

**ROLE OF INDIAN NATIONALIST FOR FORMATION OF LABOUR UNION
IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE**

**DR BASANTA KUMAR NAIK, LECTURER IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
DUTIKA SAHU COLLEGE, LAIDA DIST-SAMBALPUR**

ABSTRACT-

The First World War marked a turning point in the history of Indian trade union. Labor organizations had existed in India for nearly a quarter of a century before the outbreak of the war. They were, however, service organizations created by reformers and philanthropists with a view to ameliorating the worker's sufferings rather than concrete manifestations of labor's freedom to organize for the purposes of securing better terms of employment and advancing its economic well-being. Humanity, rather than freedom, was the prime mover.

KEY WORD- Humanity, Labor union, Communist, Socialist and freedom.

INTRODUCTION-

The purpose of the trade union movement was to overcome the competition between individual workers, which kept them disorganized and under the heels of their employers. Labor organizations had existed in India for nearly a quarter of a century before the outbreak of the war. They were, however, service organizations created by reformers and philanthropists with a view to ameliorating the worker's sufferings rather than concrete manifestations of labor's freedom to organize for the purposes of securing better terms of employment and advancing its economic well-being. Humanity, rather than freedom, was the prime mover. The concept of economic power of combination was little understood by them and the 'strike' was hardly employed. They relied on petitions and memorials.

World War-II:

By the eve of World War-II, the Red Trade Union International had clearly failed to destroy the free trade union movements of the non-fascist nations of western Europe and America. Instead, they had begun to experience a revival of membership in International Federation of Trade Unions. The two international trade union movements were brought together for a time after World War-II, as a consequence of the grand alliance resulting from Hitler's 1941 attack on Russia. Hoping for a new era of international peace and amity, British trade unionists pressed for a merger of the trade union movements affiliated with IFTU and those organized under the aegis of Russia: Their hope was consummated at an international trade union conference in Paris (Sept.-Oct., 1945) which brought into being a new international trade union organization, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The Old IFTU, the RTUI and the Third International were all dis-mantled.

The postwar Developments:

American union conventions became the scene of much activity by radical labour leaders aimed at achieving the affiliation of their organizations with the WFTU (World

Federation of Trade Union). They were successful in CID (Clothing Workers of America) where their influence was strong. They were unsuccessful in AFL (American Federation of Labour) but not without putting up a struggle. Initially the fight was over whether or not representative should be sent to the exploratory International Conference at London (1945). The AFL decided not to send any representatives. This decision was based on the federation policy of non-cooperation with any international labor organization which included soviet trade unions. The federation leader maintained that soviet trade unions were instruments of the state and did not represent a labor movement capable of independent action.

Apart from the Christian trade union movement, the international labor movement has split into two major camps:

- The essentially pragmatic, evolutionary and free trade union movement of the western world symbolized by ICFTU;
- And die politically directed, state controlled labour movement of the soviet bloc symbolized by highly centralized WFTU.

The socialist stress on international trade union organization became evident very early. First International (International Workers Association) was created in London in 1864 and lasted until 1872. Karl Marx was active in its affairs. A second international was organized in Paris in 1889. It adhered mainly to the evolutionary socialist (social-democratic) ideology. Yet it contained both pragmatic and anarcho syndicalist unionists. Destroyed by World War I, this organization had concentrated earlier on winning from national governments the rights of workers to organize in trade unions and to strike. On the eve of World War-I, there are thirty. Three International Trade Federations or secretariats. Their major activities prior to World War-I comprised the compilation of statistical materials and assistance to individual national unions involved in strikes. Between the two great world wars, the pre-1914 trends revived but they were significantly affected by the Russian revolution of 1917 and its consequences. Revolutionary socialists gravitated toward the powerful national trade union center which was created and supported by the Russian state. Indeed, the Russian government attempted to organize the international trade union movement for the purpose of accomplishing the political aim of world communism. At the level of 1919, of a Third international (also known as the communist international or comintem). At the level of indirect action it pursued its purpose through the establishment, in 1921, of a Red Trade Union international (RTUI). The RTUI fought bitterly against the evolutionary socialists and pragmatic trade unionists of western Europe and the United States.

All evolutionary socialists and pragmatic trade unionists did not immediately recognize the danger to free trade unionism posed by RTUI. Many of them sympathized with the Russian revolution of 1917 and its triumph over Czarism. Their

initial hopewhich died hard, was that the Russian trade union movement would join with the feetrade unions of the western world in a revived international federation of Trade Unions.

FORMATION OF LABOUR UNION IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE-

Apart from international forces, such as the establishment of the International Labour Organisation, some national circumstances were helpful to this development. Mahatma Gandhi who hand launched a mass movement for India's freedom from British colonial rule shook the people out of their placid and pathetic contentment and instill in them a sense of pride, a spirit of self-reliance and an awareness of human rights. Jawaharlal Nehru in 'Towards Freedom' wrote that 'A demoralized, backward and broken-up people suddenly straightened their backs and lifted their heads and took part in disciplined, joint action on a countrywide scale.

A notable exception had been Narain Meghajee Lokhanday, a factory worker who became a leader in the 1880's and took prominent part in the establishment of the Bombay Mill-Hand's Association, in 1890, India's first labour organization. A majority of workers were illiterate and lacking in formal education and hence they were unable to produce leaders from their own ranks. Due to autocratic nature of the management, the existing and the almost absolute control they exercised over terms of employment, the possibility of a worker leader, even if available, being successful was not encouraging. The fear of victimization was widely prevalent. The workers required outside help to channelize their aspirations and for them their needs.

Gandhi, whose services were requested by an officer of the Government of Bombay in the solution of a labor dispute between mill owners and workers in the textile center of Ahmadabad in 1918, proceeded to establish a spinners' and weaver's association (which later become the Textile Labour Association) to be run on the lines of 'righteous struggle' advocated by him. Gandhi's role was that of a reformer, not that of a Politician. Narain Malhar Joshi of the servants of India Society, who organized unions in the textile and engineering fields in Bombay, was another leader whose main concern was the welfare of workers.

Mahatma Gandhi who hand launched a mass movement for India's freedom from British colonial rule shook the people out of their placid and pathetic contentment and instill in them a sense of pride, a spirit of self-reliance and an awareness of human rights. Jawaharlal Nehru in 'Towards Freedom' wrote that 'A demoralized, backward and broken-up people suddenly straightened their backs and lifted their heads and took part in disciplined, Joint action on a countrywide scale. Secondly, amidst business prosperity the poorly paid working people were hard hit by soaring priced.

ROLE OF DIFFERENT NATIONALIST LEADERS FOR FORMATION LABOUR UNION-

The nationalists were drawn from the Home Rule Movement organized by Mrs. Annie Besant as well as from the amorphous Indian National Congress which was leading the fight for self-government. B. P. Wadia, who organized textile workers in Madras, belong to Annie Besant's political movement, while leaders like V. V. Giri, M. Varadarajulu Naidu and B. Shiva Rao were members of Congress.

In 1920, nationalists helped start the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). This loose, federal organization was brought into being chiefly to facilitate the selection of delegates to represent Indian Labour at the International Labour Conference in Geneva, but it also set before itself the task of co-ordinating the activities of several individual unions existing in the country, and promoting the interests of Indian labour in economic, social and political matters. Among the political leaders who entered the trade union movement at this time were also active young communists like Shripat Amrit Dange, S. S. Mirajkar and Dhundiraj Thengdi. In 1924, violent and long-drawn out strikes by unions organized by them led to arrest, prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of prominent communist leaders. But by 1928, the communists had regained their influence in the trade union field by organizing the cotton mill workers of Bombay. Commenting on the communists' success, the Royal Commission on Indian Labour observed that for some time efforts had been made by communists in India and from beyond its borders to capture the trade union movement. These met with their greatest success in Bombay in 1928. The absence of any strong organization among the cotton mill workers and a realization of their weakness combined with the encouragement given by the result of a prolonged strike enabled a few communist leaders by an intense effort to capture the imaginations of workers and eventually to sweep over 50,000 of them into a communist organization.

The strike referred to by the Royal Commission in its Report concerned the textile workers in Bombay. Lasting nearly six months, and marked by violence, it proved to be the communists' greatest success in a year of continued industrial strife. The communists were given support by extremists among the nationalists, while the moderates were pushed to the background.

The communists were successfully entrenched in the Trade Unions not only in Bombay, but also in other industrial towns in the north, such as Delhi, Calcutta and Allahabad. Their success was aided by several factors. 1st several provincial governments carried on a vigorous drive against the communists and other left wing elements forcing them to hide out. The hunted elements found the trade unions a refuge and cover for their activities. 2nd, some militant nationalists did not hesitate to foment violence among workers and this tied in beautifully with the communists' own tactics. 3rd the refusal of some employers to tolerate even legitimate trade union organizations among their employees and their tendency to yield ground only when confronted with extremist tactics encouraged the growth of communist influence.

4th there were adequate economic reasons, such as wage-cut and arbitrary increases in work-loads, to justify the workers resorting to direct action, and the communists capitalized on these opportunities by taking up the cause of labor. Fifthly, lacking in formal education, dissatisfied with the system, the workers were easily led to believe in the possible success of revolutionary dogmas and fell a prey to those advocating violent overhaul of existing social, economic and political structure of the society. Lastly but quite important was the financial help that the communists received from Moscow.

But another blow was struck against the communists in the trade union movement early in 1929 when the Government of India arrested communist and other left-wing leadership on the charge of conspiring to overthrow the British Sovereign's rule in India. Among those arrested was Shripal Amrit Dange, S. S. Mirajkar, R.S. Nimbkar and Philip S Pratt, all of whom were communists active as trade union leaders. Most of those arrested were kept in prison at least until 1933 when their trial-the Meerut conspiracy case as it was called-concluded, while some were jailed for longer periods. But, while it appeared that the government's move had curtailed the communists activities in the trade union, subsequent events show that communist influence had indeed not ended.

In Nagpur in 1929 at the 10th annual session of AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) when the communist, who had captured the Executive Council of trade union center, acted further to consolidate their position in the organization.

Communists claimed that Gime Kamgar Union, Bombay and the G.I.F Raitwaymen's Union, Bombay had 54,000 and 45,000 members respectively and that these Unions should be allied votes on the basis of these figures. Moderate leaders like Diwan Chamanlal, V. V.

Girt, N.M. Joshi, B. Sheva Rao, S. Guruswamy and Varadarajutu Naidu-members of the Indian National Congress as well as independents discovered the strategy behind this move and realized that if it were allowed to succeed, the trade Union center would practically be in the hands of the communists and other radicals. Thus asserted that the membership claims of the Girini Kamgar Union and the GIP Railwaymen's Union were fictitious and since the figures were not based on audited statements refused to accept them as valid. They suggested alternative figures which were lower and which in the case of Gimi Kamgar Union were as low as 6,000. Their objection was, however rejected by the communist majority in the Executive Council.

During the Nagpur session of the AITUC, the communists in spite of opposition from the moderate wing, forced the passage of resolutions which called for the affiliation of the organization with the League Against Imperialism, the Pan Pacific Trades Union Secretariat and the workers welfare League of India in Great Britain. Controversy between the communists and the moderates centered not only on these issues, but also on the questions of trade union participation in the activities of the International Labor Organisation and the Royal Commission's inquiry into the

conditions of factory labor, which had been announced by the Government of India. Finding compromise with the communists unacceptable, the moderates led by Chamanlal, Giri, Joshi and others and consisting of representatives of twenty-four affiliated unions, seceded from the AITUC. In a statement issued by them, the dissidents charged that AITUC under the control and direction of the new majority in the Executive Council, will be fundamentally opposed to the genuine interests of the working class. Shortly afterwards, they formed a separate trade union center, namely, the Indian Trades Union Federation (ITUF) with V.V. Giri as president and R. R. Bakhale as General Secretary. Both Giri and Bakhale were members of the Indian National Congress. Militant nationalists like Subhas Chandra Bose remained in the AITUC.

Most of this group were moderates who did not like violence and this applied even to some who did not join Gandhi's movement of non violent non-cooperation.

A group led by M. N. Roy, a communist who was seeking to lead the communist party from abroad, initiated moves for trade union unity, but they met with vigorous opposition from communists who did not belong to the Royist group. The struggle between the two groups came to head at the annual session of AITUC held in Calcutta in July 1931 under the presidency of Subhas Chandra Bose. A fight between S. V. Deshpande, leader of orthodox communists and the candidate of the Royist group, G. L. Khandalkar, as to who was the rightful representative of the Gimi Kamgar Union of Bombay, was decided in favor of the latter by credential committee. The annual session ended in disorder as Deshpande and a group of unions which also had been denied recognition withdraw from the AITUC and held a separate session. The result of the separate session was the emergence of the all India Red Trade Union Congress with leadership in the hands of hard core communist.

The beginning of the thirties the trade union movement presented a picture of disunity. There were three trade union centers, namely, the AITUC led by Royists and militant nationalists, the ITUF led by congress nationalists and moderates and the All India Red TU consisting of orthodox communists. Besides, there were some independent organizations, notable among them the All-India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) and the Textile Labor Association (TLA) of Ahmedabad.

A trade union is an organ of class struggle, its basic task is to organize the workers for advancing and defending their rights and interests. Negotiations representations and other methods of collective bargaining must remain an integral part of the Trade Union activities.

The Indian Trade Union movement shall support and actually participate in the struggle India's political freedom from the point of view of the working classes. This

would mean the establishment of a socialist state and during the interval, socialization and the nationalization of all means of production and distribution as far as possible.

An interesting condition to the agreement was that 'there shall be no advocacy of violence or non-violence by either party at joint functions while they were free to criticize each other's political principles and policies from independent platforms.

The Giri proposals were endorsed by the NTUF in its third session in Calcutta in December 1937. The AITU, which had accepted the Giri proposals at its fifteenth session in Bombay in May 1936, ratified the principle of unity between the two organizations by a resolution in its open session held in Delhi in January 1938. Subsequently, a joint session of AITUC and the NTUF met in 1938, appropriately enough in Nagpur, and resolved to implement the Giri Proposals. Two years later, in 1940, the NTUF renounced its separate identity and merged completely with the AITUC.

M. N. Roy and members of his Radical Democratic Party broke away from the AITUC in opposition to its official policy of neutrality towards the war question, and set up a new trade union called Indian Federation of Labour (IFL) the IFL called for the mobilization of Indian labor for participation in the industrial program geared to the needs of the war and the 'securing for the workers the bare minimum of wages and amenities which the wartime conditions demanded and without which the maintenance of workers, morale was an impossibility.

The AITUC and the IFL, for primary in the field of labor representation. Early in 1944, the IFL, which claimed to have organized a large number of workers, applied to the government for recognition as 'the only representative central organization of Indian labour' and stated that the labor representative to the International Labor Conference should be selected on its recommendation. The AITUC challenged this claim.

Trade union as a Political Union :

Indian trade Union are usually criticized and contemned as being political organizations or political unions. The complaint that is made is that they pay more attention to political problems rather than economic problems, the problems of bread and butter. There is a belief that originally there was no politics in the trade unions but that is the reason why the trade union movement is so divided and weak. As will be seen from the discussion. As will be seen from the discussion that follows, the proposition is not correct. A look into the history of the development of the trade union movement will show that it was born in politics and that it developed along with the political movement. It is in recent times that the movement is trying to steer away from politics and political parties.

The first Indian trade union was formed in Madras in 1918 by Mr. B. P. Wadia. A look at the leaders of the trade union movement of those days will make the

position clearer. Originally all leaders of the Indian trade union movement were congress leaders. A galaxy of congress leaders, like Lala Lajpat Rai who was the first President of the All India Trade Union Congress, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mr. C. R. Das were very closely associated with the movement in its early years. Mr. N. M. Joshi who is regarded as the father of the Indian trade union movement was essentially a political leader though a moderate variety. There were differences among congress leaders, some belonged to the extremist school of thought and some were Moderates. But it was those politicians who organized the first unions in the country. Indian trade unions were not spontaneous organizations of workers, they were built up for workers by some political leaders of the country.

The communist entered some time in 1925-26. They entered with political motives.

The Indian National Congress started taking interest in worker's organizations right from 1919. At its thirty fifth session held at Amritsar in 1919, A committee consisting of Lala Lajpat Rai, C. R. Das, Ansuyaben Sarabhai, implemented the improving social, economic and political conditions of the labouring classes and securing for them a fair standard of living.

The process of fractionalization which began in 1947 did not stop with the birth of the I.N.T.U.C. It continued and in 1948 there was one more organization, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. The United Trade Union Congress followed in 1949. Thereafter, the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh were formed and there are now six central trade union organizations in the country. The process may not stop there the D. M. K. are setting up their own unions the Right communists are being pushed out of unions by the left communists are being pushed out of unions by the Left Communists in Bengal and Kerala and one need not be surprised if in course of time the two groups of communists have their two separate central organizations.

CONCLUSION-Unions in India have a long tradition of association with and active participation in politics. Politics is, so to say, their birth mark. It has so long taken the form of domination of political parties. As unions become strong and develop as independent autonomous organizations the domination of political parties may and should disappear. It will be undesirable, however, if it will be followed by disinterest in and running away from politics. Indian unions will not be able to protect and advance the interests of workers and of the society as a whole without certain amount of participation in politics.

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