1994).

The Indian working class, however, had a quite different historical background. In the Western countries the industrial working class was mainly the city dwellers. Once they came from their homeland and then they became full-fledged industrial workers. But in India, the industrial labourers could not secure full value of its labour power, as they maintain a strong link with their villages. Most of them belonged to the traditional village societies based on class and caste. Since almost all the village dwellers were bonded to the landlords or village moneylenders or 'Mahajans', they rushed to the cities in search of job when the British started establishing industries in the colony. It was not that, there were no job in villages but in search of good living and in order to free themselves from the bondage of debt, the people were forced to join the British industries. But most often these people did not totally break their ties with their villages. They returned to their villages particularly during the sowing and the harvesting seasons and what is more important is that they left their families in the villages.

Another interesting feature of the early period of Indian working class was, it was only the poor and marginal peasants and the landless agricultural labourers that had joined the industries and not the landowning farmers who had some degree of security. Again these landless agricultural labourers belonged to the lower castes of Indian social strata. However, the workers those who moved between the villages and the towns were not always welcomed or even accepted by the industrial employers. It was because, they left the industry, at a particular period of the season and also they were the most unskilled section of industrial workers. People accustomed to simple agricultural, manual services of handcraft find the discipline of a factory, particularly irksome and only when very hard pressed will they give themselves up to it (Buchanan, 1966; p. 294). However, usually, the workers had come and joined the factories on temporary basis keeping their families in the villages in some cases they brought their families in the cities. They returned to their villages during sowing, thrashing and harvesting reasons and therefore, there was a fall and intense scarcity of workers in urban industries. They never thought to settle down in the towns as industrial workers, these people just came to the industries due to the increasing pressure of landlords and moneylenders. Gradually the British for keeping the interest of

the capitalist economy, destroyed the traditional handicrafts and cottage industries. As a result, the traditional village people were compelled to join these industries. When the artisans and craftsmen had entered the industries, they lost the professional and age old technical skills. Then these agricultural masses could not become a full-fledged industrial labourer and could not even get out of casteism, racialism, superstition and harmful religious ideas of middle or dark ages. All these became strong obstacles to the development of modern industrial working class of India. Till late 19th century, they could not even realise their positions in the entire economic structure of the country and not at all conscious about their condition. However, when they came to the cities, they could not adjust with the life of the towns and also of the factories. And it was the reason for which, it took more than three decades for the Indian workers to consolidate and emerge as a separate class and establish their distinct positions in the social and economic system.

The problem of Indian working class, its emergence as a new class were born out of the basic process relating to brutal colonial exploitation. Big groups of impoverished masses moved from their native villages to distant places in search of jobs where new capitalist industries were being set up, mining of coal or plantations were developed (Sen, 1997; p. 27-28). India of the 19th century was a vast country with different languages, cultures, religions, customs but the migration of people from one place to another in totally a different environment, created acute problems, which hindered the formation and growth of a working class in the colony.

The establishment and development of modern industries in India took place between 1850-70s; it was also the period of the growth of workers as a separate class. In the 1890s, there were a large number of factories in India. 3,00,000 people were employed in factories and mines, about 2,00,000 were in cotton, jute mills and coalmines and also a large section of population were employed in transportation industries like railways and shipping lines or road transport (Buchanan, 1966). Development of the communication system in the late 19th century also had helped the growth of working class mobility in the colony.

Labour in the jute mills around Calcutta varied with the location of the mills. Those outside the city and to the south often employed a large percentage of Bengalis, that

is, of local labourers who can come in from their homes, in the surrounding villages, while those in the city and to the north employed, "up country" people almost exclusively; a woollen mill in Punjab reported in 1908 that it drew all its labour from the cultivators living in the surrounding districts (Buchanan, 1999; p. 296).

In the coalmines, the largest sections of the workers were the "Santhals". Low castes people had supplied a major portion of the factory workers in every part of the country. One statistics revealed that in a large factory in 1916 in the Central Provinces, fifty one percent of the workers were the 'Mahars'. 'Mahars', 'Holis' and 'Dheds' were the principle "untouchable" class of the Bombay Presidency and Central Provinces like the 'Chamars' in North India and "Panchamas" in Southern India (Buchanan, 1966). The following table shows the proportion of men, women, boys and girls employed in factories coming under the Factory Act at internal since 1895:

Workers Employed *

<i>Year</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
1895	293,836	54,530	19,812	2,923
1900	372,617	68,610	23,106	4,623
1905	501,227	93,431	32,171	5,807
1910	624,945	115,540	42,273	8,753
1915	791,978	150,356	50,906	10,886
1920	986,367	184,922	55,503	11,933
1925	1,178,719	247,514	57,199	11,526
1927	1,222,662	253,158	48,028	9,534
1930	1,235,425	254,905	32,597	5,375
1931	1,173,372	231,183	21,920	4,912

* In *Bulletin of Industries and Labour*, No. 17, Table II and also *Statistics of Factories*, published annually by the Government; see, Buchanan, 1966.

The factories consisted mostly of female workers. There were several reasons for the low level of women employment in the factories. Mainly, at that time women even belonging to the lower castes could not work with or near men, and another important reason was that, the male workers kept their families in the villages from where they belonged.

In all the countries the history of early industrial development shows that the employment of child labour was one of the characteristic feature. As we have already observed in the table that many children comprising both girls and boys were employed in the coalmines, jute mills, cotton mills, railway establishment etc. Children mainly of the age of nine to sixteen were employed in the factories.

Working Conditions

During the early period of industrialization in the West the condition of the workers were worse than anything else. So it was also expected that in the colonies the workers' conditions must be worse than their western counterparts. Wages, working hours, employment of child labour, housing and in all other spheres the extent of exploitation was appallingly excessive (Sen, 1997; p. 35). But in Europe, the employers had provided much better working conditions e.g., the factory buildings had proper system of ventilation, light, cleanliness and sanitation facilities. But in the colonial factories the working condition was inhuman. There was even no proper supply of drinking water.

It was claimed by the British capitalists that the machines and tools used in the colonial factories were of improved and modern, so there was no chance of accidents in the factories. The machineries utilised by the Indian or British capitalists had some major drawbacks because these were unsuitable in the Indian climate. There were some bad cases such as when a boy of fifteen being killed after working fourteen hours in a mill including whole night entangled in cogwheel (Buchanan, 1966; p. 303). There were several other examples of such incidents in the cotton mills in the early age, stones were placed in cotton to add to its weight and the machineries threw these stones with heavy force which injured the workers several times. Women in Sarees were burnt to death in several occasions, and there was no system of compensation in such cases.

Working fifteen to sixteen hours in a factory in the colonial countries was quite common. Working in nights was new, but the day working was so long that sometimes twenty- two to twenty- three hours working had not been very unusual especially in iron and steel industries. Not only in the British owned factories, but also in the factories owned by Indian bourgeoisie, the condition of the working people was the same. The

employers were not only responsible for such a long period of working hour but the men and women in deep need of money were eager to work day and night. "Dusk to dawn" working hours meaning thereby maximum working hour depending on the availability of sunlight was lengthened by the introduction of electric light (Sen, 1997; p. 36). Working day started at 4 to 4-30 a.m. in the morning and continued till 9 to 9-30 p.m. at night. The children and the women had to work at similar extends. Due to overwork the new recruits replaced them when the health of the workers broke down.

Moreover, the landlords in the villages had sent the bonded labourers to the factories in the towns through the intermediaries who were called the jobbers or contractors. These jobbers and contractors were not responsible at all to the problem of the labours they were not concerned about them. The employers wanted to employ labourers at lowest cost. These contractors had supplied the labourers from the villages at very low rate because the labourers were illiterate and thus it was easy to deceive them and the contractors got some money in return of the supply of the labourers.

The wages paid to the labourers were too little to live. Therefore the children were also compelled to work in the industries. The children who were engaged in the simple types of works in the factories were paid Rs. 1/- per week; the skilled labourers were paid Rs. 10-12 per week. In the jute mills the skilled labourers were paid Rs. 5 to 7 per week and the unskilled labourers were paid Rs. 0-14-6 to 3/ per week. Interestingly, an investigation had revealed that an adult spinner of jute mill got Rs. 10/ and a coolie Rs. 7/ per month in 1892. In 1877 in the cotton mills of Bombay Presidency, the monthly wages averaged from Rs. 10-12 for men and from Rs. 7-9 for women (Sen 1997; p. 40).

The following table shows the monthly wages of the different groups of the workers in 1890

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Monthly Wages</i>
Minor Girls	Rs. 5/-
Boys	Rs. 6/- to Rs. 7/-
Adult Females	Rs. 6/- to Rs. 10/-
Adult Males (Other than Weavers)	Rs. 10/- to Rs. 12/-
Adult Male (Weavers)	Rs. 12/- to Rs. 15/-

[British Parliamentary Papers 1891, Paper 86; see, Sen, 1997]

The first Factory Act was passed in 1881. It restricted the employment of the child labour below the age of 7 years and provided Nine hours working day for the child labours. By 1908 the condition of the factory labour had changed though very little. One of the Madras Mills found that short-working day was more economic than a longer day. By the Factory Legislation, one holiday was introduced in a week and it was made mandatory. Consequently, Sunday was followed as a holiday following the European tradition. These legislations, to some extent changed the situation and also altered the inhuman condition of the workers in colonial India. Therefore, when more of the factories were established in India, more people become disintegrated from their village lives. People from different parts of the country and from different social, cultural, linguistic and economic strata came to these factories in the quest of livelihood. However, thousands of workers belonging to these labour forces faced several uncertainties, difficulties and hazards in their every day life arising from sickness, accidents, pregnancy, death, unemployment due to business decline and depression and strikes or lockouts. The problems were compounded by the absence of any government supported programmes for compensations for disability or death due to accident, facilities for health care and support during sickness, benefits for maternity, old-age pension, unemployment benefits and education till the mid-1920s (Dasgupta, 1994). This condition remained almost unchanged till to the eve of independence.

IV

The Indian Railway Worker (1853 to 1947)

We have seen that in India the process of industrialisation began with the introduction of the Railways in 1853. Development of transportation system especially development of the Railway industry had played a very significant role in the growth of capitalist economy in the colonies. To transport the British imported goods to the remote places of the country and also to carry the raw materials to the ports, some fast means of communication system was felt necessary. To quote Adam Smith we can also say that, 'Industry runs with Railways'. Moreover, Railways connected the important cities perhaps the whole country into a single thread. As a result, the British took the initiative of establishing Railways. The

two British Private Companies - The Great Indian Railway Company and The Great Peninsular Railway Company were given the responsibility. As we all know that, Railway construction required huge capital. It was also highly labour intensive. Thus a large number of men, women, and children were required for the building of Railways. Modern Indian Working class first germinated in this construction of Railways in India (Sen 1997; p. 22). Thousands of people were engaged in the early phase of construction and these workers emerged as the predecessors of modern Indian working class, trying to establish their separate identity. For running the Railway throughout the country, coal was required. Therefore, coal-mining industry had to develop and since it was also a labour intensive process, thus, Railways led to the emergence of labour force in other industries also.

We have already observed that the Indian industrial workers emerged not as a separate industrial working class; they were not even the city dwellers as it happened in Europe. Those people, who did not possess any agricultural land and were bonded to the landlords or to the moneylenders, had joined the industries to lead a free life. Sometimes the forefathers of the workers were bonded to the landlords and if they failed to return back their debt, their sons or grandsons become bonded and were bound to return the money. This was something that was common. Mainly the industries were joined by the poor or marginal peasants, sharecroppers and by the landless agricultural labourers. The picture was the same in all the newly established industries like, coalmines; jute or cotton mills etc. and Railway were also not an exception.

Thousands of men, women and children were employed in the building of Railways. The British had utilised the huge labour power of India. Railway construction required a good amount of capital investment, but while the colonial rulers found that they get labour at very cheap rate, they tried to exploit this part of the economy. One important characteristic feature of the Railway workforce was its heterogeneity. They were divided into various groups and categories such as, age, gender, difference in religion, culture, social custom, language, skilled and unskilled etc. We have also seen that in the cotton or jute mills the majority of workers were male but in the Railway industry the picture was quite different. Here, a large portion of workers comprised of women. It was because of the fact that in the Railway industry, the employers had mainly employed less number of people and the workers came to the worksite and joined the industry as a family unit. The

male workers did not keep their families in their villages as the workers of cotton or jute factories did. Also it was because the wage paid to the men in the Railway industry was too inadequate to bear the burden of the whole family, so the women and the child members of the family were forced to work. There was little stimulus for the employers to utilise more capital intensive construction techniques because the cost of labour was low, if one labour could not earn enough to support the family, then the entire family had to work to ensure their survival (Kerr, 1997; p. 87).

There was a distinction between the unskilled and skilled labourers. Most of the construction workers were unskilled. Women and children fell mostly in this category. One statistic revealed that around 86-87 percent of the worker in Railway industry was unskilled. Building a short distance of Railway line required a huge number of workers for earth works and also for moving rocks. In the inception of Railway construction, it was necessary to prepare the roadbed and it required a large amount of excavation to dig earth, tanks and rocks. Labour was needed to move these earth and rocks.

The unskilled labourers were immensely drawn from the neighbouring villages or the local rural population joined the Railway construction process, particularly the landless agricultural labourers and poor artisan class of village society, were engaged in it. The employers often called them 'unreliable' labourers. Because, in the sowing, harvesting and thrashing seasons, these workers went back to their native villages, nothing could restrict them even the lure of higher wages could not bind them. Usually there had been a huge and continuous supply of labourers and the coolies to the Railway industry, but in these agricultural seasons there was an immense scarcity of workers throughout the country. These people played the role of the industrial workers at the same time they were attached greatly to the village economy. In Punjab in April 1860, station work at Lahore and the progress of line in South to Multan slowed down because the coolies had left for the harvest in 1862. In Calcutta and South Eastern Railway, the harvest season made local labourers hard to get, but once the crops were in, the engineer hoped for a great increase in the labour supply (Kerr, 1997; p. 95). Interestingly in 1864, the uncertain Monsoon disturbed the normal agricultural activities, which resulted into the irregularities and fluctuation in industrial progress. The unskilled labourers belonged mostly to the lowest margin both in caste and clan of the Indian social system. They usually belonged to Beldar,

Od, Sonkar, Larhia, Karigar, Mukhuda, Chunkar, Manuarwar, Thapatkari, Vaddar, Palhnet, Kakari etc. - these were the lowest margin of the social hierarchical system in India. The unskilled labourers travelled distant places especially those who had experience in construction works. They moved within region and inter-regionally in search of works, even before the construction of Railways began. Many of the labourers, one suspect, who blocked Henfrey's works from Oudh and Bengal in 1865-70, travelled at least part of the way by train (Kerr, 1997; p. 101). The mobile section of the labourers moved in groups or gangs, which were led by superior mainstay jobbers who were not at all responsible to the workers. Their functions were only to supply the workers and took a percentage of the wages from the labourers. The mistries or superiors acted as the intermediary, who negotiated with the employers.

The skilled labourers comprised only 20-25 percent of total Railway workers engaged in the construction process. Concentration of skilled workers were to be found at station, tunnel sites, bridges etc. although the extent of concentrations depended particularly on the state of the work e.g., where bridges were involved on the stage of construction i.e., the preparatory works such as approaches and river training required fewer skilled workers and girder erection required extensive use of skilled labours (Kerr, 1997; p. 114). The skilled labourers were also differentiated i.e., carpenters, bricklayers, stonecutters, builders, mines zamadarmans, ironsmiths, etc. These skilled labourers were the handicraft and artisan classes of the village economy. Due to the exploitation by the feudal lords gradually these people were forced to seek employment in the industrial sectors. Thus, they left their villages and engaged themselves in the industries. The skilled workforce who travelled from distant places had training in the earlier projects. These workers helped in the programme of the works. Masons were also of high demand, sometimes, they were recruited from inter-regional basis. However, surprisingly, a figure available in 1911 showed that in the transportation industry, the Railway sector employed 1,00,000 workers or 79% of the total number of workers engaged in the transportation and it stood first in employing labour.

As we have observed that there was no defined working hours in the colonial system of industries in its early period. People had to work up to twenty- two to twenty-three hours a day at a stretch. Shifting duty was also introduced in this period. For

example, there were three groups working in shifts within a twenty-four hours day, each group worked for eight hours per day. But these things were implemented in India in the late 19th and early 20th century of industrialisation. Introduction of electricity in 1880 made it possible to work in nights also. Sometimes it had become necessary to work for a particular group throughout the day. The labours sometimes used new technologies to increase the rate of progress of construction work. There was also no holiday in whole of the week in the early period of industrialisation. But by passing some important labour legislation in the late 1890s, it was stated that there should be one holiday in a week; 'Sunday' was followed as the 'holiday'. The Railways were in the hands of the Europeans, so it was quite natural that their shops should recognise the European Sunday. Cownpore and other factory centres in the North West, largely dominated by Europeans did likewise (Buchanan 1966; p. 314).

It was quite difficult to judge the wage payment of the labourers in the industrial sectors in colonial India. It depended on the condition of the localities from where the labourer was recruited. It is really difficult, now living in the 21st century, to give bare judgement to the workers; 90% of which belonged to the agricultural societies of the villages. Moreover, there was a great deal of movement by the workers between their villages and the industrial towns. The most unfortunate and lowest income group of agricultural sector had joined the industries. And unfortunately 90% of the industrial labourers were still low paid. But the wages in industrial sector were little more than the agricultural or rural traders. However, from mid-1860s the wage had been increased in comparison to earlier period of industrial establishment. One authority states, in the neighbourhood of the Railways, the wages of the coolies (representing the unskilled labourers) and of carpenters (representing the skilled labour) were doubled between 1830-1860 (Buchanan 1966; p. 320). It might be higher than the agricultural wages but still inadequate to live.

The system of payment was quite amazing in the Railway industry. The Nunia contractor stood on the top of the rising embankment with a bag of cowrie shells, and a basket of earth was deposited, he gave one cowrie to a child, two to a women and three to a man which the contractor then redeemed at the end of the day at the rate of 80 cowries per anna (Kerr 1997; p. 113). Thus the rate of the earth done by an unskilled labour was

Rs. 2-8 per 1000 cubic feet. The wages of the masons was little bit higher depending on the manufacture of bricks. However, the following table indicate the real picture of the wage system in the industries including the railway industry.

Real Wages
[1890 - 1895 = 100]*

Class of Labour	Average of Year			Year	
	1895 to 1899	1900 to 1904	1905 to 1909	1910	1912
<i>* RURAL</i>					
Agricultural Labourers	103	120	123	134	138
Village Artisans	105	122	124	135	138
<i>* URBAN</i>					
Skilled Labourers	104	119	120	132	134
Unskilled Labourers	106	122	126	135	145
Domestic Servants	100	111	108	117	116
<i>* CITIES</i>					
Skilled Labourers	105	118	120	131	130
Unskilled Labourers	104	117	120	131	132
Domestic Servants	102	113	111	118	116
<i>* INDUSTRIES</i>					
Jute	105	113	105	109	106
Cotton	101	106	100	106	106
Tea	101	96	90	98	95
Mining	105	129	128	148	137
<i>* RAILWAYS</i>	97	99	97	108	101

* [Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India by K.L. Dutta, M.A.I., pp. 169-170;
(Buchanan 1966; p. 357)]

Industrialisation had not brought any major change in the economies of the colonial peoples. Another important reason of low rate of payment was that only 20% of workers were trained. Most of the workers lacked training and discipline, which prevented them from getting higher wages.

The workers lacked efficiency due to the unhealthy and dangerous condition of the worksites. Most of the Railway workers had to work under the Sun not under any shelter - they worked in summer and also in rains. Thus, it was quite natural that the health of the workers would be broken. Accidents were regular incidents. Many of the workers had lost their hands, legs when constructing the tunnels or stations. Many were flooded away while working over rivers. Accidents were not the main killers and crippers, diseases contributed

as well (Kerr, 1997; p. 159). Cholera, Malaria, small pox, typhoid etc. were the many life taking diseases were the regular causes of loss of life in the Railway worksite. The most dangerous of these was the cholera. It often broke out in epidemic form and spread over the large groups and gangs mainly of coolies. Then these people fled away from the worksite to save themselves. Actually the main reason of the cholera or other epidemics was that there was no proper system of sanitation. And there was also no proper system of supply of drinking water. So it broke out of once and killed many people within a few days. Apart from cholera, malaria was another deadly disease, which had taken away many lives of the Railway workers. The way of labour recruitment process also had helped to the spread the diseases. The mobile section of workers brought the disease to the worksites. The unhealthy living condition was the only reason of these diseases. What the epidemiologists came to call "large aggregation of tropical labour" lived in a crowded unsanitary condition that virtually guaranteed the rapid spread of diseases; sanitation system was almost non-existent there; living conditions were primitive, difficult and often deadly (Kerr 1997, p. 161-163). More than one family were made to live in one room and that too without ventilation and sanitary arrangement (Sen 1997; p. 41).

The housing condition of the workers varied in respect of the localities, or different parts or the districts of the country. The huts or the houses of the Railway workers in the worksites were mainly made of thatch or palm leaves of seldom of mud or bamboo. The workers had very meagre food. The best and most expensive grain was rice, while jowar, bajra, wheat, patni were widely used (Buchanan, 1966; p. 401) because the latter were easily available and above all cheap. However, the Railway construction workers lived a life of insane. Death were the two most common and constant companions of the workers.

The condition of the Ghat (the tunnels where the work went on throughout the year even in rains) led to violence. The workers belonging to the lower margins sometime, the tribal and the untouchable sections of the Indian society worked under the guidance of the rough and harsh Europeans in the unhealthy and inhuman physical environment. The physical and mental assaults were unbearable for these people involved in Railway construction. They were often treated as 'semi-slaves'. Oppression and exploitation were at their heights.

The advantage and the convenience of the Railways, which we have been enjoying, are the gift of individual men, women and children who paid the highest price for it in the colonial period. Therefore, the working hours, wages, housing condition, sanitation system and other conditions of services had been the main obstacle for the Indian working class to emerge as a conscious proletariat or a separate unit who had the capacity and potential to revolt against the colonial rulers. It was however, a historical inevitability of colonial India that born out of the impoverished rural masses with their weaknesses and initially meagre in number and oppressed under inhuman living and working conditions, the working class of India took a considerably long time to get conscious and consolidated (Sen, 1997; p. 65).

It was this inhuman condition that led the workers to revolt now and then. It had been reported that the Railway workers for the first time, revolted against the employers in 1862 in Howrah Station but that was purely of sporadic and scattered nature. It was their first collective effort to challenge the British authority. However, the conditions of the Railway workers did not changed much till the date of independence.

Chapter II

Industrialisation, Railways and the Railway Workers in India (1947-1974)

Introduction

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the process of industrialisation in the country after independence with an emphasis on the growth of the Railways till 1974 since there exists a connection between the process of industrialisation and the growth and expansion of the Railways. An attempt has also been made to understand the nature and condition of the industrial workforce in the country including the Railway workers. It has been argued that the Railway workers had a number of grievances and these grievances were rooted in their economic condition and it is these grievances that were responsible for the strike actions of the workers including the strike of 1974. In the first section of the chapter an attempt has been made to look at the process of industrialisation in India after Independence, in the second section the growth of the Railway industry till 1974 had been discussed. In the two other following sections an attempt has been made to look at the nature and condition of the Industrial and the Railway workers that were responsible for their grievances.

I

Industrialization in India (1947-1974)

This section mainly deals with the general process of industrialization in India from post-Independence period to 1974. We take this period for study because in this period a crucial change took place, e.g., agricultural India had been transformed into industrial India. Therefore, Indian Government gave stress on the development of heavy and key industries, for developing the infrastructure of the country. Railways had been considered as the 'heavy public sector' industry where the government needs to put stress for its

development. As we know that, Railway transportation industry is also important for carrying goods from remote areas to industrial sectors it is therefore as much important as in the pre-independence period. It was also the easiest means of moving Indian mass from one place to another. Railway has a separate ministry to run and manage its programmes. Thus we can consider the Railways as one of the key industries in India. However, in this section we analyse the four-five year plans initiated by the government of India on the direction of the Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. We also discuss whether these plans had been successful to generate industrial growth or not and how, the politico-structural constraints hindered the industrial development - both public sector and private sector - and the economic progress of the country in the period.

It was thought at the eve of independence that the transfer of power would bring major changes in the political, social and economic spheres of the country; but in practice it brought change only in the political sphere. Indian rulers, in the context of economy, followed the path of industrialisation that was essentially British. The industries, which dominated the field of British entrepreneurship, interestingly got the predominance even after the independence, i.e. the major manufacturing industries like cotton textiles, sugar, jute textiles, iron and steel smelting and rolling etc. dominated the industrial map of the country. Moreover, in matters of employment also these above said industries dominated, e.g. cotton textiles occupied almost above 40% and jute textiles also more than 20% of country's total industrial employment.

As we have stated earlier that the Railway industry was considered as the public sector industry, then, the policies or the process of governmental activities in the field of industry were somewhat similar as in the cases of other public sector heavy and key industries. In the process of industrial policy making the Indian bourgeoisie played a vital role since independence. It was felt that there was a necessity to establish and develop more heavy and key industries in the public sector and small industries in the private sector. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India desired to follow the line of socialistic pattern of economic development which must be encompassed with the "Planning" - the overall planning of agriculture and industry - as we know that India had been an underdeveloped country. At the same time Pandit Nehru opted for the modernizing approach and was of the opinion that without strategic plan a country could

not develop and growth could be achieved. When independence was achieved, the low level of India's capitalist development was shown by the country's industrial structure (Chattopadhyay, 1992; p. 141). Therefore, the shift of economy from agriculture to industry must be initiated and shouldered by the 'State'. The government ventured and set up public sector industries and it was felt that these must be guided and controlled by the state itself - either by the central or by the state government. Thus Nehru-Mahalanobis Plan or First-Five Year Plan was implemented in 1950. In this plan the industries and mining were observed as the "secondary section". During these years stress was given on the development of scientific skills and technologies. Indian Planning brought major structural changes in the Indian economy, although not to the extent desired by the planners (Chakraborty, 1987; p. 2). As a result of planning industrial production had grown up in comparison with agriculture. Development of industrial production also increased the number of industrial workers, though very low in comparison to the total number of working population.

Indian planners had stressed some points while initiating the planning process. It was felt by them that the economic and political goals and policies of newly independent country like India must be related to accelerate growth. Besides it, the rulers and the capitalists started to think that the process of industrialization held the principle position in the economic activities of the country. And above all, it was felt that there should be assimilation of strategies between industrial and agricultural growth. The main objective of economic planning of 1950s was that, the government must play a key role in the industrial production and the results or the benefits of planned economy must reach to each and every section of the different socio-economic strata of the nation. Hence industrialisation was attached a significant role as a means for reaching the country's economic development.

In the period 1950 to 1975 there were Four Five Year Plans and these plans worked in India's economic and political field. In almost all the Five-year plans that were pursued covering a period till the mid of the 1970s stress was given on the development and expansion of heavy industries and commodity production. As a result the major achievements of the industrial sector were:

- i) wide diversification of the industrial base as a result the country was in a position to produce a very wide range of industrial products;
- ii) development of public sector with the potential to cater to the infrastructural needs of development and to provide direction to the process of development within a mixed economic framework; and
- iii) reduced and limited independence on imports for the needs of development (Ahluwalia, 1988; p. 151). Thus, national income increased during First-Five Year Plan annually 3.5%; 4% during Second Five Year Plan; 2.9% during the Third Five Year Plan. The growth of First and Second Five Year Plans were somewhat impressive. But during the Third Plan there were two severe droughts that affected India and at the same time there were two consecutive wars, the Indo-China (1962) war and the Indo-Pak (1965) war that affected the Planned Program of the economy.

	<i>Net National Income</i>	<i>Per Capita Net National Product</i>
First Plan	3.5	1.6
Second Plan	4.0	1.8
Third Plan	2.9	0.4

(Bhagwati & Desai, 1970; p. 62)

Despite of all the achievements listed above the overall performance of the industries in terms of income of the working class and the standard of living of the mass was not up to the satisfactory level. The production of certain selected industries can be estimated as per the following:

Production of Selected Industries

<i>Industries</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>1950-51</i>	<i>1960-61</i>	<i>1970-71</i>	<i>1975-76</i>
Pig Iron	Mt. Tonnes	1.7	4.3	6.9	8.5
Finished Steel	Mt. Tonnes	1.04	2.4	4.8	5.9
Aluminium	11,000 Tonnes	4.0	18.3	166.8	187.3
Machine Tools	Mt. Rupees	3	70	430	1,137
Railway Wagons	Per 1,000	2.9	11.9	11.1	12.2
Automobiles	Per 1,000	16.5	55.0	87.9	72.7
Diesel Engine	Per 1,000	5.5	55.5	68.2	139.7
Bicycles	Per 1,000	99	1,071	2,042	2,332
Electric Motor	1,000 H.P.	99	728	2,721	3,531
Nitrogenous Fertilizers (N)	1,000 Tonnes	9	98	830	1,535
Soda Ash	Mt. Tonnes	45	152	449	565
Cement	Mt. Tonnes	2.7	8.0	14.4	17.2
Petroleum Products (Rebind)	Mt. Tonnes	2.0	5.8	17.1	20.8
Jute Textiles	Mt. Tonnes	837	1,071	1,060	1,302
Cotton Cloth	Mt. Metres	4,215	6,740	7,596	8,319
Sugar	1,000 Tonnes	1,134	3,021	3,740	4,264
Tea	Mt. Kgs.	277	332	423	483
Electricity Generated	Bn. Kwh.	5.3	16.9	55.8	79.2

(Chattopadhyaya, 1992; p. 143).

The first three Five Year Plans which bore the personal imprint of Nehru and specially the Second Plan which reflected a major watershed in India's economic thinking - are specially important as attempts at giving concrete shape to the vision of transformation, social and economic, to which the modernizing elite subscribed (Chakraborty, 1987; p. 9). There were also certain politico-structural backwardness which became the major constraints to the development of the industries, these were the orthodoxy of Indian political structure to introduce the productive technologies and the inadequacies of material capital; orthodoxy in accumulation of capital which hindered the speed of capital investment; structural and institutional inefficiencies in raising fiscal and monetary policies; tendency in employing agricultural labour in industries which again hindered the growth of production; ignorance and neglect of market mechanism and above all the unequal distribution of income. But from this time the government started more rigorously to provide necessary enthusiasms to the private sectors in generating capital for building more new industries and excavating new area of investments. Therefore, realising these facts, the government itself helped in establishing industrial financing houses - such as, the Industrial Finance Corporation of India; National Industrial

Development Corporation etc - which would provide the required capital for establishing new industries or expand the existing ones - initiated by both the public or private sector enterprises.

But surprisingly the government did not feel it much necessary to invest enough capital in the infrastructural sectors like power, fuel, transportation - road, railways - where the private sector enterprises were reluctant or unwilling to invest and these sectors were most important area of economy because they had contributed and had to contribute heavily to the development of industrial activities. The growing inefficiency in these sectors was only due to under-investments.

Second and Third Plan: Analysis of Public and Private Sectors Investment

Head	Second Plan			Third Plan		
	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total
Agriculture and Community Development	6	20	12	10	20	14
Major & Minor Irrigation	12	-	6	10	-	6
Power	12	1	7	16	1	10
Village & Small Industries	3	6	4	2	7	4
Organized Industries & Minerals	24	22	23	24	26	25
Transport & Communication	35	4	21	24	6	17
Social Sciences & Miscellaneous	9	31	19	10	26	16
Inventories	-	16	.8	3	15	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(Bhagwati & Desai, 1970; p. 121)

From the mid-sixties the Congress government took the decision of investing mainly in the area of infrastructure, industry and agriculture. But during the third decade of independence the heavy industries like basic metals, metal products, machinery (electrical, non-electrical) showed no significant change or perhaps started declining (1968-72) though the textile industries had showed certain significant rise in the economic growth from 2.5% in 1956-57 to 1966-67 to 4.3% in the second period of 1966-67 to 1979-80. In the case of Railway the net metric tonne kilometres per metric tonne of wagon capacity showed a declining trend from 1960-61 to 1973-74; to some extent this was due to the

neglect of replacement associated with declines in investment in Railways, but more generally, the inefficiencies covered the entire spectrum from project formulation to implementation and finally to operational stages (Ahluwalia, 1988; p. 152). But the deceleration was mainly seen in the public sector and it was three to four time lesser in the private sectors.

The Fourth Five Year Plan was postponed in 1965-66. The division in the Congress, the then ruling party was to some extent responsible for the delay. However, the Fourth Five Year Plan had stressed on the cut-back in public investment of the government, which was called as 'trickle down' policy approach of the development economy. The government should invest in improving the infrastructure of the country and in raising the standard of living of the mass, not so much in the industries or in the form of industrial subsidies. But this led to somewhat pseudo depression in the country. But it was not the only reason, above all the political turmoil in the country created pressure on the political economy of the nation, which had increased government expenditure on defence, and other infrastructural facilities of social and political structures. And, it was clear that without industrial progress a country could not develop but from the early 1970s, industrial growth was alarmingly decreased due to several reasons such as lack of investment, improper management, labour discontentment etc. Surprisingly during the Fourth Five Year Plan, industrial licenses were being freely distributed to the entrepreneur like anything. But no one wants to touch them since there was no climate for new enterprise or investment (Birla, 1967). Besides, since independence there was no long-term consistency in the policies of taxation, industrial law etc. The political situation was uncertain, no business house wanted to take any initiative in any new venture. The industrial laws also failed to provide any security. There were immense labour indiscipline, labour unrest was also observed in the form of 'gheraos'; 'go slow' etc. which indicated the failure of administrative machinery on the one hand and on the other increase of working class consciousness. However, the scene was almost similar in all the industrial sectors - public, private and public undertakings. This situation was aggravated in Mrs. Gandhi's period due to her autocratic rule.

Explain
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In the field of infrastructure, there was a significant breaks in the second half of the seventies; Railways which occupy a prominent place in the public sector investment

and which get a separate ministry to run the entire Railway transportation faced a prolonged period of neglect with real investment declining for a large part of the sixties and early seventies (Ahluwalia, 1988; p. 153). Railways also faced severe labour unrest between the periods of 1970-74. After the National Emergency (1975) imposed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi who handled the situation very strictly - showed the situation somewhat changed towards development, which comprised almost 20% per annum. Till the late 1970 India faced a severe inflationary crisis from time to time [1962-63; 1965-67; 1972-74] for which she suffered a lot. The inflation led to the failure of meeting the prices generating from industrial and agricultural production. Inflation devalued the money, which reduced the real income of the people. Another problem, which overburdened India, was its rapid increase of population.

An important feature of India's industrial production has been its fairly respectable rate of growth during the first fifty years of Planning followed by a slow-down in the subsequent period; after rising to 9% during 1961-65, the average annual rate of growth suddenly fell to a mere 2% during the next three year period (Chattopadhyay, 1972; p. 152). But after the period of National Emergency, it was seen that when the government again started investing in the Railways there was a significant and quite relevant growth in the Railway industry mainly in the early and mid-eighties. Political compulsions of the late 1960s only delayed what was to happen in the mid 70s, namely, further liberalization of economic policy both internally and externally (Baru, 1998; p. 125).

However, it is clear that the process of industrialization of a country had been immensely interrelated or rather heavily depended on the political decision making process. The economic policies to be implemented needed a clear and trouble free political structure and political situation otherwise economic growth through industrialization cannot be achieved.

II

The Railways (1947 to 1974)

This section discusses the performance of railway industry from 1947 to 1974, as a public sector enterprise and how the railway industry contributed to the growth of general

industrialization of the country in that period. We have also discussed that after independence how the national economic planning tried to generate profit from several other industries by stressing on the Railway industry. Here we have observed that what were the structural and organizational difficulties that hindered the growth of Railways and how economic planning tried to reconcile the financial and technical problems. We also discuss the position and condition of the Railway industry in the whole arena of industrialization of the nation.

Transportation system as an industry had its own economic as well as social impact over the country. Transportation system had provided and fulfilled the important needs of human life throughout the history of the development of mankind. It supplies the basic needs of human beings e.g., it assists in the movement of goods, persons, it helps in the growth of production system by carrying raw materials from distant place; it helps in consumption by supplying finished products to the markets and also helps in exchange and distribution. However, in the whole system of transportation, Railways occupy the most important position.

After independence, Railways as a means of transportation for the purpose of industrial growth of the country and also in itself as a profitable industry started getting importance in the economic policies of the nation. That is why nearly a quarter of the total outlay of our Second Five Year Plan was allotted to the Railways (Saxena, 1963; p. xv). In fact in the Third Plan also almost fifth of the total investment in public sector was made in the name of the transport and communication.

Railways since its inception, had been the most significant primary domestic carriage in India. And it also cannot be denied that the process of industrialisation in this country started with the establishment of the railway industry. So the history of industrialization of India would be identical with the history of the growth of the Railway industry. However though independence was achieved in 1947, development through planned economy was initiated from only March 1950. In 1950, the Railways also implemented its first Five Year Plan of development as a part of national planning. During the first two decade of economic planning Railways tried to end its transitional phase and after this period it was able to establish itself as a most important contributor to the public

sector economy. For improving the whole infra-structural condition of the country it was necessary to improve the transport system, thus, the Railways got importance in the national economic and industrial policy. Railways at the same time had shown its ability to keep pace with the necessary requirements of industrial expansion. It was felt that for economic modernization and advancement, technological and infra structural growth was necessary. Therefore, modernization of transport system mainly Rail and Road got importance and their effective and efficient running was emphasised.

In the pre-independence period, the Railways were built for serving the purposes of the British administration and their economic and commercial needs. But in the post-independence period development of Railways must be associated with the needs of Indian economy and commerce and also with the Indian people. Immediately after independence, i.e. during the first few years of planned industrial growth, the development of Railways were emphasised for the purpose of strengthening the defence capacity of the country. After this period, the economic and commercial demands got emphasis. To fill up the gap between the producer and consumer, there was a need for accelerated development of the Railways. Transport in general and Railways in particular have been predominant factor in trade and commerce because Indian Railway had been the cheapest and fastest means of transportation.

In the First Five Year Plan, there had not been any significant change or even improvement in the pattern or allotments for Railway development. But the Study Group on Transport (Planning) appointed by the Planning Commission in the year 1953, in the course of its report, observed that railways in India, which had overshadowed other means of transport were able to carry only 90% of the traffic offers and that 30% to 40% of the capacity of road transport remained unutilised (Saxena, 1963; p. 6). Later the policy makers realized the capacity of the Railways transport and doubled the estimate at the end of the Second Five Year Plan. The revised estimation of traffic on Railways in 1960/61 was 154 million tonnes was revealed by a statistical resource. The policy makers and the Planners understood that unless and until the transport system was extensively expanded, the industrial development of the country could not be achieved. During the Third Plan the goods traffic of Railways were increased from 54,000 million tonne miles to 93,000 million tonne miles or annual increase of 39,000 million tonne miles (Saxena, 1963).

But one must not forget the fact that the condition of the industrial scenario of India was quite different from the advanced capitalist countries of the West. The Western industrial countries are inheritably industrial but Indian economy was once totally dominated by agriculture. It was only after independence, measures were taken to transform India into an industrial country, hence, these earlier plan period were the transitional period only. Therefore, Indian Railways had suffered from severe technological and financial problems. However, the objectives of the first four plans for the Railways were to carry the programmes of development in the context of the development of agriculture, coal, power and other industries within the broader perspective of national planning. Along with this, the improvement of the passenger traffic was also given emphasis.

- 1) First Plan concentrated on the replacement of assets, which were in poor condition and over-aged brought about by years of neglect and World War II. Investment policy during the First Plan period (1951-52 to 1955-56) was therefore, directed towards remedying the deficiencies.
- 2) During the Second Plan period (1956-57 to 1960-61) development was accelerated but, at times, the demand still outstripped rail transport capacity.
- 3) The objective of the Third Plan (1961-62 to 1965-66) was to develop sufficient capacity that rail transport did not impose constraint on the economy and industrial development of the country. During this period beginning was also made with modernization of traction and equipment.
- 4) In the Inter-Plan period (1966-67 to 1968-69) planning and corresponding investments were made on an annual basis to meet the immediate requirements. Keeping in view the long-term objectives of developing adequate capacity to meet anticipated growth of traffic.
- 5) The aim of the Fourth Plan (1969-70 to 1973-74) was not only to provide capacity for transport ahead of the traffic demand but also modernization of the system to improve efficiency of operation. Up to the end of the Fourth Plan, the Railways spent Rs. 5,336 crores on their development programmes (Indian Railway Year Book: 1976-77; p. 11).

Investment/Physical Achievements upto 4th Plan*
(1951-52 to 1973-74)

<i>Investment (in Crores)</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Physical Achievements</i>
2049.92	Rolling Stock (Net addition)	
	Locomotives	
	Steam	727
	Diesel	1,593
	Electric	597
	Passenger Vehicles	14,431
	Wagagons	182,770
786.88	Track and Bridges	
	Primary renewals	34,826 k.m.
	Primary sleeper renewals	38,500 k.m.
847.33	Line Capacity Works	
	Doublings	7,177 k.m.
	Conversion from MG to BG	760 k.m.
446.43	New Lines and Restoration of	
	Dismantled lines	6,638 k.m.
233.66	Electrification	3,803 k.m.

* [Indian Railway Year Book 1976/77; p. 12; Ministry of Railway]

From 1950 there was a major change in the financial policy of the Railways. It was declared that the general tax -payer would also become the shareholder of Railway undertaking. It was also suggested that the Railway finances were also to contribute to national development of which Railway development was a part. Railways from the third decade of planning started making profits and even Railway revenue contributed to the general revenue of the nation for the larger economic interests of the community. But at the same time, a huge capital investment in Railway industry also started taking place in India. Therefore, to keep its output and service profitable, it is necessary to increase its business up to the extent of highest capacity in order to utilize the full volume of its production. As we know that the Railway industry is a natural monopoly, competition for such industries would result in heavy loss and other kinds of disasters. State has the overall control on this industry. It also has to follow the policies of the Planning Commission for organizational development and the policies of the Finance Commission for instruments and wages for its employees etc. Although the Railways are run as a department of the government, they are of public utility and of national importance and in this sense it can be termed as the largest public sector undertaking in the country (Administrative Reform

Commission, Report on Railway, 1970). To perform the social, economic and commercial activities, the Railway industry tried to increase its areas of activity e.g., increase its freight capacity, capacity of carrying passengers etc. It also has some manufacturing divisions managed by its own administrative machinery, which also has a commercial impact on national economy.

The end of the Third Five Year Plan in 1966 marked a watershed for the Railways and for industrial growth as a whole since the problems of stagnation, low surpluses and inadequate outlays on expansion surfaced from this point of time (Monthly Commentary on Indian Economic Conditions, 1982; p. 1). And the important reason of stagnation was that inflationary crisis of the Indian economy mainly up to 1974 as the real value of the invested money decreased. But after this period there was an expansion in the strength of locomotive, passenger accommodation, track etc., which also effected in increasing the productivity and efficiency of the industry. But the consequences of years of neglect surfaced in the form of slow proportion of growth rate and low proportion in revenue generation and return. It is from this time the Indian Railways came closer to the people for its mass transit system. It brought people of remote places into the exposure of national mainstream. It not only moved goods but also the people of various regions of the country. Railways also exposed several new commercial centres of the country and connected them into a single thread. With the commercial cities, it also provided easy, cheap and fast transportation facility to the commercial and business population.

Moreover, these were another significant change in the Railway industry e.g., the reduction of subsidies i.e., the government had decided to reduce the subsidies given for the development of the Railway and asked the Railways to generate their own fund. But the Railways found themselves unable to manage this concern and as a result it was compelled to raise its passenger's fares and freight rates. Productivity connecting the output and input was the only means of measuring the performance of industries like Railway organization.

Profile of Growth in Industry*
1960-65

Industry	Weight	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)	Percentage Change over Preceding Year			Jan - to Oct 1970 over Jan-Oct. 1969
			1967	1968	1969	
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Machinery except electrical	(3.38)	43.2	+ 2.8	+ 9.1	+ 6.9	+ 4.9
Manufacturing wood work except furniture	(0.80)	27.0	+ 6.3	+ 7.0	+ 9.9	- 30.2
Transport equipment of which	7.77	21.3	-11.4	+ 3.1	- 5.2	- 1.3
Railway equipment	(3.50)	31.8	-21.5	- 8.5	- 10.6	- 19.4
Metal products	(2.57)	21.1	- 7.8	- 5.6	+16.2	+ 3.9
Electrical machinery	(3.05)	20.9	+ 8.1	+14.0	+16.2	+ 11.8
Electricity generated	(5.37)	18.2	+11.6	+15.6	+12.9	+ 11.3

* [Economic Survey: Government of India Press 1970/71]

Therefore, the Railways declared that there had been satisfactory utilisation of input materials from it got the desired result. But in practice the picture was not like that. The unsatisfactory financial position of the Railways was because of the fact that it kept with the policy of price restraints, fares and freight rates and hence it failed to compensate for the steep rise in wage levels and prices of materials and services (Indian Railway Year Book, Railway Board 1975-76).

reason for?
The financial policy of Railways must be associated with the Plans because the former assisted in the flourishing of the national economy and provided safeguard to the industrial development of the country. Railway organization tried to remove operational and engineering difficulties for achieving self-sufficiency. In practice since independence up to 1975, the Indian Railways had suffered from several operational and organizational difficulties. There had been various labour unrests, e.g., minor and major strikes took place in different levels of organizational set-up within the Railways; in the different parts of major and minor Railway centres. Thousands of man-days were lost for this kind of unrests. Therefore, operational efficiency of the Railways were to be brought to a level where adequate revenues are earned to meet the working expenses; to cover the obligations for development and renewal of the Railway assets and to yield a reasonable profit, the basic steps for achieving these were:

- a) running the railways with business like efficiency;
- b) scientific planning;
- c) effecting all practicable economies;
- d) improving passenger appeal;
- e) scientific approach to personnel problems;
- f) rationalization of rates and fares to maximise earnings;
- g) managing the railways as far as possible on commercial and business principles and not utilising them as means of subsidising certain programmes and activities on the ground of public interest (ARC Report, 1970).

Throughout the period (1947 to 1975) it was observed that the Railways as a public sector enterprise had gone through several structural and financial problems, which hindered the rapid growth of the industry. Government implemented a number of plans to keep the face of the Railways fast and compatible with the national economy and industrial growth. Although it suffered from various shortcomings Indian Railways have been able to establish its separate entity now a days, within the broader perspective of the public sector industries of the company. Today, India is held not only by the silken-bonds of our culture and our 'Constitution', but also by the "ribbons of steel", over which roll day and night, unremittingly. 1100 trains loaded with passengers; raw materials and thousands of other commodities, all embracing in their scope and cutting across provincial and regional barriers, forging the bonds of unity and bringing different cultural people together (Saxena, 1963; p. XIII).

III

The Industrial Worker in India : 1947 to 1974

In this section, we discuss the condition of the industrial workers in India after the independence i.e., from 1947 to 1974. Here we try to locate the causes of workers' grievances; how they cope up with the acute inflationary crisis of India in this period. It is also pointed out that the Government through its planning implemented several labour policies and the industrial management took measures to satisfy the demands and needs of the workers. Here, we also discuss why the workers expressed their grievances through

4 several violent means and the administration took repressive measures to resist the workers' unrest.

The new era of independent administration by the Indians ushered in new political and economic changes. The development of modern industries in the second half of the 19th century led to the emergence of totally a new class of Indian society - the industrial working class. This working class had suffered from years of deprivation and exploitation under colonial rule. And now they expected an end to their exploitation at the eve of the freedom. But by the time of independence, political power was vested on the hands of the Indian capitalists and landlord classes whose economic interests went against the economic and political interests of the working class. It was now a rule of capital - a rule of exploiting minority against the exploited majority (Sen, 1997; p. 379). In the post-independent period the working class had greater objective - the objective to establish a society free from exploitation of human by human, whereas in the pre-independence society they had the goal to achieve national liberation. The working class had to develop the required class-consciousness to achieve this objective, which they were yet to acquire.

how?
 rising
 class

Freedom from two hundred years of colonial bondage roused immense hopes, desires and aspirations among the all sections of people in India. But, at the same time, independence was accompanied with inflationary spiral, terrific rise in prices and the continuous fall in the real wages of the workers, further, as the ruling classes had embarked upon a path of building capitalism in the newly independent country particularly in an epoch when capitalism proved to be a decadent economic order, it brought in its wake untold hardships and sufferings for the toiling masses; this generated a powerful resistances of the working class all over the country (Sen, 1997; p. 382).

On the other hand, the ruling classes tried to strengthen their capitalist base through planned development of economy. Indian planners in the 1950s and 1960s by the "working class" understood only the formal or organised sector of industrial workers. Here it must be clearly pointed out that which sections of the working masses were termed as organised and which one was unorganised sector. The workers, in the small-scale industries, who were loosely united, were considered as the unorganised sector of the working class and the workers in the large-scale industries who were highly unionised were

considered as the organised workers. In India before, independence there were few large-scale industries, therefore there we could trace a few organised sector of working masses. But after independence the working people became fragmented into several sections - the government directly employed some, the industrial authority employed some and some were the employees of private sector industries. We also could find the workers related and depended on the industries indirectly working under the contractors etc. Indian planners totally ignored the interest of the latter during the first three decades of planning.

Indian Planning did not fulfil the minimum basic needs of the workers and other exploited masses. It is true that the organized working class led by their class conscious vanguards had been able to increase its nominal money earnings and wrest some other concessions by waging heroic strike struggles and other forms of mass actions but increase in their money earnings does not at all reflect their real incomes (Roy, 1980; p. 41). From the period of 1947 onwards workers participation in union activities had increased immensely to mobilise their demands. This situation led the Indian Planners appoint a committee headed by the P.C. Mahalanobis to enquire the per capita national income of the workers. Prices for 1951, 1955 and 1957 were 105, 95 and 111 respectively; the annual wages of factory labourers increased by 50 percent from 1950 to 1962 but their real earnings decreased due to steady rise in price. But because of the application of modern technologies and highly specialist skills, the labour productivity improved during these period. The per capita average annual money earnings of the workers was less than Rs. 200/- per month which rose almost continuously over the entire period 1951-64 - the level in 1964 being roughly 1½ times that in 1957; within this period, there was a rise of nearly 13% during 1951-55; 19% in the next five years (1955-60) but during the next four years 1960-64 average money earnings rose by a little less than 13%; during 1955-60, the rise in the cost of living was about 29% and the real earnings showed a decline of about 8%. Therefore the working class had to live with minimum consumptions to maintain their standard of living in this condition. Hence, the workers moved to get their demands fulfilled. And we observed a good amount of general feeling of discontentment among the workers.

Real Earnings

Base : 1961 = 100

<i>Year</i>	<i>All India CPI Numbers</i>	<i>Index Numbers of Money Earnings (Factory Workers)</i>	<i>Index Numbers of Real Earnings (Factory Workers)</i>
1961	100	100	100
1962	103	106	103
1963	106	109	103
1964	121	114	94
1965	132	128	97
1966	146	139	95
1967	166	151	91
1968	171	160	94
1969	169	171	101
1970	178	175	98
1971	183	185	101
1972	194	199	103
1973	228	216	95
1974	304	207	68
1975	321	205	64

*Source: Pocket Book of Labour Statistics (1977-78).

The needs of the workers must be satisfied to eliminate their discontentment and also to improve their productivity and efficiency. Thus the employers must turn their attention to following factors:

- i) workers' economic needs were not fulfilled (his wages were inadequate);
- ii) his need for security was not satisfied (employment was not stable);
- iv) working conditions were disagreeable;
- v) his social needs were not fulfilled.

Though these problems were identified by the employers there was no attempt to eliminate these grievances on the part of the industrial authorities of India- both the private and public sector enterprises. Industrialization and employment in various industrial spheres - primary, secondary and tertiary - were major goals of the Second Five Year Plan along with this it had the goal that the economically productive population were to be distributed in different industrial sectors. A major portion of the working people in this period was involved and employed in the plantations, mining, construction and the transportation industries. And Second Five Year Plan provided new jobs for eight million unemployed persons and new labour market entrants by 1961. It was also designed to

upgrade the industrial production of the country, as we know that the Second Plan gave stress on rapid economic growth through industrialization of the country. However, there was increasing pressure coming from the workers for reviewing the wage bill as articulated by the Planning Commission and prepared and presented by the Finance Commission. Then the workers raised the question of Dearness Allowances to support their income in the crisis of inflation of the country. Regarding the dearness allowances the First Central Pay Commission, which reported in May 1947 i.e., before independence, enunciated certain principles, the cost of living index taken by the First Pay Commission was 1939 = 100 and it made all its consideration on the question of dearness allowances basing on the belief that the price level had reached its peak in 1947; the Commission thus granted an increase of Rs. 5/- for every increase of 20 points over the cost of living index beyond 180 at the lowest rank of pay-scales and similarly fixed progressive scales for all other pay-scales (Sen, 1947; p. 387). But the dearness allowances also failed to cope up with the price rise in the country. The Second Pay Commission reported in 1959, which also could not satisfy the workers' demands, and the Third Pay Commission instead of increasing the real wage and dearness allowances, it combined the two and presented it as the revised pay scale in 1972. And this aggrieved the workers discontentment. Again this pressure hindered the usual and rapid growth of industrial production of the country.

Another feature, which aggravated the workers' grievances, was the injuries of the labourers caused by industrial accidents apart from a sharp decline in the real earning of the workers. As we know that the industrial people of India were originally agriculturists so they were not well equipped with the modern industrial technologies and machineries and also were not even trained by authority and this they could not do for lack of enough economic resources. Hence, the workers met with accidents frequently. But the irony was that they did not even get minimum compensations for the industrial injuries or deaths. As a result of which the workers gradually started agitations like gheraos - meaning encirclement of the employers; officers or managers, demonstrations, mass casual leave, cutting off the supply of electricity, *hartals* (general strikes), *bandhs* etc. These offensives of the workers led the employers to take necessary measures against them, which were in the form of lockouts, closures, retrenchments etc. But there were no ways and means to solve the problems in its root or the employers-workers relation case.

Industrial Injuries

Year	Total No. of Injuries	Frequency Rate of Injuries (Per 1000 Workers)
1961	1,59,696	45.67
1962	1,69,283	46.40
1963	1,84,509	47.80
1964	1,89,595	47.12
1965	2,02,823	49.25
1966	2,08,844	51.33
1967	1,98,710	48.13
1968	2,27,458	55.93
1969	2,62,616	63.48
1970	2,38,343	70.11
1971	3,25,180	75.67
1972	2,85,912	63.63
1973	2,86,017	62.58
1974	2,49,110	53.77
1975	2,42,352	50.87

Source: (Pocket Book of Labour Statistics, 1971-78)

Not only the wage and working conditions of the industries dissatisfied the workers but also the living conditions that were provided to them were inhuman. As because their wages were so low that they could not afford good housing, food and nutrition. They usually lived in the slums which were full of bad smells, noise dirt, there was no proper system of ventilations in the houses, therefore, the workers breathed impure air, poor lighting in the houses because of insufficient supply of electricity in the slums. They did not even get pure drinking water. In such unhealthy conditions workers had lost their working efficiency and productivity.

These factors again investigated and pushed the workers a step towards protesting against the employers. If the workers had the freedom of speech and expression they might be able to inform the authority about their problems and did not resort to frequent strikes or other means of unrests.

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Stoppages</i>	<i>No. of Workers Involved</i>	<i>Working Days Lost</i>
1951	1,071	691,321	3,818,928
1952	963	801,242	3,336,961
1953	772	466,607	3,382,608
1954	840	477,138	3,372,630
1955	11,666	527,767	5,697,848
1956	1,203	715,130	6,992,040
1957	1,630	889,371	6,429,319
1958	1,524	928,566	7,792,585
1959	1,531	693,616	5,633,148
1960	1,538	986,268	6,536,517
1961	1,357	511,860	4,918,755
1962	1,491	705,059	6,120,576

(Sen, 1997; p. 385)

The working class in the post-independence period had suffered from several problems and were exploited and deprived by the employers. As a result of which they expressed their grievances through violent means. After the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan, the Government took the initiative to enquire the reasons of workers' grievances and also tried to satisfy their demands. Although the government and the capitalist employers took measures to give material and psychological support to the workers, they continue to suffer till date.

IV

The Railway Worker (1947 - 1974)

This section deals with the economic, social and living condition of the workers in the Indian Railway Industry from the period of 1947 i.e., from independence to 1974. It tries to reveal the causes behind the workers' grievances in Indian Railways and how these grievances led the workers to agitate and launch major struggles against the Railway authority and management. Here we have discussed how the Railway workers had managed their livelihood in acute inflationary crisis in India during the period of late 1960s and early 1970s.

The partition of the country in August 15th 1947 brought many changes in the political, economic and social spheres in India. Not only in these fields but also it brought changes in the life of the general masses of India. But surprisingly, it did not bring any change to the life and condition of the workers' - both the agricultural and industrial as well. Partition on the other hand, strained the Indian Railways about 6,950 miles or 19% of the track went to Pakistan. A major portion of Bengal Assam Railways went to East Pakistan and no constructed rail lines were existed in Assam without touching the land of East Pakistan. Again, a good portion of Railway workers almost 1,26,000 living in different territories of the sub-continent after the partition went to Pakistan because the land was included in Pakistan. About 83,000 workers also migrated from India to Pakistan. The workers who went to Pakistan were mainly Muslims; and these workers constituted the major part of skilled workers of the Indian Railways. They were the specialists in the fields like - coppersmiths, blacksmiths, drivers, firemen etc. Therefore, it became a dual burden for India, since new lines were to be constructed in Assam region immediately after partition and this created a pressure on the Railway economy. Again, the Railway authority realised the lack of skilled workers who were needed for skilled functions but it caused difficulty for them to train the unskilled workers for sophisticated works within a short span of time for the authority was not at all prepared. On the other hand, most of the workers, came to India, were constituted of clerks whose absorption again created new problems because Railway industry had already suffered from over staffing with specific category of workers. Thus, it can be said that, independence did not bring good for the Indian Railways. From the very beginning it started suffering from organizational and structural problems.

To Indian Government - Railways are the single largest nationalized undertaking and biggest employer in the world employing nearly 15 lakh of regular workers and approximately 2.8 lakh casual labourers. More than 8 lakh employees consisting of porters, gang men, cleaners, points men, sweepers, watermen, workshop employees, workers employed in locomotive sheds, train examining depots, ferries, labour employed in mines etc. were generally called and known as the working class of the Indian Railways. One in every four hundred Indians is a railway employee and one family in every hundred is supported by the railways (Rao, 1974; p. 182). The Indian Railways as a concern of material transaction on the one hand and a concern of public utility on the other, it must

maintain the efficiency of the staff at high level. Railways as an employer must observe that, the economic and humane conditions of working must be secured for maintaining efficiency, and discipline of the workers.

But the irony was that, the Railways paid much lower wages to their employees compared with other public sector industries in India. It was not that the Railway authority was not able to pay a good remuneration but it was not able to generate its revenues properly. Low rates of wages resulted into decreased productivity of the workers. There were certain general factors, which influenced the wage level of the workers in a public sector undertaking like the Railways. According to Rao and Rao these were:

- i) remuneration in comparable industries;
- ii) firm's ability to pay;
- iii) cost of living;
- iv) productivity;
- v) union pressure and strategies.

It is interesting to note that if we examine these factors in relation to the payment of the Railway workers, we find that the remuneration of the skilled and unskilled workers were significantly low than the workers involved in other industries.

Minimum Monthly Wages in Comparable Public Sector Industries*

Sl. No.	Industry/ Sector	Minimum Monthly Wages (in Rupees)		
		Basic	D.A.	Total
1.	Central Government (including Indian Railways)	196.00	112.60	308.60
2.	Life Insurance Corporation	125.00	285.00	410.00
3.	General Insurance Corporation	125.00	285.00	410.00
4.	Nationalized Banks	116.00	260.48	376.48
5.	Coal	286.00	131.30	417.30
6.	Iron and Steel (Hindustan Steel Limited)	300.00	129.60	429.60

Source: *Indian Railwaymen: official Organization of AIRF; Vol. 14; No. 6; 1978.

In the year of 1960-61 the gross traffic receipts increased from 1950-51 by 73.68%, which indicated the improvement of Railway revenues. The percentage of net revenue receipts the financial soundness of the Railways, this percentage increased from 5.75 in 1950 - 57 to 6.72 in 1963-64 due to increase in net revenue receipts at a rate higher than that of capital at charge (Rao and Rao; 1982; p. 357). This trend showed the ability of the Railways to pay satisfactory remuneration to its workers, but in practice the result was reverse. In 1973-74 this percentage decreased heavily due to a fall in net revenue receipts because of labour unrests, which reached at its peak in these years and as a result of which a good amount of man-days were lost.

Cost of living was another factor, which determined the condition and position of the workers. The income of the Railway workers was increased by every decision taken by the Central Pay Commission, as the Railway workers were treated as the central government's employees. The Pay Commission also provided dearness allowances to the workers keeping in view the tendency of heavy price rise in India during 1960s and 1970s. In spite of this, the real earning of the workers did not increase at all and surprisingly it declined with the inflationary crisis of the country. The prices of the basic commodities - food grains, edible oil clothing etc. increased day by day and their real earnings were not capable to cope up with the present situation. Dearness Allowance formula of Central Pay Commission would not work here. Thus, the discontentment among the workers gradually started accumulating. Moreover, the Railway workers were bound by the decision of Central Pay Commission therefore they were not even able to bargain with the Railway management on the question of wage and dearness allowances. Unlike the worker of other organisations, public sector enterprises could do. They could not maintain minimum standard of living, which on the other hand affected labour productivity.

Index Number of Money Wages, Real Wages and Labour Productivity*

Year	Money Wages	Cost of Living	Real Wages	Labour Productivity
1	2	3	4	5
1960-61	100	100	100	100
1961-62	103.94	110.71	93.89	103.43
1962-63	109.36	119.38	91.61	108.62
1963-64	112.54	129.84	86.68	109.73
1964-65	117.36	134.31	87.38	107.33
1965-66	129.61	136.23	95.14	112.69
1966-67	141.14	157.81	89.44	113.56
1967-68	153.44	165.72	92.59	116.89
1968-69	166.39	175.47	94.83	121.93
1969-70	175.28	176.46	99.33	129.98
1970-71	189.76	182.33	104.08	125.27
1971-72	201.30	188.33	106.96	130.14
1972-73	207.71	202.92	102.36	132.83
1973-74	227.13	236.90	95.88	122.30
1974-75	291.29	310.75	93.74	126.16
1975-76	344.91	306.83	112.41	141.03

Source: Annual Report by the Railway Board on Indian Railways; Vol. II
Up to 1972-73; Indian Railway Year Book.

Interestingly, the Railway workers also got different scales of pay. In pre-independence period, it was because of the fact that, there were various Railway companies in the country both private and public. But after independence the operation and management went to the hands of the Indian Government, which created a separate ministry for the efficient, functioning of the Railways. Still the Indian Railway workers' pay scales were not uniform, because it follows the system of hierarchy of services. 12.9 lakh employees were employed on Railway operation and maintenance; 4.3 lakhs on workshops and artisans and 1 lakh were running staff. The Central Pay Commission standardised the scales of pay of the Railway workers considering the length of duties and responsibilities; type of work, duration of work i.e., the working hour and the qualification of the workers. Thus the pay scales according to the gradation of services made the labourers dissatisfied. A section of Railway workers known as loco-running staff, mainly, the drivers, shunters, firemen etc. became annoyed because in the British period they were considered as the "elite" of the Railways but the Indianisation of the service decreased not only their status but also their salary. During the British Raj, these workers were treated as the "intensive

by system
payment.

staff" following a strict limit on the working hour but after 1947, the management declared them as the "continuous staff" i.e., there should be no limit of working hour of the workers; sometime they had to work for 15 to 20 hours long a day. All these factors provided the workers necessary fuel for developing a reverse attitude towards the management.

This living condition of the Railway workers was also not satisfactory. Practically all the staff located at the places where the accommodation was not easily available, such as small wayside stations. They were provided with quarters in the bigger stations also quarters for staff were built on a programme basis, to relieve shortages, the total number of quarters for staff on the Indian railways was 5,34,192 on 31st March 1973, accommodating 38.1% of the number of employees (Rao, 1974; p. 188). But these were provided only to the class II and III categories of staff. The class IV staff lived in the dirty slums, which were full of noise, heat, and bad smell. These slums did not have even proper system of sanitation and clearance. Houses were poorly electrified and there was no proper system of ventilations.

Any industry cannot expect efficiency and productivity unless the basic human needs of the workers were recognised. The Railway management ensured medical and health facilities to its workers, each Railway head quarters and divisional or district headquarters had hospitals and dispensaries for the Railway staff which provided medical facilities to the workers at lower costs but these dispensaries and hospitals were not well equipped with modern medical tools and machineries. It was told that the lower paid employees were supplied with free diet in these hospitals but all these were only theoretical comments and did not have any practical basis. Workers lived in unhealthy atmosphere that affected their physical fitness too.

These factors led the workers to burst into the major unrests with ferocity. It included mass casual leave, absenteeism, go slow, *bandhs*, strikes etc. The first strike in the history of Indian labour movement took place at Howrah station in 1862 for reducing the working hour. There were several events of major struggles of Indian Railway workers. After independence, this struggle took violent shape. There were three general strikes that took place in Indian Railways of which the most important was the strike of 1974. The

relevance and significance of these three general strikes of the central government employees could not be overlooked. In 1960 a "five days general strike" of central government employees including the Railway workers took place against the declaration of the Second Pay Commission. Again in September 1968 there was a one-day token strike maintained throughout the country. In May, 1974 the general strike of the central government employees led by the Railway Workers' Union including the workers of Port and Dock, Defence etc. shook the state administration in its root as the strike lasted for 20 days long. Apart from these three major strikes there were several strikes that took place in different regions and different sections of the Railway administration in India.

The government's barbaric repression should be pointed out in this connection when the Railway workers launched their struggles against the capitalist exploitation and imperialist policies and rules. However, the employer-labour relations in Railways have great significance partly on account of the large number of men employed and partly because the government owns and manages nearly the entire Railway conditions. (Prasad, 1960; p. 303). It was known that the Railway workers were highly organized or rather unionised. But at the same time there was a good portion of workers that remained outside the unions who worked on daily wage basis. They were engaged in construction of rail lines under the private contractors. They were usually called as "casual labour" or unorganised sector of the Railway industrial workers. These casual labours also had some demands:

- i) the wages paid to them must be based on equal scales applicable to the regular employees performing same work;
- ii) they should be allowed weekly rest with wages.

But these demands were never met with some constructive solutions.

The Railway workers had suffered from wrong transfer, demotion, dismissal etc. that led the workers to delve into insecurity of employment and insecurity of life as well. Railway administration was not at all aware of these facts and crisis of the workers, which frequently resulted into major or minor unrests in the Indian railways. There were only two recognized unions at central level e.g. National Federation of Indian Railwaymen or NFIR. led by the Congress and the All India Railwaymen's Federation or AIRF led by the

Communists and the Socialists in the Indian Railways. Therefore, Railway workers from all segments of their services could not ventilate their grievances through these two unions and one of which i.e., the former acted as the protector of the interests of the employers rather than the interests and the rights of the workers. There were several other unions at the divisional and zonal levels but they were either not too powerful or they acted as the wings of the NFIR or AIRF. And these unions were not capable of launching any major struggles on their own ability. However, several such reasons aggrieved the workers to go for agitation against the Railway authority.

Since at all the hours of day and night, winter and summer, in good or bad weather over 11,000 trains run every day throughout the country from one place to another in India it includes certain amounts of risks to the life and property of its users; this risk becomes significant when the Railway staff is overworked, unduly tired, insufficiently nourished or clothed, inadequately housed improperly trained or smarting under a sense of grievances (Rao, 1974; p. 182). Therefore, it should be the responsibility on the part of the Railway management to provide satisfactory working and living condition to the workers to redress their grievances.

Chapter - III

Unions and the Railway Strike of 1974

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen that the industrial workers in India were exploited, physically and economically and hence they suffered from the very beginning of the industrialisation process, which was initiated during the colonial period. After independence i.e., from 1947 onwards there occurred no change in the position and condition of this class. The grievances of the workers reached its peak during the period of 1960-73 due to various causes e.g., inflation, rise in prices of basic commodities – food grain, oil etc, decline in real wages; inhuman conditions of working and living etc. Above all, the government's stand towards the problems of industrial working class was almost negative; it even did not take any minimum constructive measures to satisfy the workers. As a result discontentment of the industrial workers in general and Railway workers in particular erupted and took the shape of major labour unrest in the country in 1974. In this chapter we look at the working of the various unions that existed in the Indian Railways and analyse the historic strike of 1974. These issues had ^{ve} been dealt with in the following order. The first section deals with the activities of the trade unions with a focus on the national level trade unions. In the second section we look at how, the strike began and in the final section we look at the national impact of the strike. We also look at the reasons for the failure of the strike in brief in the concluding pages of the chapter.

I

Trade Unions in the Railways

In this section we deal with the activities of the trade unions existing and working in the Indian Railways: Here we also try to locate how the Railway workers through their unions had prepared themselves for such a major strike in 1974. We also discuss the nature of the

strike, i.e., how it could spread almost in similar volume throughout the country except one or two states and how the strike could motivate all sections of the Railway workers. After having done this in the next chapter we try to analyse the attitude of the then central government led by Indira Gandhi and how, the government reacted towards the biggest challenge of the Indian working class ever in Independent India.

The conflict between the workers and employers was the most common incident in all the developed, underdeveloped and developing countries. There are several reasons of industrial disputes. Disputes arose out of the terms and conditions of employment, wages, rising cost of living, bonus etc. Strikes provided the platform to express the desires and aspirations of the working class. It was basically an organised protest against the existing industrial conditions. Apart from the strikes there were several other means of protests, e.g., go slow, *gherao* (encirclement), mass casual leave etc. to which the workers resorted. They were the symptoms of more fundamental mal-adjustments, injustices and economic disturbances. Industrial unrest, frustration and discontentment arose when the workers failed to achieve their economic and social objectives, one of the leading central trade union has stated the following main causes for labour unrest in the public undertakings:

- (a) Bad terms and condition of service. Lack of provision of a need-based minimum wage or any scientific wage policy, absence of bonus scheme, bad housing etc.
- (b) Unsatisfactory living conditions.
- (c) Top hierarchy management and migratory executives.
- (d) Lack of proper personnel management.
- (e) Non recognition of trade union and lack of facilities for collective bargaining.
- (f) Inter union rivalry.
- (g) Absence of job satisfaction.
- (h) Unhealthy working conditions.
- (i) Steep rise in prices and consequent fall in real wages; and
- (j) Partition politics.

(Sharma, 1978: pp. 47-48).

In India from 1947 to 1974, there were several strikes and labour unrests noticed in the industries. And all the above causes were found in full volume in the public sector enterprises like Indian Railways etc. which led ultimately to the massive labour eruption, the 1974 strike.

The working class movement in India was divided because four different major centres of trade unions led it:

- i) All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC);
- ii) Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC);
- iii) Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS); and
- iv) The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

Apart from these unions several other trade unions existed in India – United Trade Union Congress, Bharatiya Majdoor Sangha (BMS) etc. AITUC was the oldest national trade union founded in October 1920. But it suffered from several splits later, the split of 1970 that formed the CITU was the most remarkable of them. Strikes and lockouts became common in the industrial front after independence. Here is a brief account of the number of strikes and lockouts resulting in a loss of number of man days in the country as a whole. The table also gives an account of the number of workers that participated or affected in the strikes and lockouts in the country.

The Congress established the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) in the year 1947 by splitting the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) was formed in 1948 claiming a difference in ideology. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had its origin only in May 1970 and started with the slogan of “unity in struggle”. All these unions had played a vital role in organizing the workers in the Indian industries. The workers engaged in infrastructural public sectors were more or less free from the direct influence of the national trade union centres like, Railways, Post and Telegraph, Port and Dock, Defence, Airlines etc. ✓

Year	Strikes and Lockouts	Number of Workers Participated/Affected	Number of Man days Lost
1	2	3	4
1947	1,811	18,40,784	1,65,62,666
1948	1,259	10,59,120	78,37,173
1949	920	6,85,457	66,00,595
1950	814	7,17,883	1,28,00,704
1951	1,071	6,91,321	33,18,928
1952	963	8,09,000	33,73,000
1953	772	4,66,697	33,82,608
1954	840	4,77,138	33,72,630
1955	1,666	5,27,767	56,97,848
1956	1,203	7,15,130	69,94,040
1957	1,630	8,89,371	64,29,319
1958	1,524	9,28,566	77,97,855
1959	1,531	6,93,616	56,33,517
1960	1,583	9,86,268	65,36,517
1961	1,357	5,11,860	49,18,755
1962	1,491	7,05,059	61,20,476
1963	1,471	5,63,121	32,68,524
1964	2,151	10,02,955	77,24,694
1965	1,835	9,91,158	64,69,992
1966	2,556	14,10,056	1,38,46,329
1967	2,815	14,90,346	1,71,47,951
1968	2,776	16,69,294	1,72,43,679
1969	2,627	18,26,866	1,90,48,288
1970	2,889	18,27,752	2,05,63,381
1971	3,752	16,15,140	1,65,45,436
1972	3,243	17,36,737	2,05,43,916
1973	1,370	25,45,602	2,66,26,253
1974	1,917	16,16,636	2,72,92,304

(Source: "Strikes Struggles in India", Indian Labour Journal, December 1974).

Before the formation of the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF), no organised union existed in Indian Railways. Up to 1920, there were various incidents of labour unrests in the Railways but those were sporadic and weak. In 1862, Railway workers, for the first time, at Howrah Station went on strike for eight hours working day but this strike was not an organised effort of the workers or led by any union. Interestingly, there were no organized trade unions in India to unite, educate and to protect the workers' interests and to protest against the employers' exploitation. The first trade union movement in India was observed in 1875 under the leadership of Sorabjee

Shapurjee Bangalee who launched an agitation against the manufacturers and factory owners. At the end of the First World War, the industrial workers occupied a vital position in India. The first big strike in Bombay took place in January 1919 involving almost 1,25,000 workers covering all the textile mills. After independence there were many more industrial disputes in India. Several man-days were lost and thousands of workers were involved in these disputes, which affected the national economy also. The number of disputes, number of workers involved and the number of Mandays lost per year immediately after independence is given below in tabular form.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Disputes</i>	<i>Number of Workers</i>	<i>Number of Man days Lost</i>
1947	1811	1,840,784	16,562,666
1948	1259	1,059,120	7,837,173
1949	914	6,84,128	6,580,887

(Dhyani: 1979, p. 49)

In the Railway front the oldest trade union was All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF), founded in 1925. It was affiliated to AITUC but left the mother body in 1929. It was found under the leadership of V.V. Giri and Jayprakash Narayan. It was mainly the Socialists who dominated it. There was another prominent trade union namely, National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) which was controlled by the right wing Congress. Several other trade unions also existed in the Railway front at the zonal and local levels, which had affiliations to either of these two. The Railway Management had faith on selective recognition of the unions, therefore in the Railways at the central level two powerful unions existed-AIRF and NFIR. The zonal level Railway unions were e.g., S. I. Railway Labour Unions, the Eastern Punjab Railway Workers Unions, the GIP Railwaymens Unions, BNR Workers' Union etc. Certain category or craft wise unions were found in the Railways, e.g., Station Masters' Association; All India Loco Running Staff Association etc., which were organisationally very strong and the members of these craft unions were also very much committed to their ends.

The Railway workers of Bombay and West Bengal went on in a general strike to protest against the arrest of Tilak in 1809. Throughout the history of labour movement of the country the Railway movement of the country the Railway workers had shown a different awakening and remarkable unity and courage. Thousands of Railway workers

rose to protest against police repression and atrocities. Surprisingly, the recognized unions had not brought out the struggles and resistances of Railway workers in focus to destroy the Indira-Congress's attempts of establishing police raj in the country rather than they tried to condemn the heroic struggles of the Railway workers' in their speeches and statements.

On 16th May 1947, the Central Pay Commission published its reports on scales of the central government employees and other matters, but the recommendations were most unsatisfactory it did not concede Railway workers' demands for a living wage, denied dearness allowances at the rate fully compensating the rise in the cost of living and finally they suggested the complete closure of grain shops as well as lowest scale for skilled artisans a wretched scale of 40-60. Against these Pay Commission's scales of pay there were expressed de-satisfaction from every quarter. The Railway unions suggested radical Amendments in these recommendations in the All India Railway Workers Conference that was held in 1949. By the end of the 1947 and early 1948 it was observed that there was activity among the Railway workers and unions, which for a general strike and 350 thousands of workers voted for a general strike on 9th March 1948. The workers had the following demands:

- 1) Basic minimum wage of Rs. 80/- for unskilled class IV staff and Rs. 120/- for class III staff with regular annual increase so as to reach maximum of Rs. 120/- and 200/- respectively;
- 2) Continuation of cheap grain shop concession as it existed on 1st December, 1947;
- 3) Dearness Allowance at a rate fully compensating the rise in the cost of living;
- 4) No retrenchment and reinstatement of all those retrenched;
- 5) Confirmation of all temporary and casual labour numbering over two lacks;
- 6) Forty hours week with a maximum 7 (seven) hours a day;
- 7) One month privilege leave; with pay and abolishing all present distinctions;
- 8) Withdrawal of Railway Inquiry Committee report;
- 9) Immediate and unconditional release of all detunes and reinstatement of railway workers detained so far;

- 10) Payment of full compensatory equivalent to total monthly earnings to all workers detained or retrenched with retrospective effect.
- 11) Withdrawal of Public Security Act, Indian Trade Disputes Acts, Railway Service Rules 1949 and such other measures that seek to curtail the democratic and trade liberties and restrict workers right to strike;
- 12) Full facilities and rights to organise trade unions as a matter of right;
- 13) Rent free quarters to all or house rent in lieu there of.

(Report of Inaugural Conference 1949; p. 35).

But the recognised unions decided not to carry on their responsibility and hence as a result the general strike and it was called off.

The First Five Year Plan did not have any reverse influence and impact on the industrial workers because it did not give much attention to industrial growth. But the launching of Second Five Year Plan in 1957 in April, 1957 dissatisfied the entire industrialisation process as it emphasised on the rapid development of national economy through industrial growth. It invested a large amount on building and developing the infrastructure industries, such as, transport, communication, heavy industries etc. From this time the working mass of India in general and Railway workers in particular started showing their grievances against the economic policies of the government.

In 1959, the Second Central Pay Commission published its report, which again aggrieved the workers of public undertakings including the Railways. In April 1960 a 'Joint Council of Action' was set up with the representatives of the AIRF, the National Federation of Post and Telegraphs Employees, the All India Defence Employees Federation and the Confederation of Central Government Employees. The JCA formulated seven demands if that was not satisfied it reiterated that it would organise a general strike from the midnight of 19th June 1960, which was later put off to 11th July 1960. The seven demands were :

1. The payment of DA on the basis of the First Pay Commission's recommendations;
2. To grant a national minimum wage in the light of the recommendations of the 15th Indian Labour Conference;
3. Appointment of a Permanent Wage Board with equal representations to labour and to neutral Chairman to settle disputes relating to pay, service conditions etc;
4. No curtailment of existing amenities, rights and privileges;
5. Reference to arbitration of disputes referred by either party;
6. Recognition of one union in one industry by determination of the representative character of a union through referendum held annually;
7. Withdrawal from the service rules of all the provisions for the termination of contractual services.

(Siddhanta: 1974)

The strike began on 11th July and lasted for 5 days. It faced severe government repression. 17,780 central government employees and 2,359 trade union leaders were arrested (Siddhanta; 1974). Again in September 19th, 1968, there was a one- day token strike of the Railway workers along with the other central government employees' organizations, but because the major portion of Railway workers did not participate in it, the strike thus failed to voice its grievances. It became evident that many in the AIRF leadership were opposed to the strike when Maniben Kara, president of the Western Railway Employees Union, unilaterally withdrew her strike notice (Sherlock 1989; p. 2313). Being dissatisfied with the recognised union's inefficiency the different segments of Railway workers according to their types of work tried to form their own sectional leadership to launch their struggle separately from the central of zonal unions.

Several category-wise unions were formed, e.g., Station Masters' Association, Fire Men's Council etc. In August 1970, All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) was set up which played a most important role in influencing the other sections of the Railway workers. It came into existence because, as we have discussed in the last chapter, that with Indianisation of services after partition the position and status of locomotive staffs declined considerably. Therefore AILRSA launched several movements from 1970 to 1972. In 1972, AILRSA was able to secure reduction in the maximum working hour

from 14 to 12. Again in 1973 the AILRSA went on strike to reduce the working hour from 12 to 10. This time it faced a violent repression from the government, which arrested hundreds of activists and declared to dismiss them but AILRSA demanded for unconditional release of the strikers. The government and the Railway Ministry agreed to their demands and the strike was called off. Thus, it was a great victory of the category wise and craft wise unions, which shock the position of the recognized unions.

The success of this strike showed that well organised action and determined effort to achieve the goal can defeat the massive repressions of the government. As we know that a good part of the working class was constituted with the Railway workers. Therefore, their successful struggle would have a tremendous impact on the entire working class of the country. From this time, the recognised unions realised that their organisational and structural deficiency should be rectified and the nature of their demand and movements should be reorganised. For NFIR the crisis was not so dangerous because it had a close nexus with the ruling Congress Party; NFIR was termed by the railway workers as the official strike breaking unit of the Indian Railways, as long as Congress was in power, the NIFR could sustain its networks of patronage (Sherlock, 1989; p. 2315). NFIR tried to show its ability to organise a full-fledged struggle of the Railway workers. On September 10, 1973, A.P. Sharma, who was the president of the NFIR as well as deputy leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, declared that the NFIR had decided to launch "direct action" from November 10, if the recommendations of the 1969 Railway Labour Tribunal on working hours were not implemented by that date (Sherlock 1989; p. 2315). By this announcement NFIR tried to maintain its image among the workers. And above all, by doing this NFIR attempted to resist the growth and development of the category unions. But the success of the category unions made the situations worse far the AIRF, because AIRF, from this time had been loosing its support base among the workers and the question arose that whether AIRF could maintain its leadership and retain its power or not in the Indian Railways.

*Competitive
struggle
winning*

It was revealed that the Railway workers did not have much faith on the AIRF and could not rely on its leadership. Therefore, the AIRF had to reorganise its structural and organisational deficiencies and sort out the inadequacies of its leadership. AIRF also realised that it just needed a new face to motivate the entire railway workers irrespective of

their terms and types of service. Ironically, the Third Pay Commission, which was appointed in 1970, submitted its report in 1973. It again aggrieved the workers as it combined the regular salary of the workers with the D.A. and abolished the system of payment of dearness allowance and published the combined wage as the revised and increased wage level. 1965 onwards India had been suffering from acute inflationary crisis, the prices of the basic commodities were innumerable high; oil was beyond the reach of the common people. All these factors aggravated the workers discontent about the present situation and arouse a negative feeling towards their recognised unions. And, therefore, these factors worked behind the change in activity of the trade unions, which worked for regaining their popularity and also tried to bring about changes in the objective and in work plan. Therefore, AIRF brought Mr. George Fernandes as its President in the Railway trade union front to mobilise the entire workers. Fernandes was singled out because he had established a formidable reputation as a trade union leader in Bombay and the credentials of having supported Railway workers' struggles in past (Sherlock 1989; p. 2317). He had successfully organised the struggles of Bombay Cotton Mills Workers. The General Council of the AIRF, which arranged a conference in New Delhi to review the declaration of the Third Pay Commission, adopted a resolution. This resolution said that not only has the Pay Commission shied away from the challenging tasks that was placed before it in the matter of need based minimum wage and restructuring of the pay scales in relation thereto, but the Commission has also been responsible for curtailing the privileges that the railwayment had earned throughout these years of hard and sustained struggles. The resolution after taking all factors into consideration and referred to the massive mandate given through the ballot for strike calls upon all the railwaymen to prepare for a total and indefinite strike to commence on and from 27th April, 1973 (Siddhanta 1974; p. 3). But before launching this strike the AILRSA called its own strike and thus, the AIRF withdrew its decision to launch a unified and indefinite struggle of August 1973. The trade unions working in the Indian Railways were to some extent successful to inform the government and the Railway management about the long and outstanding grievances and discontentment of the workers. But the anti-working class recommendation of the Third Pay Commission and policy of the Central Government had totally ignored the workers' cry. Moreover, the recommendations and governmental policies pictured the bankruptcy of the administration, which provoked the Railway workers to resort to direct action. Instead of meeting the immediate demands and needs of the workers and instead of

solving the problems, the Railway management and the government, mainly the then Railway Minister Mr. L.N. Mishra intended to use the essential items against the interests of the vast majority of the Railwaymen.

II

The Railway Workers Strike of 1974

Indian Railway workers were tremendously unionised and were well known for their united performance and strength. They were united, even though over two million workers employed in the Railways were engaged in diverse types of works ranging from skilled to unskilled, educated to illiterate, lower to higher income levels. Apart from these categories which were obvious to the travelling public such as drivers, guards, station masters, ticket-sellers, a Railway workers^f could also be a clerk, accountant, cleaner, coal loader, labourer, cook, waiter, gateman, mechanical and electrical engineer, store man, printer, welder, fitter, process line workers and so on (Sherlock 2001; p. 140). The specialised Railway workers were constituted of the engine drivers, metal workers, signal and telecommunication maintainers etc. The general skills of the station master or the unskilled duties of the cleaner or labourer; the vast array of skills and duties was reflected in pay levels which ranged in 1973 from as low as Rs. 70/- per month for a gateman, through Rs. 110/- for a bottom rung commercial clerk; Rs. 130/- for a base level assistant station master up to those who merged into lower management such as chief yard master, who could receive up to Rs. 575/- per month (Sherlock 2001; p. 140). In spite of the various duties and range of work they already formed category-wise organisations to protect their own interests.

Therefore it had become difficult for the recognised unions mainly for the AIRF to organise those under one umbrella and to regain their faith. But on the other hand, this fragmentation of the labourers was harmful for a broader perspective of entire working class movement. The category-wise unions were criticised for shaking the roots of organised trade unionism in India. It was not able to bring good for all the sections of the workers thus; it indirectly provided the root for the disunity among the Railway workers.

The AIRF had to perform alone the difficult task of organising all the workers under one leadership because it had decided to lead the general mass actions. On the other hand NFIR performed its functions on the basis of patron-client relationship. It never

responded to the workers' demand collectively, it always expected the recognition of their position as the powerful leaders that the workers came to them and by touching the feet of the leaders requested for fulfilling their needs. NFIR never kept the demands but tried to keep the requests of the workers. As a result of their link to Congress ruling party, in local levels they also enjoyed some sort of power. Therefore, the workers joined this organisation to protect oneself from the system of ill transfer on to secure jobs for their sons etc. In this way NFIR became the union of individual worker and not the union of the Railway workers a whole. The workers did not have any loyalty or commitment towards this union. It again declared that strikes were the last resort or last weapon for settling any dispute, i.e., the strike was not a constructive means of securing workers' demands and interests. Workers could not directly negotiate with the management. This was done through their representatives, i.e., through their unions. In India unions were always in pressure from both the side of the management and the workers and in many cases it was found that the unions were keen to protect the employer's interests rather than the workers.

The AIRF, at its Secunderabad Annual Convention in October 15th to 19th 1973 declared their decision for calling a general strike from 27th February 1974 restating the deteriorating conditions of the Railwaymen. In this Convention George Fernandes defeated Peter Alvares by 277 votes to 210 votes and was elected as the President of AIRF. The Convention adopted seven point demands. These were:

- 1) Restructuring of the pay-scales providing need based minimum wage in accordance with the principles of the 15th Indian Labour Conference formula;
- 2) Provision for subsidised grain shops;
- 3) Payment of bonus to all railway men;
- 4) Full neutralisation of dearness allowance after a periodic review of six months on a rise of four points in the All India average consumer price index;
- 5) Point to point fixation so as to ensure reflection (of the weightage) of service in the new scales of pay;
- 6) Retrospective effect of the recommendation of the Third Pay Commission from 01.03. 1970 for all purposes including payment of arrears;

- 7) Speedy settlement of all other outstanding demands and disputes of railwaymen pending at various levels viz., PNM, JCM, Tribunal etc.

(Siddhanta, 1974; p. 16).

AIRF decided to form a forum – Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM) to provide the government the last opportunity to consider the workers' frustration and discontentment. But the government became accustomed with the empty roars of the Railway unions and took it for granted. The other unions affiliated to AITUC was also involved in the joint action. They were of the opinion that the anti-labour and anti-people policies of the government must be checked and hence attempted to launch a powerful mass movement of the entire industrial working class. But the Railway workers formed the category unions as they became dissatisfied with the performance of the recognised unions. They viewed this strike call of AIRF with scepticism, because they lost all their faith and confidence over these recognised unions. In this situation the strike to be successful and effective, it must follow the joint and united action of all the categories of workers and it must have included the other workers of other public sector undertakings.

AITUC observed 31st January 1974 as Demand Day throughout the country. On 4th February the Railway Minister Mr. L.N. Mishra called a conference on Labour Relations on the Indian Railways of Central Trade Unions and the two recognised Federation (Siddhanta 1974; p. 21). But the result of this conference was not fruitful.

On the other hand, the discontentment of the workers had been growing day by day with various issues like wage irrationality, bonus, working condition etc. among the different sections of the Railway workers. The General Council of AIRF found that the preparation for launching a general strike for a indefinite period were not complete on several Railway zones. The fund collected for the strike was less than Rs. 6,00,000/- from Central Railways Rs. 2,00,000/-, Western Railways Rs. 1,60,000/-, Northern Railways Rs. 25,000/-. Eastern Railways Rs. 12,000/-, North East Frontier Railways Rs. 30,000/-. Southern Railways Rs. 1,00,000/- and South Central Railways Rs. 50,000/- (Siddhanta 1974). Therefore, in spite of launching the strike on 27th February it postponed it to May 1974. Considering the various fragmented agitations all over the country through the

category unions or the sporadic actions of the Railway workers the General Council directed its zonal and local organizations to set up:

1. Action Committee of the Union at levels;
2. Joint Action Committees with those organisations that are willing to make common cause with our struggle.
3. Women's Committees to bring about total involvement of the women from railwaymen's families in the struggle.
4. Volunteer Corps to meet any situations that may be created by the enemies of the struggle.
5. Peoples' Committees consisting of prominent citizens, representatives of other working class organisations, lawyers, journalists and other public personalities to support the action of railwaymen.
6. To complete the collection of the struggle fund targeted at Secunderabad by the 15th of March.
7. To appoint a cell at the Zonal Head Quarters to keep liaison with the AIRF Head Quarters on the progress made in the preparations for the strike (Siddhanta 1974; p. 25). George Fernandes on 27th February 1974 called a convention with the objective of uniting all the railway unions – regional, zonal, local, craft – and asked for the formation of the National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS) because AIRF knew that it could not lead a general strike on its own. However, the railway workers had some urgent demands which were consisted of that: (i) all railway workers should be treated as industrial workers and they must be granted the right to negotiate with the employers; (ii) the eight hour working day; (iii) implementation of need based wage system; (iv) the government must bring wage parity between the central government's undertakings; (v) D.A. must be linked with the cost of living; (vi) confirmation of the service of the casual labour; (vii) supply of adequate subsidised food grains; (viii) victimisation of cases must be withdrawn etc. However, the NCCRS set up 13 members Action Committee consisting of following members:

1.	George Fernandes	Convener
2.	J.P. Choubey	AIRF
3.	Priya Gupta	AIRF
4.	Parvathi Krishnan	AITUC
5.	Srikrishna	AITUC
6.	N.S. Bhangoo	All India Railway Employees Confederation
7.	K.P. Ramaswami	All India Railway Employees Confederation

8.	H.S. Choudhury	All India Loco Running Staff Association
9.	S.K. Dhar	All India Loco Running Staff Association
10.	Samar Mukherjee	CITU
11.	N.N. Chakraborty	CITU
12.	G.S. Gokhale	BMS
13.	N.M. Pathak	BMS

The NCCRS declared on 15th April that Railwaymen were going on indefinite strike from 6th and 8th May 1974. The NCCRS was quite aware of the consequences of the indefinite strike whose impact on national economy was certainly to cripple. Negotiations were being held with the Railway Minister Mr. L.N. Mishra, but it could not bring out any constructive solutions. 200 unions served the strike notice on 23rd April associated with NCCRS. During the negotiations between the members of NCCRS and the Railway Ministry surprisingly the government arrested the President of NCCRS i.e., Mr. Fernandes and the other members of the Committee and put them in jail. Moreover 15,000 railwaymen were arrested irrespective of party loyalty – including the socialists and communists before the commencement of the strike. This irked the trade unions and its members. The AITUC for e.g., felt “The Indian working class stands in proud defiance of the treacherous and death-dealing power of the gang stars and the gunmen of the Indian capitalist order; all victory to Indian Railwaymen! All success to the Indian Working Class, the gravedigger of capitalism and builder scientific socialism, democracy and culture” (Siddhanta 1974; p. 69).

Therefore, the Railway strike became obvious because of the arrests of the NCCRS leaders treacherously in the midst of the negotiations. Ultimately the strike began from 6 a.m. on 8th May 1974. The most outstanding event of the history of Indian labour movement began on 8th May, which was till to date the biggest fight of Indian working class against the exploitation and deprivation of hundred years. It was strongest and highly united labour unrest, which took place in India since independence. It lasted for 20 long days. The entire industrial working class of India were swept with this strike storm. In the beginning of the strike all the central government employees participated in it. From the very beginning of the commencement of all the negotiations between management and the

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trade unions, it seemed to be failure because on the main two demands of AIRF – bonus and wage parity with the other public sector industries, the government did not want to compromise with the workers at the earlier stage. The government, thus, took all the possible and impossible measures of repressions to prevent the strike and tried to ensure that minimum essential train services must be maintained. But the arrest of Mr. Fernandes and other leaders made the workers furious. Mr. A.P. Sharma, the president of NFIR condemned the strike as illegal and stated that his union did not support it. On the other hand a debate took place in Lok Sabha on the illegal arrest of the trade union leaders and the opposition showed its disappointment on Railway Minister's stand. On the claims of the Railwaymen the management provided a chart, which consisted of the governments' expenditure on the Railway front apart from the wages of the workers, e.g., Railway administration had to spend Rs. 45 crores per year in providing subsidised residential quarters, 650 hospitals and health facilities, 750 educational institutions for the children of the Railway employees. In spite of the government repression the strike involved more than one million workers covering 60 thousand kilometres throughout the country. On 15th May, all the central trade unions observed "*Bharat Bandh*", i.e., all India general strike in support of the Railway strike.

III

The Impact of the Strike

The impact of the strike was grave and manifold – the national economy according to some estimates suffered the loss of Rs.1000 crores due to the strike. The Railway Board's own estimation was around 500 crores. This rough calculation was measured from the estimated loss of Rs. 50 crores per day by way of earnings from freight and passenger fares during the strike. Many places throughout the country mainly Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, plunged into darkness. The power stations in these states could not generate power which required a daily coal supply of around 3,400 tonnes which were brought by the rails from distant places like Madhya Pradesh and Bengal-Bihar collieries. Therefore, the irregular train services disrupted not only the daily life of the people but also their consumption. Another major impact of the Rail strike was that it disrupted the exports of goods and also the distributions of the imported commodities to the different

urban, rural and remote parts of the country like food grains, petroleum, petroleum products, fertilizers etc. The Finance Ministry, Planning Commission and the persons of industry and trade spent many sleepless nights to make up the gap created by the Railway strike in India.

The daily goods of traffic movement on the Railways during 1973-74 (which was a bad year owing to wildest strikes in August and December) amounted to 20,900 wagons corresponding to 0.5 million tonnes but the bulk of the goods movements during the strike period excepting that of petroleum products was low rated traffic (Hindu, June 4, 1974). The working in the marshalling yards was also seriously affected during the peak days of strike, only 25 percent of the total wagons moved. Interestingly, the number heavily came down even when the Railwaymen came to join their duties and the immobilization of wagons was about 12,000. Even after the withdrawal of the strike Rail services gradually becoming smooth, the Indian Railways faced several problems and losses. It was just because of the considerable deterioration in the utilisation and maintenance of the Railway wagons, yards and several other Railway properties due to the strikes. The idle times of the wagons at the loading and unloading centres particularly the steel mills had increased for several reasons apart from the deterioration in law and order situations given by the Railways. One of the reason was that the increase in the holding of special type of wagons like inbox, tank wagons etc. for movement of raw materials to the steel plants and finished products from them also led to an increase in the extent of empty haulage (Hindu, 4th June 1974). Due to the neglect and bad maintenance on the part of the new and repair staffs in the workshops, the Railway engine which could run 2 lakh kms. before it failed, declined to 97000 km. only. The Union Ministers of Agriculture, Steel, Irrigation, Power, Chemicals etc. were worried because what would happen to the movement of food grains, coal, oil and other products. Just before the strike, the demand for movement of *rabi* crop from Punjab and Haryana had not yet come up and concentration was on the movement of imported food grains from Bombay, Kandla, Madras and Visakhapatnam to distant areas in Bihar and Assam; during the strike 18,255 wagons of food grains were loaded on a priority basis to the North-Eastern sector which had been badly affected (Hindu, 4th June, 1974). The movement of oil was stopped from refinery to the oil market during the strike.

The strike had different pictures in different Zonal divisions. It started well on 8th May 1974 in the South-Central Railways, but at Secunderabad division it ended on 20th May. In the South-Central Railway it was said that the leaders of trade unions betrayed the strike. There were persons like Shri P. Venkataswaralu, Vice-President of South-Central Railway Employees Union (CITU) and Member of Zonal Coordination Committee of the NCCRS; Shri Saibaba, Zonal Assistant Secretary, South-Central Railway Technical Supervisory Association; Shri Appala Charyya, Vice-President, Station Masters' Council and all other leaders of the Loco Running Staff etc.

In the Central Railways the number of strikers was 1.8 lakhs. The arrest and death of Shri V.S. Mhalgi, the General Secretary of the AIRF, Central Railway in police lock up, the workers became furious and the strike was fairly successful at Bombay V.T. to Jagatpur and Lonavele Section. The other divisions of Central Railway like Bhusawal – the strike continued for three days; Jhansi – three days, Bhopal – two days, Nagpur – one day etc. But, Mr. P.R. Menon, the Working President of AIRF reported that the strike continued well and misled the Central Union and as a result of which the union adopted penal measures against Mr. Menon.

The number of workers, in the Western Railway involved in the strike was 1.8 lakhs. The effect of the strike in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana was least because the state Chief Ministers of these states resisted it strongly. They even stated in response to the Central Government's directives, they know how to handle the illegal harmful and anti-social activities of the workers. They described the strike as '*saberi tamasha*'. In a Punjab town, for instance, residents of a *mohalla* would not let the Railway employees who lived there and was on strike take milk from the local dairy until he had resumed duty (Statesman; May 20th 1974). In these states only 10% of the workers participated in the strike.

In the South-Eastern Railway mainly Kharagpur and Adra divisions the strike was remarkably successful. It started on 8th May and ended on 28th May 1974. In these divisions majority of the CITU leaders belonging to Loco Running Staff Association publicly opposed the strike. The Secretary of AILRSA, Shri S.K. Dhar fled from his headquarter at Anara and stayed 'deep underground' at one of his relative's residence in Calcutta on the plea that the police will shoot him at sight (Biswas; 1977, p. 9). Other party

members like Awatar Singh, Pandu Raju, A. Rama Rao etc. did not participate in the strike. They even along with the police went to the residences of the striking workers and informed the police about the movements of the leaders. CITU leader Mr. S. R. Mohuri, Assistant Secretary, distributed money among the so-called non-striking loyal workers for disrupting the strike. The striking workers were surprised when they heard that General Secretary of All India Station Masters' Association – Mr. A.C. Lahiri; President of Station Master's Association – Mr. P.K. Bhattacharyya went-undetground during the strike period and Mr. Samir Chowdhury, Vice-President of Station Masters' Association helped the Railway management to open the functioning of the stations. And after the strike, he got promotion which itself indicate his treachery (J.M. Biswas; 1974). There were lots of CITU leaders who changed their political colours and joined the Congress Party after the strike, e.g., Shri Chandraya, First Fireman; Bhojudib, Executive Member, LRSA; Shri H.S. Das, Assistant Secretary, LRSA; Driver Loco, Bhojudih; Shri Netai Sen, First Fireman, Bhojudih; Shri N.P. Modak, Guard, Bhojudih etc.

Eastern Railway showed a different picture. The strike was perfectly successful in this region. The workers of Lilooh, Jamalpur, Kanchrapara Workshops and Sealdah, Howrah and Danapur Division widely participated in the strike action. In Calcutta Head Office and other offices 95% of the workers had joined the strike. At Dhanbad Division, the strike was fairly successful. But at the Asansol Division there was no sign of strike except at few places like Andal, Sitarampur etc. At Howrah and Sealdah almost 40% of the workers went back to their duties four or five days before the withdrawal of strike (J.M. Biswas; 1977). The workers of Mughalsarai division faced the most severe repression but the strike was most successful and the workers attained it from the very beginning and fought a heroic struggle.

Here also several incidents of betrayal marked. e.g., Shri Gopal Pandey, Loco Fitter at Ranaghat and Vice-President of Joint Council of Action of Sealdah Division, who was also reputed CITU leader not only stayed outside the strike but also gained cash rewards from the Railway Authority for his anti-strike campaign and Mr. Pandey's son got a job in the railways at the special reference of the General Manager of the Railways (Hindu; 4th June 1974).

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In the Northern Railway, the number of Railway workers, participated in strike was 2 lakhs. In Delhi and Bikanir division the strike started on 8th May and spread to other places also, but except few places like Delhi, the strike was somewhat over on 13th May 1974. The Loco Running Staffs and the other operating staffs did not at all support it and consequently the train services were almost normal. At the end of the strike, i.e., on 28th May, it was seen that only 15% of the workers constituted the striking people. Mainly the majority of the CITU leaders in this Railway division betrayed the striking workers. They were Shri A.S. Bedi, Clerk, Boroda House; Shri Mridul Kumar, Booking Clerk, Meerut City Office; Shri Inder Singh a Clerk at PWI Sadhulapoor etc. who deceived the workers and surprisingly all these peoples were the members of CITU and they earned cash rewards for opposing the strike. It was heard that in Ludhiana Division Loco shed CITU had a strong influence but during the strike none of the CITU men had been absent from their duties (J.M. Biswas; 1977).

In the North Frontier Railways the strike was successful at the beginning, but it was noticed at Tinsukia, Lumding; Alipurduar and Katihar Divisions only from 15th May to 18th May 1974. In this Railway division the CITU leaders were at all less active than like the other right reactionary strike breakers and had created a history of treachery in the entire labour movement in the country. Shri Sunil Ghosh, Welder, New Bongaigaon Workshop Executive Member of JCA, Shri Benoy Chakraborty, Mechanist, Wheel shop, New Bongaigaon – Executive Member of JCA joined their duties from 15th May. Apart from these people, there were other CITU members who opposed the strike in Siliguri – Shri Sunil Bhowal 'A' Grade Fitter, Diesel shed – Vice President, Diesel shed Staff Council; Shri Biren Majumdar, Fitter, Diesel shed – Founder of the Diesel shed Staff Council; Shri Aurobindo Pal, Fitter, Loco shed and Organiser of Loco shed Staff Council came to their duties under police protection. In New Guahati, Shri C.L. Biswas, Trains Clerk, Operating Department and Treasurer Local Action Committee NCCRS with his party members went back and joined their works on 24th May 1974.

Around 25% of North-Eastern Frontier Railway workers were involved in this strike. It started in Lucknow Division on 6th May and continued up to 13th May. At Itanagar Zonal Railways it started on 8th and ended on 23rd of May 1974. The result of the strike was not good because the workers met several repressions. The 'Times of India' and other sources provided the information that the leaders and workers who opposed the

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strike were almost 90% CITU members and more surprisingly the places where the CITU leaders betrayed the striking workers they had a stronghold and influence than other trade unions.

At the Chittaranjan Locomotive Workshop the strike was greatly successful, out of 14 thousand workers, only 850 workers did not join the strike and returned to their works before the withdrawal of the strike. All the thousands of workers of Metropolitan Transport Project (Railway) Calcutta joined the strike and continued to the end. Almost 95% of the workers of the Integral Coach Factory, Perumbur, Madras participated in the strike. In Diesel Locomotive Works, Varanasi strike lasted only for three days. At the Railway Board Office, New Delhi the strike was non-existent.

On 13th May 1974, an important meeting took place at the residence of Shri Khadidkar, Minister of the Union Government, Shri S.A. Dange of the AITUC, Shri Ramamurthy of the CITU, Shri Madhu Limaye, Shri S.M. Joshi and Shri Madhu Dandavate of the Socialist Party amongst other attended the meeting. It discussed the strike situation and evolved a three point formula as a measures for settlement. The three-point formula meant that:

- 1) All leaders and the workers of the Railways held under arrest would be set free;
- 2) the strike would be withdrawn;
- 3) negotiations on the demands of the Railway Workers would be resumed.

(J.M. Biswas; 1977, 9. 16)

On 31st May 1974; the various trade unions functioning in India – AITUC, CITU, UTUC, HMS etc. maintained Solidarity Day. Some leaders of different leftist trade union wings wanted to fulfil their own objective and purposes by using the Railway workers' struggle, calculating the entire situation from wrong political perspective although the strike situations was rapidly deteriorating, and these leaders inculcating false hope amongst the workers to continue the strike for a day or two more which according to them, would result in collapse of the Indian Government (J.M. Biswas; 1977, p. 22).

Most of the left leaders for their own political carrier and interests used the sectarian line of politics. The CITU leaders most of whom opposed the strike, after the

withdrawal of it, tried to propagate against the AITUC but Mr. Fernandes after coming out of jail whole-heartedly welcomed the striking workers irrespective of their political allegiance for cooperating and supporting the strike. He also declared that Railway workers must be alert in future from such false propaganda of trade union leaders who actually were not supportive to the workers and stood all along with the employers. This statement of Mr. Fernandes made the CITU and CPI (M) leaders hostile and in return they started accusing Mr. Fernandes to be the main cause of great damages to the Railway workers took place due to the launching of the strike. Thus, not only the Railwaymen in general but also the several CITU members opposed their opinions and showed their difference with the decision of the Central Trade Union.

The majority members of the NFIR at different Railway zones participated in the strike in spite of the opposition of their Central Organization. This strike had shown a unique feature that a large number of workers employed in the Indian Railways joined the strike and fought for their general demands irrespective of political colour and it was a leading example of democratic unity. As a result of which these workers faced arrests, suspension, dismissal etc. Here the name of Shri Dhanapati Sharma, the Founder Member of N F Railwaymen's Congress and the Vice President of this body must be remembered because he along with his union members supported the strike from the very outset to its end and met serious repression and dismissal of service. We must not forget the united struggle of the Railway workers under the leadership of NCCRS and its Action Committee. It was broad based unity, which was largely supported by the entire organised working class of this country (Biswas; 1977, p. 24).

On the political plane, the aftermath of the Rail strike was bound to put the alignment between the Congress and the CPI to severe strain, a pointer to this was the arrest of Mrs. Parvathi Krishnan, President of the CPI sponsored Indian Federation of Railway Workers on Tuesday at a time when her colleagues were trying desperately hard to find a face saving formula to end the strike, the arrest in these circumstances clearly meant that Mrs. Gandhi was not interested in finding a compromise to solve the conscience of the CPI (TOI, 18th May 1974). Mrs. Gandhi instead of winning confidence of the workers by accepting the acceptable demands made during the pre-strike negotiations went on confrontation course with the Railway workers organised under different trade unions.

Railways were the backbone of the national economy and she crippled it only to show her strength and ability to govern the country. On the two most important demands of the Railwaymen – bonus and wage parity – she did not want even to negotiate at all if she compromised on these two issues with the railwaymen the country could not have to meet such economic loss. It was true that the wages of the Railwaymen in comparison with other public sector undertaking like banks, L I C etc. were remarkably low and they enjoyed over generous wage settlements. Railway strike aggrieved the other government employees and the junior doctors in Delhi who went on strike seeing their wages unfavourable with the bank employees. This strike made the government aware that the public sector employees must have equal scale of pay according to their duties and it must implement overall similar wage policy. But the government took no unified view. In other direction the bonus review Committee engaged in a largely futile exercise to decide whether bonus should be treated as the deferred component of regular wages or as a reward for performance (TOI; May 1974).

The significance of the strike and the decision not to give in was that it might start a new phase in the Government's present production oriented policies more than that it would give the Congress and the country a measure of hope about the Government's seriousness in dealing with the pressing crisis of the day. Not since the days of Congress split when Mrs. Gandhi was fighting for survival, had the government shown such determination in meeting a domestic crisis. It was unfortunate for the Railwaymen that their strike had come at a time when it became necessary for Mrs. Gandhi to prove that she was not a helpless spectator. While the country drifts to economic chaos and political violence, in the words of her Cabinet Colleagues the die is now cast (Singh; May 1974, quoted in Statesman). Mr. George Fernandes also had the opinion that Mrs. Gandhi intended to utilise the Railway strike for declaring National Emergency and wanted to institute a personal dictatorship. Hence, Mr. Fernandes became a symbol of opposition to the Indira government.

Now coming to the question why the strike had to be called off without any settlement? Why was it so despite of the heroic struggle of the working class the strike had to be called off by the NCCRS? The calling off the strike in one way was a retreat in the battle. What were the reasons behind this retreat or what forced them to surrender? The

first and foremost important reason was the utilisation of the violence of the state power, which made the workers weaker and forced them to surrender. AITUC felt that "the government, ruling in the name of democracy, had unleashed its armed forces against unarmed peaceful workers to compel them to work: it looked like the naked dictatorship of the Roman Emperor letting loose their armed soldiers against their slaves who refused to be mere slaves only to work under the whiplash (Siddhanta: 1974, p. 106). The workers wondered about the use of violent repression though they went on for a peaceful struggle to settle their legitimate demands and not to shake the government or to overthrow it. It is not the starvation that broke them, in 20 days no striker was starved into submission it is not just arrests that broke them, never since the days of the freedom movement has India seen 50,000 workers sent to prison in three or four days, but it is not prisons broke them; it is the cumulative effect of this total barbarism of the classes in power that made them think that there was no way out except retreat and when all the efforts for compromise failed when all doors for settlement, all formulas for solution were deadlocked, the workers decided to trek back (Siddhanta: 1974, p. 107).

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Another important reason for the failure of the strike was the inter-trade union rivalry. The different trade unions affiliated to different political parties working in railway front always had tried to make their own base strong and thus, manipulated the workers and confused them about their real objective. During the ensuing period all the central trade union organizations started competing with one another by way of forming them parallel trade unions in one and the same industry; the existence of more than one trade union in the same industry and also in the same unit of the industry owing allegiance to different and sometimes conflicting ideologies further hampered the growth of strong trade union movement (Dhyani; p. 49). In the railway front there were two recognised unions existed only and one of which – the NIFR opposed the strike and made a constant efforts to break it. During the strike it was also observed that within the left socialist front, the majority members and the leaders of CITU betrayed the workers after the commencement of the strike. The question naturally arises why wider unity could not be developed into industry-wise and India-wide or statewide continuous actions (Roy; 1983, p. 223). It was thought that the CITU – so called representative of militant working class movement tried to avoid political confrontation with the ruling government. In the light of the havoc inter union rivalries of regulating collective bargaining by providing for a

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democratic method of picking a truly representative union as the sole bargaining agent (TOI, May 18, 1974).

In spite of the problems, which the strike encountered it was really a powerful document of the strength of the working class. There were, however lots of reasons responsible for the failure of this strike – like the organisational and structural inadequacies and weaknesses were always existed in the preparation and launching the strike. There were also no proper communication system remained among the zonal railways and the central railways. The fund collected for continuing the strike, was not adequate for a general and indefinite strike. Again all the sections of railway workers did not participate in it and the striking workers also faced violent repression, which broke their physical and mental strength. Although these problems remained in the railway front, the workers had shown the potentialities to fight for their legitimate rights and to resist the bourgeois exploitation in the country. In this strike not only the railway workers but also the entire working class had proved their capacity, strength and power to confront the authoritarian rules and bureaucratic power. Railway workers' strike of May 1974, got prominence and importance in the entire history of labour movement because railways, on the one hand, the life blood of the Indian economy and on the other, to some extent, this strike shook the faith and root of the authoritarianism of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government.

Chapter - IV

The Strikers and the State

Introduction

In Chapter III we focused on the activities of the trade unions in the Indian Railways. We also observed how Railwaymen prepared them for an indefinite general strike and how they launched the strike, though the strike had to be called off without any settlement after 20 days. The strike started on 8th May 1974 and was called off on 28th May 1974 and during this period the Railwaymen met with violent repression. In this Chapter, we look at the handling of the strike by the government. How were the strikers dealt with? Here we try to point out the reaction and attitude of the then government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. We also look at the reasons that were responsible for the failure of the strike. We shall see in this regard that one of the reasons for the failure of the strike was the large -scale repression that was resorted to by the state on the strikers. Unable to tolerate the repression the strikers had to call off the strike though there was no settlement. Negotiations failed hence there was no settlement as such.

The main objective of all mass movements in a democracy is to get the demands of the people fulfilled and to restore peace in human life. The beginning and end of every movement is political because it starts with a crisis situation generated and emerged out of the political inadequacies and ends with a political settlement. Political movements were not separate from the socio-economic crisis. All political struggles ultimately lead to socio-economic and political changes and reforms.

The general strike of May 1974 in the Indian Railways was one of the most significant movement in the history of trade unionism in India; in a period of turmoil it stood out as one of the most significant event of the time along with the J.P. Movement. It was one of the movements that preceded the declaration of Emergency in June 1975 (Sherlock 2000; p. 415). The NCCRS observing the ferocity of the government repression unilaterally took the decision to withdraw the strike. Though it is true that NCCRS long before the declaration of the strike wanted to negotiate with the government and the

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ministry to solve the workers' problems. In spite of the repeated demands and the negotiations of the Railwaymen, the government confronted it with all its powers. The black acts of the Defence of India Rule or DIR Act or MISA were utilised heavily by the central government. Indira Gandhi dealt the strike with all its violent repressive measures. Interestingly, the Action Committee of the NCCRS after the withdrawal of the strike started announcing that the Railwaymen never wanted the strike. On the other hand it also paid its salute to the Railwaymen who sacrificed their lives for struggle, e.g., V.S.V. Mhalgi, Sripal Dwivedy, Ramaswamy etc. Among them, Ramaswamy's case could not be forgotten. The running over of a railway engine killed him.

On the other hand, the government viewed the strike not as the matter of industrial relation and dispute but as the threat to its inability to govern the industries and the state administration smoothly. The Central Government declared that the workers of public utility sectors did not have the right to resort to general strike on any issue. It wanted to treat a lesson to the entire working class and the labour movements as a whole through using repressive measures against the workers of Indian Railways. But it was known that the rights to form associations and right to strike were acquired by the workers after years of sufferings and sacrifices. According to the Central Ministry, 'Public Utility Services' were generally meant by those industries and services which were important for welfare and convenient for the general community such as water supply, electricity, telephone, railways, foodstuff etc. The Central Government gave the following justifications: Section 2(a) of Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, which has been substituted for Section 2(g) of the old Trade Disputes Act 1929 enumerates:

- i) any railway service;
- ii) any section of industrial establishment of the workmen employed therein depends;
- iii) any postal, telegraph or telephone service;
- iv) any industry, which supplies power, light or water to the public;
- v) any system of public convey or sanitation; and
- vi) any industry as specified in Schedule III, which if the appropriate government may if satisfied that public interest so require by the notification declare to be public utility service for the purpose of this Act.

The industries specified in schedule III are transport (other than railway) for carriage of passengers or goods by land, water, or air, banking, cements, cotton textiles,

food stuff, iron and steel, defence establishments, hospitals and dispensaries and fire brigade service (Dhyani; p. 153).

The government though partially interfered in the strike but not to solve the industrial dispute but because of its responsibility to run the railways smoothly and to support the employers. The Indira government treated the strike as a political strike and not a product of the workers' grievances. From the government's point of view there was no option but to treat it as a political challenge and try to disengage it from the aspiration of the rest of the population, the strike was portrayed as a selfish grab by a privileged labour movement manipulated by cynical and ambitious politicians (Sherlock 2001; p. 418). The government's arguments were well summarised by the Planning Commission's publication known as "Yojana". It asserted that with no one to "speak for the countless millions who have no jobs to stay away from the nation was heading for a confrontation between organised labour and the people" (Yojana 1974; p. 3). The strike, it was said, openly, intended to paralyse the nation's economy when the country was facing a crisis the like of which we did not have even during the war (Sherlock 2001; p. 418). The government wanted to focus that the real reason behind the strike was the influence of the opposition political leaders. Mrs Gandhi was of the opinion that the opposition leaders were not at all concerned about the well being of the railway workers and were utilising them for their own interests. L.N. Mishra branded Mr. George Fernandes, as "political adventurist". Fernandes gave a justification for the present attitude of the government that the trade unions were not at all interested to keep their popularity but to secure the socio-economic and political rights of the workers and the railway workers were not fighting a political strike but they were fighting for their own legal and reasonable demands related to wage, allowances, bonus, working hours, working condition etc.

One opinion regarding the strike is that the government used highhandedness in order to suppress the strike because of its commitment to the World Bank. Before the strike, a few months ago the World Bank sanctioned a loan of \$ 80 million for the development of Indian Railways. But the World Bank had declared that it must be associated with the drastic change in the railway administration, and it wanted to be satisfied that railways must have the organisational strength to carry out the developmental schemes. Government, on the other hand, observed that the working efficiencies of the railway workers, steel plant, rolling stocks etc. had suffered from great losses because of

several strikes in the last few years. And because of this the situation and the performance of the Indian Railway suffered. But the Railway Ministry did not respond to the several threats of strike of the railwaymen before it commenced. Mishra, the Railway minister was busy with Bihar Politics because General Elections were knocking at the door and he prepared the groundwork there, thus, he had no time to deal with the problem and take some constructive measures to minimise the discontentment among the Railway workers.

Several months before the strike the railway trade unions announced their grievances and demands but no one – the management and the government did not take it seriously. After the strike started the government in order to get the loan of \$80 million from the World Bank resorted to the heavy repression to prevent the strike.

The Times of India while commenting on the stalemate on the strike noted: "In the current controversy between the government and the NCCRS the real issues, which are economic have recorded to the background, the result is a great deal of sentimental claptrap about the humiliation of railway workers and their leaders and confused thinking about adverse effects on railway efficiency" (TOI, May 28 1974).

The government had argued from the very beginning that it already afforded the burden of extra expenditure of Rs. 80 crores per year spent as concession for the Railway workers. Mr. Fernandes however argued that the Indian Railway workers had contributed Rs. 3000 crores to their capital formation during the last twenty years and that they cannot, therefore, plead paucity of funds (TOI, May 28 1974). A railway development fund was also created by the yearly contributions from the railway revenues and was used for the development of freight capacity, locomotives controlling, growing traffics etc. From the period of independence, this fund had been working efficiently but for last few years the balances of the railways had to borrow from the central government. George Fernandes raised this question that what were the reasons behind the poor condition of the development fund? Fernandes also countered by pointing out that the uneconomic services of the railways was because of the changing policies of the government. The Railway Ministry, on the other hand indicated to the social burden of the railways which also cost the loss of 75 Crores due to their disruption of passenger services and of the internal labour problems. It, thus, blamed Mr. Fernandes that having the knowledge of all these problems he and his colleagues had been increasingly raising their voice in favour of raising fares to meet the cost of services of the passenger trains. The Railway Management

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also felt that the demand of the railway workers to increase their wages to keep pace with the increasing productivity was not illegal but they must show their efficiency and capacity to improve productivity. They further argued that the improved performance of the railways had been largely made possible by more efficient means of traction, sophisticated operational gear and improved communications and not by better output on the part of the average workers, in fact, the country has not get the return that was its due for the money invested in the modernization of the Indian Railways either in the form of growth of freight and passenger traffic or a reduction in the wage bill as a reflection of the diminution in the strength of the work force (TOI, May 28 1974). As to the workforce a 10,000 Kms Zonal railway in this country employs, nearly two lakh workers while a line with a similar length in an advanced country is run by one sixth that number, these figures give idea of gap in productivity that needs to be made up (TOI May 28 1974).

The Railway Management also held that whatever Mr. Fernandes and his colleagues might say they cannot ignore the fact that there is a scarcity of resources to meet the two main demands of the NCCRS; i.e., the payments of bonus and parity of wages with those prevailing in other public sector enterprises (TOI, May 28 1974). The newspaper felt that it was true that at that period for the central government it was quite difficult to bring wage parity among the various categories of jobs in various public sector industries. The most sensible course on the government was to appoint a national commission on wages and prices and accept in principle a productivity-based bonus for railwaymen, the details of which can be worked out by a committee consisting of the representatives of the railway unions and the Union Ministry of Railways (TOI, May 28 1974).

In order to counter the claim of the unions the government on the other hand claimed that the Railway workers raised their voice and gave slogan like 'cripple the railway in order to cripple the centre'.

The workers branded the officials as the enemies of the working class and they were *gheraoed* frequently when they asked the workers to put on their uniforms. The President of AIRF Mr. Fernandes seemed and perhaps wanted to put an end to this anarchical position of the Railways. There were sectarian and factional problems, which

were becoming day by day very acute in the Railway organisation. But the management or the government did not pay their attention to solve these problems and only dealt with their sectional demands.

During the strike, the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi gave a statement that the Railwaymen did not have any case for bonus, and the government was not in a position to bear another burden of paying bonus at that point of time of national economy. And above all she directed the administrations of the country and the state governments to take measures to protect the properties of the Railways. She knew also that the strike would cause the national economy a great loss and therefore, she firmly opposed it and dealt it with repressive steps. Mrs. Gandhi expressed that the strike was precipitated on various issues including bonus to harass the government and disrupt the economy and not so much for the genuine interests of the Railwaymen (Statesman, Calcutta, May 1974). Mr. Qureshi the then Union Deputy Labour Minister stated that the government agreed on the issues of reduction in working hours and a fixed pay scales for casual labour and they were to be employed in projects of workshops, wagon departments and loco etc. Mr. Fernandes was of the opinion that though some progress on working hour or decasualisation of workers had been made but the government did not discuss the most important issues of bonus, wage parity and question of victimization.

The strike of the other central government employees miserably failed and thus was called off on 10th May. The industrial relations in the Railways were at a dead end and no one knew how to get and move on (TOI; 9th April 1974). Two aspects of the Railway strike provide fascinating glimpses into the moves of Delhi politics. On the eve of the strike the Congress members were more concerned over elections to the Parliamentary Party than over its consequences. Secondly, since it became clear that Mrs. Gandhi had made up her mind to meet the strike head on, party members accepted the decisions as immutable; there was nothing they could do about it. There was a third interesting fact that was much commented upon in Parliaments' lobbies and it was on the personality of the Railway Minister Mr. L N Mishra. His supporters tried to convince him that the decision to arrest Mr. Fernandes and other leaders of NCCRS was taken without Mishra's knowledge and it intended to harm him.

Moreover, from this time, the government started taking recourses to suppress the movement bitterly. All India Radio's announcements confused the strikers in the way that if the trains were not running in the southern sector it declared that they were, the government also declared the strike as anti people because for this strike people could not move conveniently and due to this strike the train services were disrupted hence many social ceremonies and functions like marriage were to be cancelled. A Central Railway spokesman in Bombay reported on 24th May that 217 local trains were running but a visit to Victoria Terminus revealed that the scheduled chalked on a black board showed only 54 services operating (Sherlock 2001; p. 866). Northern Railway officials similarly generalised by saying that 'there has been such improvement in passengers as well as goods trains' (TOI; May 13 1974), reporters at New Delhi Station however, found that that only 4 out of 59 booking clerks were coming to work and the only counters open were staffed by senior management who had been working continuously for thirty six hours (TOI; May 13 1974).

The strike was fought on two fronts. The governments' success was to depend on its ability to keep supply of essential goods moving. This was thought to be achieved by employing emergency moves and giving protection to non-striking workers apart from making use of road transport. Secondly, it was felt by the government that the battle would be half won if it has public sympathy on its side (Singh; 1974, May 9 Statesman). Government viewed the 'strike as a political offensive of the opposition because the Lok Sabha general election was then knocking the door and therefore, the strike became a fight between government and trade unions. Mrs. Gandhi took the strike action as a means to lead the country out of the present economic and inflationary crisis and to arrest stagnation in industrial growth. She also tried to put an end to the industrial disputes and restore industrial peace.

The government utilised brute force to resist the strike. The Central Reserve Police Force arrested hundreds of workers throughout the country. The Central Reserve Police and the Border Security Force had carried out what they described as "Operation DLW" to force the workers back to their jobs in the factory (Sherlock 2001; p. 382). The police asked women in one Railway colony that if she wanted to see her husband alive she must send him to work. During the strike days the demonstrations were met with teargas, *lathi*

charge, bayonet etc. The workers were beaten poorly by the police and dragged them to the Railway workshops. The old men and women with the babies were taken out from their houses and thrown them from the top of the bridge over the embankment. The little daughters and sons were beaten by *lathis* and bayonets by the police and the Congress hooligans and any resistances on the part of the workers met with firing and *lathi* charge. The administration became insane and mad and lost all its humanity by beating and arresting children and womenfolk indiscriminately from the Railway colonies. Government took the help of 750,000 paramilitary troops; Provincial Armed Constabulary 6,00,000 Central Reserve Police etc. to break the mental and physical strength of the workers. The cruel part of these tortures was the barbarous attack on the families of the Railway workers, particularly their womenfolk, who have refused to be cowded down by police terror (Siddhanta 1974; p. 91).

The NCCRS after considering the facts decided to call off the strike. But George Fernandes issued a statement from jail saying "Remember there can be no settlement if our demands for parity and bonus are not met. Keep fighting. You must win this fight" (Patriot; May 1974).

On the fifteenth day of the strike an enquiry committee was appointed. On 27th May 1974 at last the NCCRS unilaterally took the decision to call off the strike from 6 a.m. of 28th May 1974. NCCRS gave its salute to the glorious struggles of the Railwaymen who showed their mental strength with courage and determination. NCCRS was compelled to take the decision because, more than 50,000 workers had been illegally arrested, over 10,000 workers were served dismissal orders; over 30,000 were thrown out of their houses with bag and baggage with their helpless wives and innocent children, women being raped by police. Adding to this according to trade union sources— over 20,000 workers were prosecuted under the DIR for joining the strike; 10 lakhs railwaymen faced break in service, 30,000 permanent workers were dismissed from their services, 50,000 casual workers had not been taken back on their jobs. And so-called loyal workers were rewarded with special increments, preferential treatment, and appointment of their children, which led to the permanent tension and better relationship between the workmen. All these caused the unions to withdraw the strike in order to restrict the governments' repression.

But the government published some stories in order to defend its actions. It propagated that the power lines were cut, fishplates were loosened or removed, fire dropped from steam engines, signals and rolling stocks were set on fire (Sherlock 2001; p. 402). It was not possible to enquire and rectify the individual incidents; it seemed that the officials fabricated and exaggerated the events to discredit the strikers and used them as a means for justification of their repressive measures and tortures over the workers. Indira Gandhi's government utilised all possible state powers to compel the Railwaymen to surrender unconditionally on May 28, 1974.

State repression was so severe on the working class and their unions in this country that after the strike was called off the immediate tasks of the unions became to:

- i) to fight against the victimization;
- ii) to maintain unity among all the railway federations;
- iii) to organise relief works for the victimized workers and their families; and
- iv) to organise the workers for more unified struggle in a new way.

The other important tasks of the railway trade unions were to

1. fight against the wage freeze;
2. fight against index band;
3. fight against the artificial scarcity of food;
4. protect trade union rights;
5. unite all the railway trade unions existed in Indian Railways;
6. link the industrial labours with the agricultural labours in order to launch the joint action in the country;
7. take the initiative for uniting all the workers – industrial and agricultural – as a class irrespective of their caste, creed, race, political colour etc.
8. Carry out new objectives of the workers and to launch united movement by building united class. For this purpose the trade unions must educate the workers and make them conscious about their political rights. Therefore, they must establish schools and develop literatures for the workers (Dange; 1974).

After the strike, the main task of the unions was to get all those thousands of victimised railway workers back to their jobs to maintain unity, to regroup and to recognise the forces; the bureaucrats of the Railway Board. The bureaucrats at different levels of the Railway administrations tried the weapon of victimization to behead the militant leadership of the workers (Dange 1974; p. 49). Above all, the government did not even wanted to

negotiate with the NCCRS. Therefore, the NCCRS utilized the AIRF's representation to motivate the government on the issues of victimizations and restoring outstanding demands. At the same time it tried to keep the united platform for all the railwaymen including the category unions, workers of unrecognised sectors etc. The trade unions, which had lost their popularity, regained it by supporting the railway strike throughout the strike period and regained its earlier position.

The NCCRS called upon all railwaymen to:

- (i) advise the NCCRS at all levels and to constitute its Committees where they may not yet have been set-up and rid those communities of strikebreakers;
- (ii) hold conventions of railwaymen at all levels under the auspices of the NCCRS;
- (iii) to observe a Protest Week from 22 to 26 July against the repression by holding rallies, demonstrations, organisation of *dharnas*, wearing badges etc. and to demand a negotiated settlement on the charter of demands; and
- (iv) take all steps at every level to provide relief to workmen who have become victims of the railway administration's anti-trade union moves (Siddhanta; 1974, p. 113).

It was quite surprising that in spite of the several requests of the recognised unions of the country and even the unions working in foreign countries, the government did not respond to any of them. In a democratic country like India, it was much regretful that during Mrs. Gandhi's reign such undemocratic incidents took place. Only within 25 years of independence the vast number of working mass of the country faced another imperialist force only because they wanted to keep some of their legal demands and class interests through the means of democratic struggle. The biggest ever action of the Indian working class – the twenty days long strike by the two million railwaymen ended in an apparent defeat but yielded invaluable insight into the present political situation (Marxist Review; June 1974). Though the withdrawal of the strike marked the victory of the capitalist role of the Congress administration, but it also shook, to some extent the root of authoritarianism in India.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we would present a brief summary of the entire study and then come to a conclusion.

In the first Chapter, we observed that, industrialisation in India started in the mid-1850s with the establishment of the railways. After the introduction of the railways other industries such as, cotton textiles, coal, plantations, jute etc. were set up gradually in the colony. Prior to the setting up of the industries the main intention of the Europeans was the collection of raw materials at cheaper rates from the colonies and selling the finished goods at high rates in the colonial markets. Therefore, India mainly became the producer and exporter of raw materials. Apart from British capital that was established in Indian industries there were several industries that were also owned by the Indian communities like Parsis, Gujratis, Marwaris, Bengalis etc. The fact that was however noticed was that with the development of trade economy there was a gradual decline of India's traditional economy (including traditional handicrafts) and thus began the commercialisation of agricultural economy.

In the second section of this chapter we discussed the initiative that the British took in building of the railways in the colonies. We have noted that this was done for developing the communication system of the colony but they wanted to establish their stronghold over the colonial administration by connecting all the important administrative centres through the railways on the one hand, and on the other, they wanted to collect raw materials from the remote agricultural places and sent them to the port towns for export. Another significant cause was that the British wanted to get the maximum benefit from the British capital investment in India. The British industrialists found the virgin market in India to sell their products required in the process of railway construction. The heavy industrial products required for the construction of the railways were brought from Britain. The ships, which carried the materials necessary for railway building, indirectly

benefited from the construction of the railways. We have also noted that the railway industry not only brought changes in the agricultural centres but also brought changes in the life of the people in rural India.

In the third section of the chapter we looked at the industrialisation process and the class that it gave birth to. The development of capitalist economy provided the path for the emergence of a new class of people – the industrial working class. The village dwellers mainly the landless agricultural labourers and sharecroppers who were bonded to the *Mahajan's* (money lenders) or the *Zamindar's* (land lords) rushed to the cities and joined the industries for securing jobs. But one interesting feature of the early industrial workers of India was that they did not break their link and relation totally with the villages. These people usually went back to their homeland in the sowing, harvesting and threshing seasons. Therefore, during these seasons, there was immense scarcity of workers in the industries. The traditional handicraft and cottage industries of India gradually lost its significance and the workers also had lost their skills because they were forced to join the machine-based industries to keep the interests of the European products. We have seen that the first generation of Indian industrial workers suffered a lot, as they did not know the handling of the machines. Again there were no limitation on the working hours and the working conditions were also unhealthy. The wages paid to them was not at all enough to maintain a livelihood.

In the last section of the chapter we tried to locate the condition of the railway workers, which was also the same as the condition of the workers of other industries. Railway construction was highly a labour intensive process and India was a densely populated country, thus, the British companies easily got their required number of workers. Railway construction process required two types of workers – skilled and unskilled. The unskilled labourers were heavily drawn from the neighbouring villages and were often described as unreliable since at time they fled from their worksites, because they had a strong tie with their villages. The skilled labourers were mainly the mobile section of the working class as they were sent from Bengal Province to Punjab or Karachi. The living conditions of these workers were very poor. Sen points out that “more than one family were made to be huddled in one room and that two without ventilation and sanitary

arrangement (Sen: 1997; p. 41). We have seen that the railway workers lived in inhuman conditions and they were treated as 'semi slaves' during the colonial rule till independence.

The second Chapter of this study dealt with industrialisation of the country after independence. People throughout the country expected that many changes would take place in India. Changes, in fact took place in political, economic and social fields, but not in the lives and conditions of the working class of Indian industries. In the industrial spheres Indian government launched many new policies and resorted to the Five Year Plans. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru brought several changes in the industrial policies of India mainly from the Second Five Year Plan onwards which heavily emphasised on industrialisation of the country because he believed that rapid industrial growth could only bring drastic and rapid development in national economy. But surprisingly, although the Planners worked so much on industrial growth but in the infrastructure sectors there was no good amount of investment found without which rapid industrial development was not possible. The private entrepreneurs were reluctant to invest in these sectors. It was clear, hence, that economic growth had been immensely depended on the political decision making process of a country. As the Public sector industries, the railways got some more importance as it had helped in carrying raw materials from the remote villages to the urban centres and supplying finished products to the markets for consumption. That is why nearly a quarter of the total outlay of our Second Five Year Plan was allotted to the Railways (Saxena, 1963 : p. xv).

In the third section, we have discussed the sufferings and problems of the industrial workers in India since independence till 1975. We have noted that there were many reasons for their grievances and problems. Political power was vested in the hands of the Indian capitalists and landlord classes whose interests went against the interests of the workers. Independence brought inflationary crisis in India and the rise in prices of daily commodities, and with this declined the real wages of the workers. Indian Planners totally ignored the interests of the working classes in the first three Plans, which made the workers dissatisfied with their employers. During this time the trade unions, which had their existence since the pre-independence period, like All India Trade Union Congress, and the unions that was launched by and affiliated to the Congress started getting prominence in the bargaining process between the management and the workers. We have

also seen that the recommendations of the first three Central Pay Commissions aggrieved the workers again because these recommendations went against the workers' interests.

In the last section we found that since independence the railway industry suffered from over burden of the workers because after partition, the skilled railway workers like blacksmiths, drivers, firemen etc. who were mainly Muslims went to Pakistan and the workers those who came to India were only the office clerks. Another reason was that in many regions new railway lines were to be constructed because a portion of rail lines and stations went to East and West Pakistan. Thus the government had to invest for railway construction and the working class from the very beginning suffered in the hands of the management because of their ignorance. However, Indian Railways was the single largest nationalised employer in the World employing 15 lakhs of regular and 2.8 lakhs of casual labourers. Although Indian Railway is the biggest public sector organisation – running 11 thousand trains per day – its low rate of pay scale associated with the decreased productivity of the workers was the reason for their discontentment. The main reason for the workers' grievance in the railways was that the workers in other public sector undertakings, could negotiate with their employers on the question of wages, but the railway workers who were treated as central government employees and thus were bound by the decisions of the Pay Commission. The pay commissions were however not able to provide justice to the workers. Consequently, the railway workers organised themselves to make aware the management about their grievances and formed trade unions like, All India Railwaymen's Federation or AIRF and National Federation of Indian Railwaymen or NFIR – both of which had pre-independence origins. The leftist leaders like Jay Prakash Narayan, V.V. Giri etc., led the former and the Congress led the latter. There were some other trade unions that existed in zonal and local levels, but they all were affiliated to one of these two central unions. There were several reasons, which dissatisfied the railway workers, e.g., apart from the wage, the Third Pay Commission that submitted its report in 1973 combined the dearness allowances and the salary and presented it as the revised pay scale. On the other hand, the living and working conditions of the workers were also inhuman. The different sections of the railway workers such as loco running staffs also became agitated because Indianisation of service led to a decline in their position and made them continuous staff instead of intensive staff following a strict limit to the working hour.

All these factors instigated all sections of workers to launch protest movements against the railway management and the government.

In the first section of the third Chapter, we discussed about the activities of the trade unions that existed in the Indian Railways and their preparation for launching a mass struggle. The two most important trade unions were, the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) – the workers branded the latter as the official strikebreaking unit. It never helped the workers to fetch their legitimate demands from the employers as it was related to Congress Parliamentary Party so it never went against any decision or policies of the central government. To remain in position, due to its patronage to the ruling party, NFIR always tried to secure the loyalty of the workers; the workers could not demand but request the leaders of NFIR to get their needs fulfilled. Therefore, NFIR did not want to solve the workers' problems from its roots. But AIRF faced major difficulties since it was in opposition to the ruling party. If it wanted to retain in its position it must launch a mass movement and bring new leadership to influence all the sections of the workers. But AIRF knew that it was not capable of launching any mass movement on its own because it lacked mass support base due to its failure of securing any constructive demand of the railway workers. As a result AIRF engaged itself in convincing other unions that existed in different public sector undertakings to launch united working class movements. The central government employees including the railway workers led two big strikes in 1960 and 1968. The success of the struggle of the loco running workers under the name of All India Loco Running Staff Association or AILRSA in 1972, made the recognised unions uneasy as they were able to motivate the central government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi who agreed to meet the demands of reduction in working hour from 14-12 of the loco running staffs. Now AIRF brought new leadership to influence the workers – Mr. George Fernandes who was also a prominent labour leader in Bombay. Mr. Fernandes and some other leaders of different trade unions met in 1973 and decided to launch a general strike from April 1974 that was later postponed to May 1974.

In the second section of the third Chapter, we discussed the nature of the railway workers strike of 1974. From 8th May 1974 the railway workers fought the biggest struggle that ever took place in the history of labour movement in the country. It ended on 20th

May 1974 when it was called off by the unions. The railway workers were highly united and well known for their united performance and strength. We have noticed that the NFIR from the very first moment of the strike began opposing it. However, the main objectives of the struggle were parity in wages, bonus, reduction in working hours, etc. But the anti-labour and anti-people policies of the government drastically cut the facilities of the workers. The Joint Council for Action was formed in the name of the National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's struggle to direct and organise the movement. But the fund required for a general and indefinite strike was inadequate but still, the NFIR had no option other than to launch a strike.

In this Chapter, we also looked at the impact of the strike. How severe was the strike? The Railway strike of May 1974 had far reaching impact on the national economic and political spheres. The strike, which could be settled through negotiations ultimately took place because the government was adamant. In early 1970s up to 1975, there was stagnation in industrial production, thus, the government wanted to remove this stagnation. The Railways had lost 500 Crores during the strike period. As railway services was considered as a public utility service, the strike caused severe inconvenience to the passengers from one place to another and also in the movement of goods. Power supply in several regions in India like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. was disrupted because oil tankers could not move during the strike.

In the fourth and final chapter we talked about how the government handled the strike? We found that the government resorted to brute force on the workers who were in strike. The railway workers faced violent repression used by the then government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The Railway Minister, Mr. L.N. Mishra was incapable of solving the problem and could not therefore solve it. Mrs. Gandhi justified the action by arguing that the government was not in a position to bear any more burden of bonus or provide wage parity. Therefore, Mrs. Gandhi handled the strike strongly. Thousands of workers were arrested, dismissed from their jobs, beaten bitterly, the families of the striking workers also faced police tortures. Mrs. Gandhi resorted to paramilitary forces, special security force and several black acts of Defence India Rule, Maintenance of Internal Security Act etc. to resist the strike.

During our discussion we also found that one reason for the failure of the strike was that some trade union leaders particularly belonging to the CITU betrayed the railway workers in different local and zonal railway front. The NFIR did not support it as well from the very beginning. Therefore, the NCCRS had to call off the strike and withdraw it on 28th May. After the strike was called off, trade unions realised their organisational and structural deficiencies and felt that their immediate task was maintaining unity among all the trade unions – local, zonal, central so that they can organise workers for bigger struggles.

Though the strike failed to secure its demands but it was the biggest struggle even fought by the Indian working class. Interestingly, after the strike till to date such a struggle of the working class could not be traced out. It could be justified in two ways that; if the workers were satisfied with their wages; terms and conditions of the services and other facilities; or, the working class of India had lost its consciousness to lead any general struggle for their own legitimate demands and needs against the capitalist exploitation in modern India.

By way of conclusion it can be said that the Indian Railwaymen's strike was not an ordinary or normal incidence of administration. The strike, on the one hand, had shown the attitude of the government and the railway management towards the workers and on the other, the immaturity of the trade union leaders to prepare themselves for a general mass movement. The strike of the railwaymen was organised and fought by the fighting sections of the railwaymen at the grass root level. It was launched because the Railway Board deprived them of the right of collective bargaining by initiating negotiations only with the two Federations recognised by it (Mainstream, June 15, 1974). After the strike the government also brought several changes in its policies related to industrialisation and industrial working class. Therefore, it could be said that apparently, the strike failed but to some extent it was able to influence the government. The railway workers for a long time had suffered from several difficulties, we could not say that the strike brought overnight changes still the strike strengthened the position of the workers. Industrial relations in the Indian society focus on the contradictions among the powers of the workers, management and the government. The railway workers showed their power and potentiality to shift the balance of power to retain their autonomy. After this strike the managements of other

industries and the government towards all the public sector industries throughout the country took positive measures. Even contract and casual labourers got some considerations from the government.

The trade unions of the railways therefore had provided the workers their necessary platform through which they could express their grievances. Faced with frustration of a powerless union and mounting discontent, large number of railway workers took up the banner of independent unrecognised unions that actually forced the kind of actions that resorted the capacity of their colleagues to exercise power of workers (Sherlock: 2001, p. 474).

The railway workers' strike of 1974 was a very uncommon fact in the history of Indian trade union and labour movement. This was the first time the railway workers irrespective of political colours, who were the representatives of Indian industrial working class – participated in the strike which gave them an extra constitutional strength and self confidence to face violent repression. Though trade unions in which they were organised and the consciousness of the workers were in their elementary stage, but they grew and reached its maturity in the later years. The government also became mature and handled strikes with care and redressed workers' grievances and industrial disputes sensitively in future years.

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ANNEXURE I

The Railway General Strike by T N Siddhanta, AITUC Publication, New Delhi.

(Select Portions)

THE STRIKE

Thus the strike, which became inevitable as result of pre-emptive arrests in the midst of negotiations started as scheduled from 6 hours of 8 May 1974. It was indeed the biggest strike action of the Indian working class in the post-independence period. Never before such a gigantic strike of railway workers covering all unions and categories throughout the sixty thousand kilometres of the railway system took place. In recent periods there had been strike in 1960 and one-day strike in 1968. But these were small events compared to the vast sweep of this strike. The long eluding unity established through the NCCRS and economic crisis accompanied by galloping prices and inflation brought the railway men in general including in many places the supervisory staff in the 20-day old strike. The unity imparted confidence and hope of victory in the railway workers and drawn in all those who never before went on strike. Even though organizational preparations for the massive strike, which would last for about three weeks, were indifferent, the strike was a big success. Long drawn strike in the vast railway system involving lakhs of workers divided in innumerable categories with uneven development of organization, consciousness and experience should be distinguished from a strike in any factory or in one particular industry.

Never before had the Government used its repressive machinery and the mass communication media in such wide a scale to suppress the strike. Arrests continued throughout the strike running into many thousands, both under MISA and DIR. Though to them a new experience, the railwaymen braved the ordeal with courage and determination. Even the family members of the striking workers were not spared, and were subjected to intimidation, harassment by the police. The railway colonies were special targets of the police and the Government behaved as it were a war against the railway workers.

Strike in the workshops has been spectacular and in many places even chief foreman participated in the strike. Workshop workers held out to the last and despite weakening in other departments and sections, defections in the workshops have been the least. Even temporary and casual workers, whose security of job is most vulnerable, plunged in the strike along with others.

The performance of the various key categories whose role is vital to the running of the railway system has not been uniform in all the railways. In fact, their performance varied from one zone to another, even from one division to another on the same zonal railway. This happened despite the fact that most of the key categories are organized in all-India category unions and excepting the Loco Running Staff Association, these are all organized in an all-India Confederation. Even the best organized among them, the Loco Running Staff Association which demonstrated its strength and organizational cohesion during the strikes of 1973, showed visible weaknesses in many places. Various local factors, lack of coordination with the industrial unions and lingering inhibitions against the AIRF leadership were perhaps responsible for this erratic performance of different categories on different zonal railways and centres.

After arrests started on May 2 morning sporadic strikes took place in some centres and in Southern Railway the strike started from 3rd May instead of the scheduled 8th. The spontaneous strikes in some centres, which were allowed and in certain places encouraged, to linger, acted in fact as non-starter for the strike, which was scheduled to start on 8 May. In some centres the all-India strike instead of commencing on 8th in fact ended on 8th or before 8th. This isolationist and uncoordinated action due to uncontrolled enthusiasm was a positive factor in the respective places and areas in weakening the morale of the striking workers.

The railwaymen have given a great battle with courage and militancy, despite the entire state repressive machinery arranged against them. They exercised their right to strike and held on for sufficiently long period for winning their demands, and not to challenge the authority of the State or dislodge the Government. The railway strike laid bare once again the ugly face of bourgeois democracy, which is democracy for the bourgeoisie and dictatorship for the workers. The railwayman has come out of the strike as a new worker with new consciousness and outlook. They had to retreat as in every battle there is such contingency, in face of superior force of the state. They have to regroup and reorganize their forces based on rich experiences of this strike. In the working class movement no strike is the last strike.

DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE STRIKE

Within a week of the strike the 13-member Action Committee of the NCCRS was further denuded of its members as a result of continuing arrests and reduced to only 5 members. The section of AIRF leadership, which was outside refused to allow replacement of the arrested members of the Action Committee by the respective constituent organisations leaving the question of Convenor ship undisturbed.

V.B. Karnik as a "motely crowd" has described the Action Committee. But the "motely crowd" had definite divergent political trends, outlook and approach.

From the very beginning, even at the time of negotiations two lines were operating – one wanting a deadlock and the other wanting a settlement. The railway bureaucrats and the reactionaries in the Government lent their hands in ultimately sabotaging the process of negotiations and possibilities of a settlement, and forcing the strike on the workers.

THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION IN LOK SABHA AND PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY

On the second day of the railway strike on 9 May and penultimate day before the Lok Sabha adjourned, all opposition parties brought in a no-confidence motion, which was debated late in the night of 9th May.

In course of her reply to the debate the Prime Minister made some statements on wage rationalisation and accepted in principle the necessity of bringing about rationality in the wages structure. The Prime Minister said: "We know that the wage structure in the country is not what it should be. We know that there is a great deal of injustice in this. It is riddled with anomalies and contradictions and, in the olden days, there was a bias against labourer and worker. We have done a great deal to correct this. It does not mean that we

have got rid of this contradiction or that we have come to a satisfactory stage. I do realise that it is absolutely necessary to bring about some rationality. But this is a tremendous task in a matter which cannot be done overnight. Because, it has to be done without causing too much dislocation. At the same time, the matter is under the earnest consideration of the government and I shall certainly welcome any constructive suggestions which the Hon. Members from here or any body from outside would like to give.”

But on the demand of the striking railwaymen of wages parity, she said: “And we cannot even say that ‘no’ we agree or principle because then it opens the door to doing this for many other sections.”

Nonetheless, the necessity of examining the wages structure as a whole, to remove anomalies and contradictions and to bring about rationality was admitted. Many including Madhu Limaye, saw a ray of light in this statement of the Prime Minister giving room for way out of the impasse in regard to one of the major unsettled demands of the NCCRS.

S.A. Dange in his letter of 21 May 1974 to the Prime Minister said: “As regards the argument and settlement on other problems, involved in the dispute, we can take the points made in your speech in Parliament and the points already settled as the new starter for resumption and completion of the negotiations...”

THE THREE POINT FORMULA

The idea of the so-called formula of simultaneous withdrawal of strike, release and resumption of negotiation emerged non-officially in course of the meeting the opposition parties’ leaders had with the Prime Minister and some other Cabinet Ministers on the 10th May morning. The Prime Minister being not a proposal given by the Government first disowned the formula. But subsequently, the Government owned it. The opposition party leaders in a joint communication intimated the Action Committee of the three-point formula. In its meeting held on 11 May the Action Committee rejected the formula, but agreed to resume negotiation without any precondition.

The Resolution of the Action Committee of 11 May is reproduced below

“The indefinite strike of railwaymen has entered the fourth day. The Action Committee of the NCCRS hails the heroic struggle, which the railwaymen are continuing with great determination. The reports received by the Action Committee from various parts of the country show that mad with the unprecedented success of the strike, the governmental machinery has intensified their repressive measures, against the women folks of railwaymen who are being harassed and tortured. *Lathi* charge on women folk was resorted to in various places. Railwaymen and their families are being evicted from their allotted quarters from railway colonies with the help of police and CRP. Indiscriminate arrests are continuing.

“The Action Committee strongly condemns these repressive measures which have surpassed all previous records. The Action Committee calls upon the railwaymen to continue the strike with greater unity and determination till a just settlement is reached on their demands.

“The Action Committee discussed today a letter received from leaders of various Opposition parties in Parliament who had met the Prime Minister yesterday to discuss the situation arising out of the railway strike.

“The suggestion made by the leaders on Opposition parties in their meeting with the Prime Minister that all the arrested leaders and railwaymen be released and negotiations be resumed at the point they were broken off is in line with the thinking of the Action Committee.

“The leaders have also informed us that from the Government side the proposal made for a solution of the present dead-lock is that there should be a simultaneous implementation of the following three-point formula:

- i) Release of the arrested leaders of the NCCRS;
- ii) Resumption of negotiations; and
- iii) Withdrawal of the strike.

“The Action Committee after considering this three-point formula has reached at the following conclusions:

1. The three-point formula is unworkable and hence unacceptable.
2. The Action Committee wants to make it clear that in the present position the withdrawal of strike is out of question;
3. At the same time, the Action Committee is in favour of a negotiated settlement of the dispute and is prepared to participate in any negotiations if there is any offer for the same from the Government”

Even before the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Political Affairs Committee members and the leaders of opposition parties in both Houses of Parliament took place, George Fernandes issued a statement from jail saying: “Remember there can be no settlement if our demands for parity and bonus are not met. Keep fighting. You must win this fight”

(Patriot, 11-5-1974).

The rejection of the three-point formula further hardened the attitude of the Government. In subsequent periods while the strike gradually began to lose its momentum and apparently weakened, the Government remained totally unmoved to all attempts of getting it agreed to some sort of a formula to end the stalemate and to bring about a settlement of the strike.

According to the evaluation of the Railway strike made by V.B. Karnik (The Economic Times, 22 June 1974)

“the leaders of the strike committed a grave blunder when they refused to accept the so-called three point formula...”

“The formula”, according to him “provided an honourable method to draw back...”
Another trade union leader of Bombay has characterised the rejection of the three-point formula as losing a “golden opportunity” to settle the strike (The Economic Times, 23 June 1974).

It should, however, be remembered that when the three-point formula came, the strike was in high pitch with justified expectations amongst the mass of railwaymen that the Government will ultimately be forced to come to a more favourable settlement.

In the AIRF Working Committee meeting held in New Delhi when Priya Gupta launched a slanderous attack on AITUC in his speech, George Fernandes interrupted him to ask if Priya Gupta received a chit sent from Jail on 12 May from him (George) stating that the 3-point formula should not be rejected, but improved upon to include the question of victimization. Priya Gupta, however, denied receipt of any such chit.

ALL INDIA SOLIDARITY ACTION

On the 9 May meeting of the Central Trade Union organisations held in New Delhi and participated by AITUC, CITU, HMS, HMP, BMS, UTUC, the decision of All India General Strike on 15 May was taken as solidarity action in support of the striking railwaymen.

Besides the Central trade union organisations, many other all-India organisations supported the call or took independent programme on that day. The Central Government employees throughout the country observed mass hunger strike, and held meetings and demonstrations. The All-India Defence Employees' Federation called for solidarity tools-down strike of civilian defence employees in Ordnance factories and elsewhere. The Banks including State Bank; Life Insurance and General Insurance employees participated in the solidarity strike action.

The decision of the all-India industrial strike – the first of its kind in post-independence period and highest form of all-India action, evoked great hope and confidence amongst the striking railwaymen. In fact, the strike was at its peak at about that time. It cannot be gainsaid that the industrial workers barring a few centres, did not respond to the extent expected and called for. This was mainly due to repeated *bandhs* observed in some bigger industrial centres and states more than once during the preceding months which made it difficult to make their all-India action as effective as was expected.

The all-India General strike was the high watermark of both of solidarity action, as well as of the strike of the railwaymen. Both these combining exerted maximum possible pressure on the Government to yield. In spite of the successful mass strike backed by the all-India industrial solidarity action of 15 May, the dead lock continued and the Government attitude remained as stiff as before along with unmitigated strong-arm tactics applied against the striking workers. Despite the heroics of a section of the Action Committee outside, the workers began to realise that there was hardly any hope of a settlement and disillusionment gradually spread leading to trek back.

President V.V. Giri returned to the capital on 11 May by cutting short his holiday. When the Prime Minister and two other members of the PAC met him on 15 May, he advised the Government to settle the strike, rather than force it to fizzle out because an embittered railwaymen would be a problem to the Government.

The President was reported to be in favour of sending the bonus issue to the Bonus Review Committee with fresh terms of reference and referring the remaining points on the railwaymen's charter of demands to a one-man Court of Enquiry headed by a Supreme Court Judge. The NCCRS and Action Committee could act as assessors in the inquiry.

(Patriot 17 May 1974)

But the Prime Minister and her Cabinet did not apparently give the President's advice. The President's stand raised high hopes amongst the mass of the railway workers.

NCCRS ACTION COMMITTEE RESOLUTION CALLING OFF THE STRIKE

Text of Resolution Received from Tihar Jail

The Action Committee of the NCCRS salutes the railwaymen for their glorious struggle waged with such courage and determination braving a government onslaught the like of which has never before been experienced by the Indian working class. More than 50,000 workers have been illegally arrested and detained without trial; over 10000 men already served with dismissal orders; nearly 30000 thrown out of their houses with bag and baggage and with their helpless wives and innocent children; women raped by the minions of law and order; a Goebbellian propaganda war against railwaymen carried through the state-owned radio, and television network; newspaper advertisements inserted with money from the public exchequer to defame and deride the railwaymen and their leadership; lies, slander and perfidy of an unprecedented low level; use of the Army, Border Security Force, Territorial Army, Special Reserve Police, Central Reserve Police and other organs of state power buttressed with the most indiscriminate use of the draconian laws like Maintenance of Internal Security Act and the war-time Defence of India Rules; marching the workers to their work places at bayonet point; non-payment of their earned wages in order to literally starve the workers into submission – these were the methods used by the Government to meet the just and legitimate demands of the railwaymen. The resoluteness with which the railwaymen and their wives and children faced this terror and fought for their rights in a saga that must have few parallels in the annals of the working class and democratic movements anywhere in the world.

The Committee notes that the Government has not responded to the requests of the organized trade union movement both in India and abroad to settle the just and fair demands of the railwaymen and to end the repression against them. All the entreaties of the opposition political parties in the country – without any exception – to the Government not to pursue its anti-worker course have also fallen on deaf ears. The constant persuasion by the country's newspapers traditionally friendly to the Government to adopt a reasonable and conciliatory attitude to the railwaymen's demands failed to impress the government. The appeals of men of goodwill like Jayaprakash Narayan and others to settle the dispute also failed to evoke any response from an adamant government. And most shocking of all, even the advice of the President of India conveyed so unequivocally and forcefully to come to terms with the railwaymen was spurned by the government most unceremoniously.

The Action Committee once again emphasises the fact that the railwaymen never wanted a strike. More than anyone else they are aware of the disastrous economic consequences of a railway strike. What we sought and fought for was a negotiated settlement on our legitimate demands. It was the Government that forced the strike on the railwaymen by taking steps that are too recent to be recounted here. But even while the railwaymen were fighting that was purely and simply an industrial action, the government fought a mini-war from the pre-emptive arrests to the final combing operations in the workers housing colonies. In a confrontation of that nature, the odds cannot but be against the workers. The course of the strike has, if anything vindicated our repeated declaration that our action had no motivation other than securing the just and reasonable demands of the railwaymen.

The Committee notes with deep concern that the government has refused to enable the members of the NCCRS to meet either inside or outside the prison to take a decision on how to end the strike. This has created an extraordinary situation before the Action Committee, which was charged with the conduct of the negotiations and the subsequent conduct of the strike. All decisions of calling for or withdrawal of the strike can be constitutionally taken only by the full body of the NCCRS most of whose members are in prison in different parts of the country or are fugitives from the law.

The Action Committee having given deep consideration to the strike situation on all the zonal railways and in other railway establishments, and aware of the economic consequences of further prolonging the action, and conscious of the responsibility thrust on it in the circumstances, hereby resolves to unilaterally call off the strike with effect from 6 a.m. Tuesday May 28. The committee calls upon all railwaymen to return to work from that hour and do everything within their power to bring normalcy into the movement of trains.

At the same time the Action Committee calls upon the Government to immediately release all those railwaymen and others arrested on account of the strike; reinstate all workmen whose services have been terminated during and in the weeks preceding the strike; withdraw all penal action taken against the railwaymen and others; restore to the workmen their living quarters; and take all other necessary steps to restore normalcy on the railways.

Simultaneously, the Action Committee calls upon the Railway Ministry to resume negotiations with the Negotiating Committee of the NCCRS on the outstanding demands of the railwaymen in order to arrive at an amicable settlement on these demands.

The Action Committee assures the railwaymen that it stands united as ever in its resolve to secure their just and fair demands. The unity of purpose and action cemented by the blood and sacrifice of lakhs of railwaymen from all over the country will not be allowed to be weakened under any circumstances till the railwaymen secure their demands. It calls upon the railwaymen to stand steadfast in the firm conviction that even now there is only one force that can defeat them and that is the enemy within their own ranks. Everyone and immediate steps taken to further close the ranks must learn the lessons of the last few weeks.

The Action Committee pays its homage to the martyrs of the railwaysmen's struggle, Com. V.S. Mhalgi, Comrade Shripal Dwivedy and Comrade Ramaswamy. The supreme sacrifice by Comrade Ramaswamy who was killed in cold blood by running over a railway engine on his person will forever inspire the railwaymen and other working people in the country to heroic deeds and total sacrifice in man's perpetual struggle against injustice.

The Action Committee expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all trade unions, youth organisations, political parties, women's organisations, newspapers and journalists and all others who stood by the railwaymen in their trials and tribulations. It assures the working classes and toiling masses that the railwaymen will always be in the forefront of people's struggles for a better and happier tomorrow.

The Committee resolves to convene the meeting of the NCCRS as soon as conditions for the convening of such a meeting appear propitious.

Sd/ - H.S. Chaudhary, J.P. Choubey.
Parvathi Krishnan, Srikrishna,
George Fernandes
(Members of Action Committee in the jail)
D.D. Vashisht
(Member of NCCRS – not a member of the Action Committee – in jail)

Outside;

Sd/ - Samar Mukherji, M.P (disagreed),
G.S. Gokhale, N.M. Pathak, Priya Gupta (disagreed)
Dated: 27 May, 1974.

ANNEXURE 11

S. A. DANGE

CRISIS OF CAPITALISM IN INDIA AND WAGE FREEZE

[General Report made to the general Council, AITUC,
on 22 July 1974]

AITUC PUBLICATION
(Select Portions)

IV

THE RAILWAY STRIKE

The most outstanding event since the last General Council meeting of March 1974 is the railway strike. The 20-day strike in its sweep and dimension was unprecedented in the history of the trade union movement. Never before had the railway workers embracing all categories, unions and federations, recognised and unrecognised, come to a united platform, the NCCRS and gone into a general strike. There had been strikes in the past of various categories, in different regions and workshops. But the strike this time assumed gigantic proportions involving lakhs of workers spread over the vast railway system.

Also never before had the Government directed the state repressive machinery on such a vast scale to break an industrial strike, to intimidate and terrorise the workers and their families. Thousands were arrested, imprisoned and dismissed. We need not recount here all the developments leading to the strike and how treacherous arrests by the Government in the midst of negotiations ultimately precipitated it, as they are already well known.

The strike in railways involving more than a million workers spread over 60 thousand kilometres of the railway system divided in innumerable categories with uneven development of organization, consciousness and experience has to be distinguished from a strike in a factory or in any industry in a region. The railway workers fought bravely against heavy odds as long as they could. The working class demonstrated its solidarity by the highest form of industrial action – all Indian general strikes on 15th May. The Government imputed political motives to the strike and on that plea arraigned its entire repressive and propaganda machinery against the strike. The Government as it were declared war against mass of the railway workers who went into strike to win their demands, and not for overthrow of the Government although some adventurist leaders of the strike might have harboured such illusory ideas.

The attitude of the Government further stiffened when the Action Committee rejected Government's offer of the three-point formula of simultaneous release, call-off of strike and resumption of negotiation. The Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet even did not pay any heed to the sober advice given by President V.V. Giri.

As a result, in the face of the gloomy prospect of any settlement and continued mass repression of the Government, the strike began to weaken and fizzling out started by 16th except in certain industrial cities like Bombay, Calcutta and workshops. From 20th May onwards the question of orderly and organised retreat was looming large. The Action Committee by then was denied of its majority members, who had been thrown into jail. Remaining blind to the realities of the situation, the adventurist section of the Action Committee outside and the CPM were still talking of intensifying the strike which was “.....”
.....”

lines were working even from the time of negotiations before the strike. One line was to underplay the possibility of a negotiated settlement, and the other for making all efforts towards a negotiated settlement, to achieve concrete gains and avert the strike, if possible.

In the course of the strike, the letter of SP leader Madhu Limaye to S.A. Dange first brought into the open the divergent approaches and tactics in conducting the strike. Limaye tried to malign the AITUC on so-called “selective” arrests and to frustrate all initiatives and efforts to end the stalemate. An appropriate reply was, of course, given to Limaye’s letter.

The ultra-Lefts tried till the end to allow the strike to completely fizzle out and end in total demoralization of the workers who had fought so bravely. The Government also was trying to force the strike to fizzle out and refused to respond to any proposal that was given from time to time to end the impasse.

We need not give here all the letters and statements issued by the AITUC in its efforts to save the situation and the workers from total rout. These are already published in the TUR. In all its statements and letters addressed to the Prime Minister and the PAC, the AITUC asked for allowing the full NCCRS, which was immobilised due to arrests, to meet and take decision, which alone being the collective body could take the decision to call off. The AITUC further stated categorically that it will not take, being part of the NCCRS, any unilateral decision of calling off the strike and which it did not do till the end. The same position was repeated in the statement of May 25, 1974 and further clarified in the course of the statement of May 27. In view of the fast fizzling out of the strike, the stiffened government attitude, and immobilisation of the Action Committee, which could not meet, the AITUC called upon the workers to collectively and democratically take any decision they choose to take. That was the only democratic procedure left open to the workers in the then obtaining situation, as individual fizzling out had become demoralizing factor in the whole situation.

George Fernandes, as he stated before the AIRF Working Committee in its meeting held in New Delhi on June 8 and 9, 1974 had sent intimation on May 24 to the Action Committee outside advising them to call off the strike. On having no response to that, the resolution of the Action Committee members in jail calling off the strike from 6:00 hours of May 27, 1974 was sent outside. That resolution also was suppressed by the ultras in the Action Committee for full 24 hours and the strike was called off only on 28th May 1974. When the AITUC statement was published another jail resolution also became known.

The campaign launched by the CPM against the AITUC and backed by the bourgeois press is sheer slander in which they are past masters. They wanted thereby to demoralise and divide the workers. They tried to utilise the railway strike to serve their narrow tactical political objectives in which they failed. Their eye was more on breaking the Kerala coalition government by alleging falsely that this progressive government in which

the CPI participated was repressing the railway strikers. They tried with the Central Government employees to pursue an adventurist tactics in which they miserably failed. The strike of the government employees which they had called for 10th May and miserably failed was called off unceremoniously within 3 days, taking note of "the conciliatory attitude of the government" at a time when the railway workers' strike and its repression was at its peak.

Instead of seeing the grandeur of the great struggle fought by the railwaymen, the petty political gamblers whose gambles failed tried to malign the AITUC and to divide the workers. They refused to see the reality of the situation at any stage of the struggle. When efforts were being made by the AITUC and some friends to find a formula to break the deadlock, some political leaders publicly repudiated it saying there could not be any "formula" excepting the acceptance of the full charter of demands. They had the blindness to say this on 24th, when the strike was almost off.

In the new phase after the strike, the main task is to get all those thousands of victimised railway workers back to their jobs, to maintain the unity and to regroup and reorganise the forces. The bureaucrats of the Railway Board and those at different levels of the Railway administration will try to use the weapon of victimisation to behead the militant leadership of the workers. The Government has been persistently refusing to negotiate with the NCCRS although it did so before the strike.

In this situation, the Action Committee and the NCCRS has correctly decided that the recognition of the AIRF and the recognized zonal unions should be utilised for representation of all cases of victimisation and also on outstanding demands. Those who are out of jobs require relief and also legal aid for those against whom court cases are continuing.

The constituents of the NCCRS have reaffirmed their resolve to preserve the united platform of railwaymen. But it will depend on the proper norm of functioning as between co-equal partners with common understanding and objective.

The main effective category unions are potent factors in the railway trade union movement and proper relationship should be cultivated and developed with them.

The AITUC railway unions and their Indian Railway Workers' Federation, with whatever strength and following they had, had fully participated in the strike and held out wherever they were till the end. They have now a great opportunity to acquire new mass bases and extend their influence and organisation. That opportunity has to be fully utilised, while fully maintaining the unity of the NCCRS.

The period since the last General Council meeting was dominated by the railway strike which overshadowed all other events. The Left parties gave a call to observe an all-India day on May 3 against high prices. The day was observed in some states by a general strike and bandhs, and in most of the places throughout the country by meetings and demonstrations. In some states, the workers had to go on a general strike twice in the month of May...

ANNEXURE III

Railway Strike In Retrospect

J.M.BISWAS

Secretary

INDIAN RAILWAY WORKERS' FEDERATION

A.I.T.U.C. AND N.C.C.R.S.

It has now become imperative to speak out on the controversy that has developed in the country following the calling off of the historic strike struggle by the Railway workers on the 28th May 1974. The movement was not only the biggest in the history of the struggle by the Railway workers, but it was historic as well. Some 1.5 million workers, under the leadership of the NCCRS participated in the movement on the basis of common demands. Such an extensive and long drawn-out strike is without a parallel even in the history of the world railway workers movement.

From the very outset, the Union Government declared the strike as one being "politically motivated". The measures that it adapted to foil this movement were unprecedented in the history of our Working class movement. The black acts of D I R and M I S A were extensively used. The police, the Border Security Force, the Territorial Army and the Central Reserve Police took recourse to the said undemocratic acts and meted out large-scale terror, extensive arrests of the workers and leaders of Railway workmen. The way mass media were used for terrorising the railway workers were unheard of. Notwithstanding all these and many other measures, the Government failed to suppress the indomitable will of the railway workers and their determination for struggle.

Long before the decision of a strike was taken, there had existed opportunities to settle through negotiations the basic demands of the railway workers and to avoid the strike thereby. The majority in the leadership of the NCCRS desired sincerely a negotiated settlement. The Government, however, with its dependence on the bureaucracy refused to move that way. It was precisely for this reason that the discussion was snapped at the middle and the leaders were rounded up. This strike was made inevitable for the railway workers. Until the strike actually started, the majority in the leadership as well as the railway workers hoped that the strike might be avoided through discussion. Some of the central trade union leaders endeavoured to initiate a discussion for settlement. It did not however bear them any fruit. It is necessary to point out one very important thing in this connection. The N.C.C.R.S. had largely been sharing the belief that negotiation might bring about a settlement and therefore they refrained from making thorough preparation for conducting the strike.

It is now a matter of public knowledge that the AITUC, as an organized force among the railway workers, had all along been emphasizing the urgency of united struggle. The AIRF, on its own, called for a strike from the 27th of February this year. It was in this context that the AITUC urged upon the formation of a united front of the Railway workers throughout India. That was why the AIRF had put off the strike call and convened a National Convention of the railway workers on the 27th February 1974 i.e. the date on which the strike was scheduled to begin. Barring the N.F.I.R. almost all the recognised and

unrecognised federations, unions and category wise organizations participated in that convention and formed the N.C.C.R.S. so as to unite and organise the railway workers for the struggle.

The All India strike by the railway workers started on and from the 8th of May '74 under the leadership of the NCCRS and on the basis of six point demands. Thousands of railway workers were arrested before and during the strike. Of the 13 members of the NCCRS action Committee 5 were rounded up. A few of them went underground to escape arrest.

FACT VERSUS C.I.T.U. FICTION

Since the 13th of May the strike situation started changing. There did not exist for the striking workers any hope of a settlement. The rigidity of the Government against negotiation and settlement on the one hand and on the other the insistence of the influx leadership, in charge of conducting the struggle, to carry on the strike inspite of there being deterioration in the situation caused serious concern to the workers.

Regarding the causes of this change in the strike situation, since May 13, one thing needs a little elaboration. A section of the Central Govt. employees, bearing allegiance to the CITU leadership, decided all alone and without caring to organise any joint platform for that purpose, to resort to non-cooperation on the 8th and 9th of May and go on an indefinite strike from the 10th. They decided to do it in support of the railway strike and on the basis of some of their own demands. Whether they had actually resorted to non-cooperation on the 8th and 9th is beyond our knowledge; but they went on indefinite strike from the 10th of May. The unconditional calling-off, which came on The 12th of May, was in fact a stab at the railway strike from the back. The statement that these CITU influenced leaders of the Central Government employees had issued while calling off the strike credited the Central Government with conciliatory attitude and gave it as the reason for the unconditional withdrawal. Although a meagre 2.8 per cent of the Govt. employees all over India did participate in the strike that the CITU had called for, but the way the strike was unilaterally called off frustrated the railway workers, made them appreciation... Out of a total of 0.14 million workers of this zonal railway, some 25 to 30 thousand had been with the strike when it was called off on the 28th May 1974.

SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY

Numbers of workers are nearly a lakh. The strike started well, but of the four divisions in the railway three saw the end of it by 22nd May 1974 at the latest. At Secundrabad division, the end came earlier, i.e., on 18.5.74, at Vijayawada on 20.5.74 and at Hubli on 22.5.74. There had practically been no strike at Solapur. About 10 thousand workers were holding out when the strike was called off on the 28th.

Here again the leadership of the CITU reported for duty betraying of the strike, Shri P. Venkatswaralu of Secundrabad, Vice President, South Central Railway Employees Union (CITU) and, member, zonal co-ordination committee of the NCCRS, S.C. Railway, Shri Saibaba of Secundrabad; Zonal Assistant Secretary, S.C. Railway, Technical Supervisory Association, Shri Appalacharyya, A.S.M. Secundrabad and Vice President, Station Master Councils, Shri Appanna, Vice-president Vizayawada Loco Running Staff Association and the names of Shri M. Ramaiya, P. Yanadaya, K. Mast an, Very and P. Ramaiya of Betrugunta, all leaders of the Loco Running Staff were important amongst them.

CENTRAL RAILWAY

Number of workers 1.8 lakhs. Following the arrest and death of Shri V.S. Malgi, General Secretary of the AIRF union, Central Railway, in the police lock up the strike sparked off right from the 3rd of May, 74. In some divisions, the workers went back to their job on 4.5.74 and joined the strike from the 8th May '74.

The strike was fairly successful at Bombay V.T. to Jagatpur and Lonavala section. However, it very nearly collapsed after the 20th. In other divisions and sections the strike was over by the 10th of May. At Manmad division of the central Railway the strike lasted only one day i.e., on 8.5.74. Bhusawal division it continued for three days from 8th to 10th Jhansi saw it for three days. Bhopal – two, Bina – three and Nagpur – one. At Wardha and Arola the strike continued for two days respectively.

In the urban areas of Bombay, the strike lasted till the 20th of May. Much less than 10% of the workers had been sticking out when the strike was actually called off. It has been reported that the CITU leadership wanted Shri P. R. Menon, Working President of the AIRF Union at the Central Railway to send telegraphic daily report to Delhi stating that everywhere the strike was continuing well. Shri Menon is said to have refused to oblige them with such fictitious reports and the leaders of the CITU adopted penal measures against Shri Menon in consequence.

Very few cases of betrayal have been reported in this Railway as because the number of organizations under the CITU leadership in the Central Railway is strictly limited.

WESTERN RAILWAY

The number of workers is about one lakh and eighty thousand. Barring the three divisions of Bombay, Kota and Ajmer, the rest of the divisions namely Jaipur, Bhavanagar and Baroda had not showed any appreciable success in the matter of the strike. At the Rajkote division, however, there had been no strike at all. According to Shri George Fernandez, the strike in this railway lasted till the 12th of May, commencing on and from the 3rd May. The strike however continued in Bombay. But, even in Bombay, it did not go beyond the 21st of May '74.

divisions of this railway and at the offices in Calcutta, a remarkably successful strike started from the 8th May 1974. At Khurda Road, Nagpur, Bilaspur, Waltair and Chakradharpur division the strike was partial, and was over by 16th of May '74. The strike continued upto the end of Adra and Kharagpur. Some 50 thousand workers belonging to these two division and the offices in Calcutta were in the strike when it was called off.

Leaders of some 20 branches affiliated to the AIRF. Union of the Western Railway resigned before the strike began and joined duty instead of participating in the strike. At the direction of Sri Maniben Kara, President of the AIRF Union, the railway workers detained at Thana Jail secured release through execution of bonds on 21.5.74 and returned to duty. A bare 10% of the workers were holding out when the strike ended there.

SOUTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Workers number about one lakh and seventy thousand. At Kharagpur and Adra

The railway workers will hardly forget the despicable role of some members and leaders of the CITU belonging to this railway specially at the Adra division. The majority in the Loco Running Staff Association run by the CITU in the south Eastern Railway, opposed the strike publicly. The Secretary of the All India Loco Running Staff, Shri S.K. Dhar fled from his head quarter at Anara and stayed "deep underground" at one of his relatives' residence in Calcutta, on the plea that the Police will shoot him at sight. His party leader, Shri Awatar Singh, a driver and President of the L.R.S.A, Shri Pandu Raju, Shri A. Rama Rao, also drivers did not care to participate in the strike. Together with the police they hounded the residences of the striking workers and helped them in rounding up the workers. Another very important leader of the CITU Shri S. R. Mohuri FM-Gr. 'A' Adra and Asstt. Secretary of the LRSA went to Khurdah Road on special duty. He took charge of distributing money among the non-striking so-called loyal workers for disrupting the strike. All were aware of the fact that the All India Radio had broadcast, the speech made by Shri H. Kerkettah, a driver at Ranchi and President of the LRSA at Adra division opposing the strike. The way Shri A.C. Lahiri, General Secretary of the All India Station Masters' Association and a leader of the CITU and Shri P.K. Bhattacharya, President of the Station Masters' Association at the Adra division went deep underground during the strike caused considerable surprise among the workers. It was all the more so because another leader of the CITU of that division and Vice President of the Station Masters' Association, Sri Somir Chowdhury, an ASM, in league with other ASMs assisted the Railway authority to open the stations, closed during the strike and make them functioning. His promotion to the post of an ATI, which came in as a reward, bears testimony to this singular instance of treachery and treason. Further, the CITU leaders and members who betrayed the strike are : - Sri Chandraya, Ist Fireman, Bhojudih, Executive member, LRSA, Sri H.S. Das, Asistt. Secretary, LRSA, Driver, Loco Bhojudih, Sri Netai Sen, Ist Fireman, Bhojudih, Sri Kundu, Fitter, C & W, Bhojudih, Sri R. N. Sen Sharma, Driver, Loco, Bhaga, Divisional Vice President, LRSA, Md. Majid, CLM-2, Adra, Divisional Operating Class IV staff, Sri Dinesh Ch. Sarkar, Fitter, C & W, Mohuda, Sri N. P. Modak, Guard, Bhojudih. Sri T. Ghosh; Guard, Bumpur, has changed his political colour and joined the congress.

EASTERN RAILWAY

Numbers of workers are about two lakhs. The strike was remarkable at Kanchrapara, Liloah and Jamalpur Workshop of this Railway. There was wider participation in the strike at Sealdah, Howrah and Danapur Division. At the Head office in Calcutta and at other Calcutta office nearly 95% of the workers joined the strike. At Asansol Division however, the strike was particularly nonexistent excepting at Andal, Sitarampur and at few other places. Similarly at Dhanbad Division the strike was attended with a fair success only at Patratu and Patherdih, the rest did not see any success thereof.

The strike at Danapur division ended after 16-5-74. At Howrah and Sealdah Division some four or five days before the strike was actually called off, 40% of the workers went back to their job.

The strike at Mughalsarai braved the most severe repression and attained historic success. But even at Mughalsarai, according to the report of Sri Fernandes, a bare 1500 workers out of total of 13500 were sticking out during the final phase of the strike. The report on the whole of the Eastern Railway however reveals that 40% of the workers were with the strike when it was called off.

Instances of betrayal by the CITU workers are quite in abundance in this Railway too. Notable among them are the ones the Asansol and Burdwan Loco Running Staff Association led by the CITU workers and by their organisation. One reputed leader of their organisation Sri Gopal Pandey, a Loco Fitter at Ranaghat and Vice president of the Joint Council of Action of the Sealdah Division did not only stay away from the strike himself, he in fact foiled the strike at his loco shed and earned cash reward from the authorities for that anti-strike role. There now goes the saying that Sri Punday has donated the entire sum earned in this act of treachery to the CPI (M) party fund and has discharged thereby the historic duty assigned to a revolutionary worker belonging to a revolutionary party (?). The news of Sri Pandey's son now getting a job at the special direction of the General Manager of this Railway in recognition of Sri Pandey's betrayal has also come to the open. Further, Sri N.N. Ghosh, Driver, electric, Asansol, Vice-president, LRSA, Asansol, avoided the strike by remaining in sick upto 22/5/74 and reported for duty on 23/5/74 and Sri Ajit Chakravorty, Asstt. Driver, Electric, Asansol, Secretary, LRSA, Asansol joined duty on 24/5/74 with other CITU members.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Numbers of workers are about two lakhs. A fairly successful strike started at the Delhi and Bikanir Division of this railway and at many of the offices stationed at Delhi from the 8th of May. But by the thirteen of the month, barring a few areas, the strike was practically over in other areas. The Vice-President of the All India Loco Running staff Association, Sri Mewalal of the Northern Railway, opposed this strike from the very out set. The loco running staff and the operating running staff and the carriage staff did not join the strike and in the consequence, the train movement was fully uninterrupted in this railway.

Those who had been holding out when the strike was called off did not constitute more than 15% of the workers.

The leaders and workers of the CITU have set up a memorable record of betraying the strike in this railway as well. Names of so-called revolutionaries like Sri A. S. Bedi, clerk, Boroda House, and a leader of the CITU, Sri Mridul Kumar, booking clerk, Meerut City Office and the member of the CITU, Shri Inder Sing, a clerk at P. W. I, Sadhulpoor and a leader of the CITU who is also nephew of CPI (M) M.L.A. Sri Mohar Singh of Rajasthan Assembly will feature prominently among the traitors who betrayed the struggle. Shri H. S. Batra, Section Controller D. S. Office New Delhi, Leader of CITU, approached the D.S. New Delhi, on 12.5.74 with folded hands and beg to report for duty and be excused for participating in the strike. The D.S. demanded that he should fall on his fit which Shri Batra refused to do and for that he was not allowed to join, Shri Subhas Chandra, clear, AEN Office, Ratangarh, a CITU leader, did not joined the strike at all and opposed this strike.

The Ludhiana Loco-shed, claimed to be the strong hold of CITU did not join the strike and had been on duty from the 8th of May onwards. All of them have earned monetary rewards in return.

NORTH FRONTIER RAILWAYS

Workers number about 80 thousand. At the outset the strike was very successful in this railways. But the workers started resuming duty at Tinsukia, Lumding, Aliporeduar and Katihar Divisions from 15th May 1974 and from 18th May 1974 at Pandu Head Quarters.

The workers withstood repression and terror let loose by the authorities and some 50% of the workers had been with strike during the concluding phase of it. It was in this railway alone that fair success of the strike was registered.

Leader of the CITU did not however lag behind other strikebreakers in creating a history of treachery and betrayal. The leaders, workers and sympathisers of that organisation took vilest means to weaken the morale of the fighting workers. Notwithstanding the fact that it failed to create any appreciable impact on the workers, who will remember such heinous act for a long time to come. Among others Shri Sunil Ghose, Welder, New Bongaigoan Workshop, Executive member Joint Council of Action reported for duty along with the CITU followers on 16.5.74, Shri Benoy Chakraborty, Machinist, Wheel Shop, New Bongaigoan, Executive member, Joint Council of Action, leader CITU, reported for duty on 16.5.74 along with CITU followers. In Siliguri Shri Sunil Bhowal "A" Grade Fitter, Diesel Shed, Vice-President, Diesel Shed Staff Council, reported for duty on 15.5.74 along with CITU followers. Shri Biren Mazumder, Fitter, Diesel Shed, Founder of Diesel Staff Council, joined duty on 15.5.74 along with CITU members under police protection. Shri Aurobindo Pal, Fitter Loco shed, Organiser, Loco shed Staff Council, joined duty on 15.5.74 along with CITU members of the loco shed under police protection. In New Gauhati, Shri C.L. Biswas, Trains Clerk Operating Department, Leader CITU and Treasurer, Local Action Committee NCCRS came out from deep underground with his followers and held a meeting by the side of Amerada Cinema, Gauhati and thus courted arrest. Afterwards gave bond and went back to duty with 17 of his followers on 24.5.74.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Numbers of workers are one Lakh and five thousand approximately. The Strike started at the Lucknow Division on 6.5.74 and continued upto 13.5.74. At Izzatnagar Division it started on 8.5.74 and lasted till 23.5.74. At Gorakhpur Head Quarters on 8.5.74 and continued upto 18.5.74. At Varanasi Division the strike continued successfully from 8.5.74 to 15.5.74. Some 25% of the workers were involved in the strike when it ended.

Besides the Regional Railways, there are various bodies functioning in different parts of the Country under the Railway Board. Following is an account of the strike situation in all such bodies.

CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS

There are about 14 thousand workers at the workshop. From 8.5.74 to the end the strike was very successful. About 95% percent of the workers participated in the strike with courage. Very few of the workers numbering about 850 returned to their job before the strike was called off.

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT PROJECT (RAILWAYS) CALCUTTA

About One thousand workers are employed at the project. Almost all of them participated in the strike from the day it started and continued firmly to the end.

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT PROJECT (RAILWAYS) DELHI

Nearly five hundred workers are employed at the project. After 3 days of strike the workers went back to their duty and the strike was over there.

INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY – PERAMBUR, MADRAS

Roughly Ten thousand workers are employed there. The strike commenced on and from May 3. About 95% of the workers participated in the strike in a remarkable way. The fizzling out started there since May 13. When the strike was called off only about 800 workers were sticking out.

DIESEL LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, VARANASI

Approximately 6 thousand workers are employed in the works. The strike in this organization lasted only 3 days. Besides, the strike was partial.

RESEARCH, DESIGN AND STANDARD ORGANISATION (RDSO), LUCKNOW

There was no strike in this organisation where nearly a thousand workers are employed.

RAILWAY BOARD OFFICE NEW DELHI

Number of workers employed in this office is 1500. There was no strike.

INSIDE DELHI

The above analysis of the strike situation indicates that the strike started at some zonal Railways on 3.5.74 and on other Railways on 8.5.74. During the initial phase of the strike, workers in huge number participated. But because of repression and intimidation by the Govt., adverse propoganda by the bourgeois press, false and motivated campaign by the All India Radio and acts of treachery and betrayal by the ultra left and right wing political parties i.e., CPI (M), Jana Sangh and Socialist Party-Madhu Limaye group, the strike started declining since the 13th of May.

On 13.4 an important meeting took place at the residence of Sri Khadilkar, Minister of the Union Govt. Sri S.A. Dange of the AITUC, Sri P. Ramamurthy of the CITU, Sri Madhu Limaye; Sri S.M. Joshi and Sri Madhu Dandavate of the Socialist party amongst others attended the meeting. The meeting discussed the strike situation and evolved a three-point formula as measures for settlement. Barring alone Sri Limaye, all others representing the workers and the Govt. reached unanimity on the score. The three point formula meant that (1) All leaders and workers of the Railways held under arrest would be set free (2) the strike would be withdrawn (3) negotiations on the demands of the Railway workers would be resumed. All these three actions would start simultaneously.

Sri Limaye's opposition to this three point formula notwithstanding, Sri Farnandes sent a letter on 14.5.74 from Tihar jail, through his wife, asking Sri Priya Gupta to accept the formula. But Sri Gupta at the instance of his the then close at hands ignored Sri Farnandes's instructions and rejected the proposal (from Sri Farnandes's report at the working committee meeting of the AIRF).

Sri Umraomull Purohit, General Secretary of the AIRF union in the Western Railway sensed a gradual decline in the strike situation went to Delhi himself on 15.5.74 and urged upon Sri Priya Gupta, Sri Samar Mukherjee and others to call off the strike

unconditionally. The two stalwarts of the NCCRS Action committee rejected his appeal and sent instructions for the continuance of the strike.

When the situation worsened further Sri Moniben Kara, president, AIRF Union in the Western Railway met Sri Farnandes at Tihar jail on 20th of May and requested him to authorise her for calling off the strike. In the jail Sri Farnandes had gained some idea about fizzling out of the strike position, and wrote to Priya Gupta on 25.5.74 that information had been reaching about the fizzling out of the strike and he opined that the strike should be called off immediately. He also stated that since they had been staying outside the prison, the authority of arriving at a final decision regarding the matter vested in them. Although all other members of the Action Committee were in favour of accepting this suggestion, Sri Priya Gupta and Sri Samar Mukherjee opposed it furiously and, in consequence, the proposal of calling off the strike as suggested by Sri Farnandes fell through.

In the mean time, following Sri Farnandes direction, Sri S.M. Joshi, a leader of the Socialist party was sought to Delhi to contact the Prime Minister Sm. Indira Gandhi and arrive at settlement thereby. When Sri Joshi met the Prime Minister, she enquired if he had been authorised by the Action committee to talk on their behalf about the strike. When Sri Joshi demanded this authority from the Action committee, the said leaders thereof (Sri Gupta and Mukherjee) told Sri Joshi that he could negotiate with the Government not on behalf of the Action committee but in his personal capacity. Sri Joshi resented their attitude and went back to Bombay without making further endeavour for the settlement.

It is necessary to mention in this connection that in support of the just demands and the struggle of the Railway workers, the central trade unions like AITUC, CITU, UTUC etc. asked the industrial workers' to go on a day's strike on 15th May all over the country. It is no longer a secret that the strike call failed to elicit proper support throughout the country. Success was limited. But inspite of this experience and the fact that the Railway strike had actually ended at a number of places in different zones by the 20th of May, Sri Ramammurthy of the CITU proposed in the central T.U. leaders meeting in Delhi on 24-5-74 that the working class all over India should be asked to go on a continuous strike in support of the Railway workers' movement. The other representatives present at the meeting (including Sri S.A Dange) considered the proposal to be adventurous and unreal and adopted instead the proposal of holding a Solidarity Day on 31-5-74 all over India. The account of the industrial workers strike on the 15th May that was reported in the meeting of the trade union representatives held on the 24th May revealed that not over 25% of their own strength did actually participate in the strike. The strike was partial in the large-scale establishment like Steel, Engineering, Jute, Tea-plantation, Cotton-Textile, Port and Dock and Coal Mines etc. Only the Bank and Insurance employees participated very remarkably in the all India strike of the 15th May. The proposal for an all India continuous strike, in the above background, was considered to be absurd and unrealistic by the members of the meeting.

Meanwhile some four hundred workers and leaders of the Northern Railway at Tihar Jail, Delhi, requested Shri Fernandez to call off the strike in view of the steadily deteriorating situation. Shri Fernandez consulted the other Action Committee members available in Jail that very day (25/5) and decided finally in favour of calling off the strike. He communicated the decision to Shri Priya Gupta on 25-5/74. Since Shri Gupta sat tight over the decision for more than 24 hours Shri Fernandez sent it again to Shri Gupta on 26-5-74 and this time, signed by all the members available in Jail. On 27-5-74 Shri Gupta placed the

said proposal in the meeting of the Action Committee members who had been outside Jail. The meeting decided to call off strike.

It was fairly natural and normal for the railway workers to loose heart and spirit at a time when the avenues for negotiation at the Government level seemed to have disappeared, when the majority of the Action Committee members locked up in jail making thereby the possibility of correct and joint decisions for the railway workers practically impossible, when the strike situation itself had been gradually deteriorating since the 15th of May, which could not however be resisted. The members of the Action Committee outside jail in complete disregard of the objective reality had been repeating obstinately the pet phrase that strike was continuing and that it would continue. Under the circumstances it was perfectly legitimate for the workers to demand to the AITUC – the biggest of the all India working class organisation – a true account of the all India situation and for proper guidance. It was not that the unions affiliated to the AITUC alone had been demanding it, several others including Shri Bhangu, General Secretary of the Railway confederation, union leaders bearing allegiance to the AIRF, Shri Hazara Singh, President of the All India Mechanical Staff Association and many other leaders of the railway workers had constantly been asking for such instructions from the AITUC.

The All India Trade Union Congress and the leaders of the Indian Railway Workers Federation discussed the situation in details. The political situation of the country was also quite complex at that time. In a number of areas the right reactionary forces had been active in utilising peoples discontent for the realisation of their nasty design. Consequently, certain things had to be closely attended to during the railway strike of which the followings were important: i) Ensuring that the situation arising out of the railway strike would not be taken advantage of by the forces of right reaction. Secondly it had to be taken care of that the unity of the railway workers forged through struggle, would not be utilised for furthering the sectarian aims of any party or groups thereof, and thirdly, that the unity of the railway workers would be broadened further and guarded from in-fighting and division.

And so, when their appeared a stalemate regarding negotiation and settlement along side of an inflexible and rigid attitude by the Govt., when the members of the Central Action Committee were either in jail or in the underground, and became immobilised as a result, when taking collective decision and issuing necessary instructions in pursuance thereof seemed to be an impossibility, whereas the workers had started taking their own decision from 13.5.74 onwards and had been returning to their duty from the area of struggle, the AITUC had to take stock of the situation. Accordingly on 26.5.74 the AITUC carefully analysed the whole situation and sent out a statement to the railway workers stating :

“Individual fizzling out is demoralising and individual sticking out is also damaging.”

“In such a deadlock the only course left is for the workers to take their collective decision group by group or zone by zone.”

If an individual worker is left free to make decision on his own and to go back to his work fizzling the strike out, it becomes hardly possible for him to master sufficient courage, pull himself together and participate in class struggle in the immediate future. Similarly, a worker who sticks out individually is hit hard, gets frustrated and is demoralized as a result. Seldom it is possible for such a worker to maintain his firm faith in the collective movement. When, therefore, the AITUC also noted that a sizeable section of the striking railway workers had gone back to their work, it considered it to be its duty, as a faithful working class organisation to appeal to the railway workers themselves to make their own

decision regarding the strike without any way jeopardising the unity they had just achieved. Those who speak of trade union democracy or consider that to be necessary have not cared to suggest however what alternative measures should have been taken in that complex and very critical situation.

It may be mentioned in this connection that Sri George Fernandez, for the settlement of the strike, sent direction to the Action Committee leaders outside on 14.5.74 to accept the "Three Point Formula" which was evolved much earlier than the statement made by AITUC on 26.5.74. Finding no response, Sri Fernandez sent a few other such directives upto 20.5.74 from Tihar Jail. Since the leaders of the Action Committee outside refused to accept his directives Sri Fernandez sent again a final directive to call off the strike on 24.5.74. It is evidently clear to the Railwaymen that those who held the AITUC responsible for foiling the strike by its statement issued on 26.5.74 and for that malign the AITUC and its leader Sri S.A. Dange, are not only liars but also following the path of disruption and disunity in the trade union movement.

Considering the strike situation at that period, the socialist leader Sri N.G. Gorey also suggested two alternatives, either to withdraw the strike unconditionally or to involve the entire working class into total action throughout the country. He also opined that as the second form was out of question at that moment, the former one i.e. to withdraw the strike unconditionally as would be the wisest decision. Sri S.M. Joshi and leaders of other T.U.s considering the deterioration in the strike situation also advised the Action Committee to withdraw the strike unconditionally.

Although the leaders of CPI (M), Shri Madhu Limaye and the General Secretary of AIRF were well conversant with the directives and advices of Shri George Fernandez and other veteran leaders of the Socialist Party to call off the strike, they refused to accept the real situation of the of the strike but on the contrary indulged in vile propaganda against AITUC, CPI and Sri Dange maligning them as mainly responsible for fizzling out the strike and its withdrawal. And that too is not the whole story. Sri P. Sundarayya, the CPM leader, did not even feel ashamed to castigate the Soviet leaders and 'Pravda' the organ of the Soviet Communist Party in this connection.

Those sectarian leaders of CPI (M) in pursuance of their sectarian political line had an illusion of the fall of the Government through this strike. They also desired to fulfil this object by utilising the Railway workers' struggle. Calculating the entire situation from a wrong political angle, although the strike situation was rapidly deteriorating, these leaders were inculcating false hope amongst the workers to continue the strike for a day or two more which according to them would result in collapse of Indian Government. One of their adventurist leaders went to the length of saying that the strike struggle would turn out to a Guerrilla war if it continued for some days more.

By indulging in such a political propaganda the CPI (M) leaders helped the Central Govt. who were in search of opportunity to brand the Railway strike as a politically motivated action. The Govt. as usual availed of this opportunity to justify the line of action it had adopted for dealing with the strike. Only a few days ago, Sm. Indira Gandhi in her meeting with the foreign press described the strike as politically motivated and said that it would bring chaos to the country. The full responsibility for giving such handle to the Central Govt. lies solely with the ultra left and unrealistic sectarian political leaders.

Those leaders seriously hoped that Sri Fernandez, Chairman of the Socialist Party would surely join the chorus with them, in their false propaganda against AITUC, CPI and Sri Dange. But Sri Fernandez after his release from jail instead of supporting and co-operating with them, through his press statements and speeches in different meetings all over the country highly commended the brave and heroic role of the AITUC men who participated in the strike struggle without any reservation from the beginning to end. Sri Fernandez also advised the workers to remain alert and abstain from any such vile propaganda and disruptionist role, which is now being played against the interest of the railway men's unity. Such a stand taken by Sri Fernandez roused the anger of the CPI (M), and other introvert leaders. CITU President Sri B.T. Ranadive in the Peoples' Democracy of 29th June '74 started attack against Sri Fernandez also. It is known from the article of Sri Ranadive that Action Committee members including Sri Fernandez have damaged the cause of Railwaymen by withdrawing the strike. It has become a matter of concern that being devoid of sense of reality the exponent of bankrupt politics who have started the disruption among the railwaymen's unity may bring about an utter disaster in the struggle of the working class in general.

The strike situation began to diffuse on and from 13th May and notably declined on and from 16th May 1974. It has been already started that the Railway workers had no hope for the redress of their demands. It was for this reason the workers desired after long 20 days struggle to come to a decision of withdrawal of strike and every organisation of railwaymen and established railway leaders excepting Sri Priya Gupta have up-held the decision of the withdrawal of strike.

Leaders of different Railway Unions have now been telling that it would have been more wise to withdraw the strike by accepting the three point formula and in that case the large scale were and tear could have been avoided and the negotiation would have resumed.

Obviously the CPI (M) and its disciples have become very much disappointed, as their ulterior motive to turn this movement into political battle foiled.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the CITU leaders in many parts of the country fled from the strike action with their cadres carrying the 'banners of betrayal' on their shoulders and resumed their duties quietly and secretly.

Not only the Railwaymen in general have rejected the opinion of CITU and its followers in matters of withdrawals of strike, but also a good number of CITU members have their differences about it giving rise to serious discontent amongst themselves.

