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TRADE UNIONISM IN BENGAL BEFORE 1922:

HISTORICAL ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT, AND CHARACTERISTICS

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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University of London

1983

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to describe and account for the development of trade unionism in Bengal from its earliest manifestations at the beginning of the nineteenth century to the formation of a trade union federation in 1922.

Chapter 1 indicates the theoretical inadequacies of many existing studies of trade unionism in India, and outlines an alternative perspective. 'Trade unionism' in this thesis refers to all forms of collective action over work or labour market conditions in which all types of employees engage.

Chapters 2 and 3 present evidence for trade unionism from the early nineteenth century to the mid-1890s. The engagement in some form of collective activity by employees from all sectors of the labour market, ranging from expatriate civil servants to 'manual' workers, is indicated, and suggestions put forward to account for the limited nature of developments in this period.

Chapter 4 discusses three phases of increased strike activity, accompanied by the formation of trade unions, between the mid-1890s and the end of the First World War. This marked development is discussed in relation to changes in the labour market, price rises, and phases of political activity.

Chapters 5-8 are concerned with the unprecedented upsurge of trade unionism that occurred between 1918-19 and 1921-2. Chapter 5 presents a statistical description of strike activity and trade union formation which enables phases and patterns of activity to be identified. Chapter 6 examines the relationship between these phases, and changes in living costs, showing through examples the processes whereby employees engaged in, or adopted new forms of trade unionism. Chapter 7 focusses on the relations between post-War trade unionism and the non-cooperation movement, while Chapter 8 examines the organizational consolidation of unions, and attempts made to establish a federation.

Chapter 9 draws out some general conclusions about the processes of emergence and development of trade unionism in Bengal.

CONTENTS

<u>Abstract</u>	2
<u>List of Contents</u>	3
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	4
<u>List of Abbreviations</u>	5
Chapter 1: Introduction and theoretical perspective	9
Chapter 2: The roots of trade unionism I: supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical employees	23
Chapter 3: The roots of trade unionism II: industrial and other occupations	46
Chapter 4: New levels and forms of activity: the mid- 1890s to the end of the First World War	70
Chapter 5: The post-First World War upsurge, 1918-22	108
Chapter 6: Economic conditions and changing processes of agitation	147
Chapter 7: Trade unionism and politics	190
Chapter 8: Union federations and organizational consolidation	219
Chapter 9: Conclusions	252
<u>Bibliography</u>	259
<u>Appendices:</u>	
I - Petitions	273
II - 'Single reference' unions (1918-22)	284
III - Trade Unions in Bengal	286
IV - Biographical	310



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While working on this thesis I have become indebted to so many people that it is not possible to mention them all individually. I am very grateful to Professor K.N. Chaudhuri for taking on the task of supervision, and for his patient criticism and attention to detail through the most trying stages of the research. I must also thank Sri Chimohan Sehanavis and Sri Amal Sen and their families for assistance and hospitality in Calcutta. However, it must be said that this research would never have been started let alone completed without the constant moral and material support and encouragement of Dr. Jharna Gourlay.

I am very grateful to the archivists, librarians and other staff of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta; the Birla Industrial and Technical Museum, Calcutta; the British Library, London; the India Office Library and Records, London; the library of the International Transport Workers' Federation, London; the National Archives of India, New Delhi; the library of the National Union of Seamen, London; the National Library, Calcutta; the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; the Patent Office Library, London; the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; the Senate House Library, University of London; the library of the Trades Union Congress, London; Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan; and the West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

The research was financed by a Major State Scholarship from the Department of Education and Science, a Postgraduate Exhibition from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the University of London Central Research Fund. I am very grateful to these institutions for their support.

ABBREVIATIONS

General

<u>ABP</u>	<u>Amrita Bazar Patrika</u>
EL	Bachelor of Law
ENR	Bengal Nagpur Railway
<u>E</u>	<u>Englishman</u>
EBR	Eastern Bengal Railway
EIR	East Indian Railway
GB	Government of Bengal
GoI	Government of India
IJMA	Indian Jute Manufactures' (later: Mills') Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
ICS	Indian Civil Service
IOL&R	India Office Library and Records
IO	India Office
KWs	Keep Withs
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
<u>S</u>	<u>Statesman</u>

Trade unions

ABGSTA	All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association
ABHSTA	All Bengal High School Teachers' Association
ABISA	Allahabad Bank Indian Staff Association
ABMOA	All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association
ABPCC	All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference
ABREU	Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union
ABTA	All Bengal Teachers' Association
AIPMSA	All India Provincial Medical Services Association
AIPOA	All India Postal Officers' Association
AIRLOC	All India Railway Locomotive Officers' Conference
AIRLU	All India(n) Railway Labour Union
AISASA	All India Sub-Assistant Surgeons' Association
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
AWU	Art Workers' Union
BA	Barbers' Association
BaLA	Barakar Labour Association
BELA	Baj Baj Labour Association
BCLF	Bengal Central Labour Federation
BIPA	British India Police Association

BJMWA Bali Jute Mill Workmen's Association  
BLA Baranagar Labour Association  
ENRILU Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union  
EPA Bengal Police Association  
EPMWA Bengal Paper Mill Workers' Association  
EPRMSA Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association  
ERSA Bengal Registration Service Association  
BSCSA Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association  
BSKA Bengal Settlement Kanungoes' Association  
BTUF Bengal Trade Unions Federation  
BWU Bengal Workers' Union  
  
CA Compounders' Association  
CAOA Civil Accounts Offices Association  
CCEA Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association  
CC&CDA Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association  
CC&SU Calcutta Coachmen's and Syce's Union  
ChLA Chittagong Labour Association  
CIOU Commercial Intelligence Office Union  
CJMWA Central Jute Mill Workmen's Association  
CLA Calcutta Labour Association  
CLU Central Labourers' Union  
COA Currency Office Association  
COLU Central Oriya Labour Union  
CoJMWA Cossipur (Kasipur) Jute Mills Workmen's Union  
CoLA Cossipur (Kasipur) Labour Association  
CPC Calcutta Postal Club  
CPEA Calcutta Postal Employees' Association  
CPSA Customs Preventive Service Association  
CPTEA Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association  
CSC Calcutta Seamen's Club  
CTEU Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union  
CT&EMDA Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association  
CaU Carters' Union  
CU Customs Union  
  
DBEA District Board Engineers' Association  
EA Employees' Association  
EBRIEA Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association

EIRILA East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association  
EIRILU East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union  
FA Foreman's Association  
GRLU Garden Reach Labour Union  
HLU Howrah Labour Union  
HWU Howrah Workers' Union  
IASSO Indian Amalgamated Society of Ships' Officers  
IBIISA Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association  
ICSA Indian Civil Service Association  
IMHU Indian Mill Hands' Union  
IPA Indian Police Association  
ISA Indian Seamen's Association  
ISAj Indian Seamen's Anjuman  
IS&FEU Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Union  
ISU Indian Seamen's Union  
ITA Indian Telegraph Association  
JA Jamadar's Association  
JJMWU Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union  
J&PEA Journalists' and Press Employees' Association  
KanJMWA Kanchrapara Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
KanLU Kanchrapara Labour Union  
KhA Khansamas Association  
KkJMWA Kankinara Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
KkLU Kankinara Labour Union  
KM Karmachari Mandal  
LA Lohars' Association  
LMA Licensed Measurers' Association  
MA Mahomedan Association  
PBBKS Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti  
PEA Press Employees' Association  
PEA(B) Provincial Engineers' Association (Bengal)  
PL Postal League  
PWU Press Workers' Union  
RjCLF Raniganj Central Labour Federation  
RWA Railway Workmen's Association

RWA(IS) Railway Workmen's Association (Indian Section)  
RU Railwaymen's Union  
SERIB Society of European Railwaymen of India and Burma  
SS Sramajibi Sangha  
SSS Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha  
TCU Taxi Cab Union  
TPMWA Titagarh Paper Mills Workmen's Union  
TU Tailors' Union  
TWU Transport Workers' Union  
ULA United Labour Association  
WBSA Writers' Building Staff Association

CHAPTER 1: Introduction and theoretical perspective

The domination and conquest of vast areas of the world by European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries set in motion processes of social transformation, the consequences of which are still unfolding. One such process was the creation of a class of employees who very soon began to behave in ways similar to that associated with their counterparts in the metropolitan countries - to strike, form trade unions, and agitate for improvements in their pay and conditions. This thesis is concerned with examining in detail the emergence and early development of trade unionism in Bengal, an area of India subjected to British and other European influences from the sixteenth century, and under effective British control from the middle of the eighteenth century.

Existing studies of trade unionism in Bengal, and in India in general, emphasise strikes and trade union formation, as Karnik's two books Strikes in India, and Indian Trade Unions: a survey, indicate.<sup>1</sup> This characteristic is also found in apparently broader studies such as Mathur's Indian working class movement, and more recently Saha's History of the working class movement in Bengal, and Sen's Working class of India.<sup>2</sup> Some historians have noted that workers submitted petitions to their employers outlining their grievances and demands, but this form of trade unionism has generally been overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Das Gupta has shown that factory workers in Bengal also responded to the pressures of industrialization with absenteeism, a tendency to take long leave at will, and minor forms of indiscipline such as sleeping, eating, or bathing while at work. They also tended to work for a particular level of income rather than remaining committed to a particular job for a period of time.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) V.B. Karnik, Strikes in India, (Bombay, 1967); Indian Trade Unions: a survey, (Bombay, 1960).
  - 2) J.S. Mathur, Indian Working Class Movement, (Allahabad, 1964); P. Saha, History of the working class movement in Bengal, (New Delhi, 1978); S. Sen, Working class of India. History of emergence and movement 1830-1970, (Calcutta, 1977).
  - 3) Saha, History of the working class movement, p.25; A. Mukhtar, Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India, (London, 1935), p.11, and Sen, Working class of India, p.75 note in passing a petition signed by Bombay workers in 1884. Only R.C. Singh, "Patterns of staff relations in the Indian civil services", Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 19 (3-4), 1976, p.086 discusses petitioning as a form of trade unionism.
  - 4) R. Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects of Calcutta working class, 1875-1899, (Calcutta, 1979), pp.10-22.

Chakrabarty has shown that Bengal factory workers also resorted to the courts in the 1870s and 1880s to obtain arrears of wages, or in protest at ill-treatment from supervisors.<sup>1</sup> However, even when such forms of behaviour have been discussed, the inference is that they were not particularly important, or merely features of an immature working class. Das Gupta described them as "covert withdrawal of effort", "an instinctive withdrawal from exertion", practised by the first generation of factory employees, which should be distinguished from "open and direct group actions, such as strike and picketing, characteristically modern working class forms of action".<sup>2</sup> Other historians' attitudes are essentially similar, though not spelt out in such terms.

Recent research into the origins and characteristics of trade unionism in other Third World contexts suggests that strikes and trade union formation should be conceived of as part of a continuum of activity in which factory and other workers engaged. In his discussion of African miners' responses to work and conditions of employment in the Rhodesian gold mines at the turn of the nineteenth century Van Onselen has shown that mass boycott of particularly bad mines, mass desertions, and various forms of passive resistance at work, and occasional strikes, occurred from the earliest days.<sup>3</sup> The solidarity evident in these forms of boycott and desertion, a solidarity of the type necessary for strikes to begin to occur, indicates that the history of the latter cannot be understood except as a development within a broad spectrum of behaviour. Cohen, in a more general review of African workers' behaviour, has suggested that a distinction can be made between "hidden" and "overt" forms of "worker consciousness". The former includes desertion; community withdrawal from the labour market; target working; task, efficiency, and time bargaining; sabotage; accidents and sickness; and theft, while the latter ranges from unionization and strikes to political activity.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) D. Chakrabarty, "Sasipada Banerjee: a study in the nature of the first contact of the Bengali bhadralok with the working classes of Bengal", The Indian Historical Review, II (2), 1976, pp.355-6.
  - 2) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.28, 30-31.
  - 3) C. Van Onselen, "Worker consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920", in R. Cohen, P.C.W. Gutkind, P. Brazier, (eds.), Peasants and Proletarians. The Struggles of Third World Workers, (London, 1979), pp.107-27.
  - 4) R. Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers", Review of African Political Economy, 19, September-December 1980, pp.8-22.

This concern with a wide range of forms of activity is supported by industrial sociologists concerned with 'industrial conflict' in advanced capitalist countries. Kerr, for example, has written of industrial conflict that

Its means of expression are as unlimited as the ingenuity of man. The strike is the most common and most visible expression. But conflict with the employers may also take the form of peaceful bargaining and grievance handling, of boycotts, of political action, of restriction of output, of sabotage, of absenteeism, or of personnel turnover. ... Even the strike is of many varieties. It may involve all the workers or only key men. It may take the form of refusal to work overtime or to perform a certain process. It may even involve such rigid adherence to the rules that output is stifled. (1)

Hyman has also noted that strikes are not a homogeneous category of behaviour, which itself "suggests that stoppages of work are in fact part of a continuum of behaviour". He points out that studies of miners in Britain indicate that strikes are to some extent interchangeable with absenteeism and go-slows, and when activists were dismissed from a car factory, the number of strikes fell, but the levels of absenteeism, accidents and rate of labour turnover rose. Trade unions are also evidently part of the same continuum.<sup>2</sup> Kerr and Hyman also distinguished two broad categories of behaviour within this continuum which appear to correspond with each other, and with Cohen's 'hidden' and 'overt' forms of consciousness and conflict.

Kerr noted that sabotage, absenteeism, restriction of output, and labour turnover "may take place on an individual as well as on an organized basis and constitute alternatives to collective action."<sup>3</sup> Hyman phrased this distinction in terms of "unorganized" and "organized" behaviour, emphasising that the latter was more likely than the former to be connected with strategies of overall change.<sup>4</sup> Cohen's "hidden" group of responses clearly corresponds to the "individual" and "unorganized" categories since it is marked by individualistic behaviour, and generally devoid of long term perspectives, while his "overt" group is similar to the "collective" and "organized" categories.<sup>5</sup> In Indian historiography,

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- 1) C. Kerr, Labor and management in industrial society, (New York, 1964), p.171, quoted in R. Hyman, Strikes, (London, 2nd ed. 1977), pp.52-3.
  - 2) Hyman, ibid., pp.52, 54-6, 75.
  - 3) Kerr, Labor and management, p.171, quoted in ibid., pp.52-3.
  - 4) Hyman, ibid., p.53; see also R. Hyman, Industrial relations. A Marxist introduction, (London, 1975), p.189.
  - 5) Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden forms of Consciousness", pp.8-22.



Das Gupta appears to be making the same distinction by separating "instinctive" from "characteristically modern working class forms of action". However, he also suggests, basing his conclusion on a reading of British working class history, that the former logically and historically preceded the latter. His primary concern, and to a lesser extent that of other Indian historians, is then to explain why the 'unorganized' forms of behaviour continued to persist, and 'organized' forms barely to develop, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> However, neither Hyman nor Cohen suggest that the categories are necessarily related in a chronological manner. Indeed Hyman has drawn attention not only to the interchangeability of forms, but the persistence of 'unorganized' behaviour among industrial workers in Britain to the present day.<sup>2</sup> The study of trade unionism must therefore take cognisance of all forms of behaviour in which workers engage relative to their work and working conditions.

Das Gupta's distinction between forms of workers' activity is linked with another feature of Indian trade union historiography - the assumption that the conditions for trade unionism were not present until the introduction of factories and railways, and the development of coal mines and tea plantations, in the mid-nineteenth century. This period saw, in Das Gupta's words,

the intrusion of metropolitan capital and the launching of colonial enterprises like jute and cotton mills, engineering concerns ... [which] was necessarily accompanied by the social process of transformation of sectors of population into an industrial working class, a distinctly new kind of labour force. (3)

Industrialization created this labour force, simultaneously destroying traditional patterns of life, and subjecting it to harsh working conditions, low wages, and appalling housing conditions and sanitary conditions. Resistance and reaction inevitably developed, which although initially taking 'unorganized' forms, also took the "characteristically modern working class" form of strikes, as evidence of railway and factory

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- 1) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.26-8 and passim. Other studies generally just note the lack of strikes in the late nineteenth century - see footnotes 1 and 2, p.9.
  - 2) Hyman, Strikes, pp.53-6. J.E.T. Eldridge, Industrial disputes: essays in the sociology of industrial relations, (London, 1968), pp.33-4 has also criticised the view that employees' basic organizing struggles no longer take place in Britain.
  - 3) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, p.1, (*italics as in the original*).

workers' strikes in the 1860s and 1870s shows.<sup>1</sup>

This perspective implies that trade unionism should be thought of as a characteristic of workers in factories and similar occupations, whose activities indeed form the focus of most histories of trade unionism in India. However, when discussing developments in the twentieth century, references are also made to strikes and unionization among 'white collar' workers.<sup>2</sup> Since no attempt is made to relate this phenomenon to industrialization, or any comparable change in 'white collar' workers' conditions, it seems that inclusion of their activities can only be justified by the form in which they occurred. This procedure raises two problems.

Apart from the questionable validity of discussing trade unionism simply in terms of strikes and trade unions, historians of the Indian labour movement have not included all such forms of workers' activity. Several years ago attention was drawn to a strike by palanquin bearers in Calcutta, in 1827.<sup>3</sup> However, most of the general histories have ignored this, while Sen has asserted that such early "cessations of work by the toilers in different professions should not be confused" with factory or other industrial workers' strikes.<sup>4</sup> Turning to the late nineteenth century, the formation of a union by European railwaymen has sometimes been noted, but has generally been excluded from fuller discussion on the assumption that it had no influence on Indian workers, or was too restrained in its behaviour to be called a trade union.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, *passim*; Karnik, Strikes in India, pp.358, 368; A.S. and J.S. Mathur, Trade Union Movement in India, (Bombay, 1957), pp.1-2, 12; S.D. Punekar, "Trade union movement in India", in V.B. Singh and A.K. Saran (eds.), Industrial Labour in India, (London, 1960), p.389; Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.1-2, 17-19; Sen, Working class of India, pp.35-50, 71-88.
  - 2) Mathur & Mathur, *ibid.*, p.14; Punekar, *ibid.*, p.391; Saha, *ibid.*, pp.19-20; Sen, *ibid.*, pp.86, 414-32. Separate studies such as R.C. Singh, Indian P & T Employees' Movement, (Allahabad, 1975), have also been made.
  - 3) G. Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, (Calcutta, 1966), pp.3-7.
  - 4) Sen, Working class of India, p.79.
  - 5) Sen, *ibid.*, p.86 stated that this railwaymen's union was "fundamentally a mutual aid society", and not therefore a trade union. Passing references were made in Mathur & Mathur, Trade Union Movement in India, p.14; Punekar, "Trade union movement in India", p.391; V.B. Singh, "Trade union movement", in V.B. Singh (ed.), Economic history of India 1857-1956, (Bombay, 1965), p.569.

A more fundamental problem stems from the treatment of 'white collar' workers as a distinctive group. In Britain 'white collar' workers have been discussed as a discrete group largely because of historically perceived differences in their behaviour compared with that of industrial employees, particularly their apparent reluctance to engage in any forms of trade unionism. Although they continue to be studied as a distinct entity it is clear that the definition of 'white collar' workers is an arbitrary one, and that their behaviour has changed to such an extent that many are now firm participants in strikes and union activities.<sup>1</sup> A recent study of scientists' and engineers' unions, for example, concluded that although they were "different from those of manual workers, ... the similarities are nevertheless greater than the differences".<sup>2</sup> Even if research in Britain had tended to confirm the distinctiveness of 'white collar' workers there, the importation of this category into studies of Indian trade unionism would be a questionable procedure. Rather, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon of trade unionism in general in order to identify any variations in different employees' behaviour. A definition of trade unionism to guide research along these lines, and which encompasses all potential forms of activity, is thus required.

The premise that trade unionism is a product of industrialization could be modified to take 'white collar' workers into account. Historically, industrialization entailed on the one hand the restructuring of manufacturing processes, involving mechanization, division of labour, and factory production, and on the other the creation of a work force employed in this and ancillary sectors, such as transport. The restructuring of manufacturing processes entailed significant changes in the labour process. Employees had increasingly to work according to the rhythms of machinery, putting their effort into the minutely repetitive tasks into which production was divided, and were increasingly herded together in factories under the owners' supervision. Trade unionism grew as workers reacted against their subordination, and sought to obtain

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- 1) R. Lumley, White collar unionism in Britain. A survey of the present position, (London, 1973), pp.13, 15, and C. Jenkins, B. Sherman, White collar unionism: the rebellious salariat, (London, 1979), pp.12-14 note the arbitrary nature of definitions of 'white collar' workers. The increasing militancy of 'white collar' workers in Britain was noted as long ago as 1961 - V.L. Allen, "White collar revolt", The Listener, 30 November 1961, reprinted in V.L. Allen, The sociology of industrial relations, (London, 1971), pp.91-6.
  - 2) K. Prandy, Professional employees. A study of scientists and engineers, (London, 1965), p.145.

the best conditions under which to part with their labour power.<sup>1</sup> While industrialization initially affected only manufacturing and related labour processes, similar changes have affected 'white collar' workers in Europe and the USA in the twentieth century. Braverman has shown that in the nineteenth century clerks were essentially craftsmen in that they had to master all aspects of their work, but that subsequently their work has been subjected to division of tasks, de-skilling, mechanization, and increased management supervision. This process has developed to such an extent, he maintains, that by the 1950s the similarity of factory and clerical labour processes was evident.<sup>2</sup> The premise that trade unionism is a response to industrialized labour processes could thus be applied equally to industrial workers in the narrow sense, and to 'white collar' employees.

Although this hypothesis is useful, there are two objections to using it as a guide to research. Firstly, there is a tendency to assume that the industrialized sector of the economy was a discrete entity. If there were no connections between the pre-industrial and industrialized workforces, then this assumption might be justified, but otherwise it must be considered possible for characteristics of the former to influence the behaviour of industrialized workers. Since research has shown that the factory workforce in late nineteenth century Bengal was not a discrete group, but retained significant ties with rural areas,<sup>3</sup> this possibility must be examined if an adequate explanation of the origins of trade unionism is to be given. Secondly, forms of behaviour apparently identical with trade unionism, such as the 1827 palanquin bearers' strike, seem to be left in a limbo. It could be argued that the palanquin bearers' action preceded any form of industrialization, but the same problem arises with work cessations by groups such as carters or sweepers which took place after factories had been established. In some of these cases, for example municipal sweepers,

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- 1) E. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp.85-8; B.F. Hoselitz, "The development of a labor market in the process of economic growth", in A. Sturmfel & J.G. Scoville (eds.), The International Labour Movement in Transition, (Urbana, 1973), pp.39-44; C. Kerr & A. Siegel, "The structuring of the labor force in industrial society: new dimensions and new questions", Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 8 (2), 1955, pp.160-63; Sen, Working class of India, pp.3-4; Mathur & Mathur, Trade union movement in India, pp.1-2, 12.
  - 2) H. Braverman, Labor and monopoly capital. The degradation of work in the twentieth century, (London & New York, 1974), pp.298-316, 350-52.
  - 3) See pp.20, 62-5.

it might be argued that they had been 'industrialized', but there is insufficient evidence concerning the work processes of many other occupations for conclusions on these lines to be drawn.

A definition of trade unionism which overcomes these limitations, and which does not pre-judge the forms of activity or range of employees whose behaviour is to be discussed has recently been outlined by Allen.

Trade unionism is collective action by the sellers of labour power in order to protect and improve their living standards. The core of this definition is the selling of labour power. Others, such as consumers, slaves or peasants may protest and take action, but it is qualitatively different from that taken by employees because employees are in a unique objective situation which produces equally unique reactions. ... The necessary condition for trade unionism, therefore, is a free labour market. (1)

It could perhaps be argued that this definition is too wide since, for example, an employees' consumer cooperative is clearly a form of collective action initiated with a view to protect or improve living standards. However, Allen's emphasis on the uniqueness of employees, the fact that they sell their labour power, indicates that the term trade unionism should be limited to collective action related to this characteristic, and not extended to all forms of collective action concerning living standards in which employees might participate.

A "free labour market", which can be defined as one in which employees' engagement in the labour process is subject principally to economic as distinct from legal or political constraints, developed in Europe during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and became a "vital element" in the latter.<sup>2</sup> Thus Allen argued that the potential

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- 1) V.L. Allen, Social analysis: a Marxist critique and alternative, (London, 1975), p.201.
  - 2) Ibid., p.206. Braverman, Labor and monopoly capital, pp.52; Hoselitz, "The development of a labor market", pp.34, 38-9. T. Nichols, Capital and Labour: studies in the capitalist labour process, (London, 1980), pp.74-5 outlines this definition, noting (p.79) the important proviso that "the reality of 'economic compulsion' does not exist in an historico-cultural void", and that "economic compulsion is not, in practice, an entirely economic mechanism". R. Das Gupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", Economic and Political Weekly, XVI (44-46), Special Number, 1981, pp.1781-1806 has argued that the Indian labour market was "unfree". However, since his argument is based on the premise that a 'free' labour market does (or should) function entirely through economic mechanisms, his conclusions need no further discussion in this context.

for trade unionism existed where production was organized on capitalist lines, whether in Europe, North America, or in sectors of capitalist production established in Africa or Asia.<sup>1</sup> This labour market is the primary source of industrial conflict since it embodies an inherently unequal relationship. Employers own and control the means of production, and only need to purchase such labour power as their production objectives require. Employees on the other hand depend on selling their labour power in order to gain a livelihood since they have no significant access to the means of production on their own account. The potential for conflict also occurs over the rate at which labour power is purchased. For employers this is a cost which, like that of other commodities, has generally to be minimised, while for employees, labour power is sold to meet historically determined and variable needs.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that this definition considerably extends the perception of which groups of people could be considered as potential trade unionists, at least so far as studies of Indian trade unionism have been concerned. As Allen remarked,

Anyone who sells his labour power, irrespective of the nature of his work, of his income level, social background, educational achievement or position in the authority hierarchy, is a potential trade unionist. (3)

However, the initiation of trade unionism, and its 'spread' from one group of employees to another, is dependent on the fulfilment of other conditions which vary according to the situation, and can thus only be identified empirically.<sup>4</sup> These conditions, on which studies of trade unionism have traditionally focussed, include a range of factors such as the personal relations between employees and management, the nature of workers' communities (occupationally homogeneous communities tending to exhibit greater degrees of solidarity), the character of work and the nature of the labour process, employees' social status, and political constraints on trade unionism itself (or similar collective social

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1) Allen, Social analysis, pp.206-7.

2) Ibid., p.218; Allen, Sociology of Industrial relations, pp.39-40; V.L. Allen, Militant trade unionism. A re-analysis of industrial action in an inflationary situation, (London, 1966), pp.21-2; K. Burgess, The origins of British industrial relations, (London, 1975), p.304; Hyman, Strikes, pp.85-91.

3) Allen, Social analysis, p.208 (*italics in original*).

4) Ibid., pp.206-7, 208.

activities), and changes in living costs and needs.<sup>1</sup>

The labour market is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but is in reality a conglomeration of markets for different types of skills.<sup>2</sup> Since skills exist at the level of the labour market, itself the basic structure of trade unionism, employees' propensity to engage in trade unionism could be expected to vary according to their skill characteristics. Identification of skill groups could thus facilitate analysis of trade unionism by replacing the traditional 'white collar' and 'manual' groups. Analysis and classification of the skills present in the eastern Indian labour market would be a complex task, beyond the scope of this thesis. For present purposes it will be sufficient to identify categories not only on the basis of skill, but also taking into account other factors, inseparable from employees, such as community, status, and forms of labour process. Accordingly, five labour market or employee categories have been identified: supervisory, subordinate supervisory and technical, clerical, factory, and non-factory.<sup>3</sup>

The supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical groups replace what has been referred to as the 'white collar' sector.<sup>4</sup> In Bengal, these ranged from, for example, the Indian Civil Service officers at the top of the administrative hierarchy (supervisory employees) through the uncovenanted and provincial civil service members, and technical supervisors in industry (subordinate supervisory employees), to clerks in the private and public sectors, and similar groups such as teachers, printers, and compositors (clerical employees). Employees in these groups filled a hierarchy of occupations to which entry was based on literacy in English, or other skills obtained through training

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- 1) For reviews of these factors and their effects, see Eldridge, Industrial disputes, pp.16-65; Hyman, Strikes, pp.56-73; D. Lockwood, The black-coated worker, (London, 1958), pp.15, 34-5, 194-5, 204-12.
  - 2) For discussion of skill in labour markets, see Allen, Social analysis, pp.214-23. For skill classification problems, see International Labour Office, International Standard Classification of Occupations, (Geneva, 1949), pp.44-50.
  - 3) G. Arrighi, "International corporations, labor aristocracies, and economic development in tropical Africa", in R.I. Rhodes (ed.), Imperialism and underdevelopment: a reader, (London, 1970), p.228 outlined a similar classification.
  - 4) M. Van de Vall, Labor organizations. A macro- and micro-sociological analysis on a comparative basis, (Cambridge, 1970), pp.20-34, described a similar three-fold sub-division of 'white collar' workers with respect to trade unionism in Europe and the USA.

in the English language. While from the perspective of skill these groups formed a continuum, in practice they were segregated, largely along racial lines.<sup>1</sup>

The supervisory group occupations in both government and private sectors were to all intents and purposes reserved for Europeans until well into the twentieth century. In 1919, for example, European expatriates still held more than 88% of all high grade government posts in India,<sup>2</sup> and the 1921 Census revealed that Europeans and Anglo-Indians occupied 64.5% of managerial positions in factories.<sup>3</sup> The situation in the subordinate supervisory and clerical groups was more complex. In 1879 vacancies in the uncovenanted (later to be called the provincial) civil service carrying a monthly salary of Rs.200 or more were reserved for Indian candidates - except for posts in the opium, police, customs, salt, survey, mint, and public works departments, and selected sub-divisional offices.<sup>4</sup> The 1921 Census shows that nearly 40% of all subordinate supervisory industrial employees were Europeans or Anglo-Indians.<sup>5</sup> Indians, particularly 'middle class' Hindu Bengalis, filled most of the judicial and executive administrative posts at provincial civil service level, and formed the majority of the clerical labour force.<sup>6</sup> Some of these Bengalis probably came from families with a long tradition of such work, but their numbers were augmented in the latter part of the nineteenth century by small landholders and middle tenants who were forced by declining rent incomes to seek employment.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) For information on which this and the following paragraphs are based, see particularly, Report of the Salaries Commission appointed by the Government of Bengal to revise the salaries of ministerial officers and to reorganize the system of business in Executive Offices, 1885-1886, (Calcutta, 1886), (hereafter: Report of the Salaries Commission); A.K. Bagchi, Private investment in India, 1900-1939, (Cambridge, 1972), pp.150-56; B.B. Misra, The bureaucracy in India, (Bombay, 1977), pp.52-94; A. Seal, The emergence of Indian nationalism, (Cambridge, 1968), pp.116-9, 138-42, 164-67.
  - 2) Misra, The bureaucracy in India, p.232.
  - 3) Census of India, 1921, vol. V (II), Table XXII.
  - 4) GoI Home (Public), April 1879, A 173-6.
  - 5) Census of India, 1921, vol. V (II), Table XXII.
  - 6) Some clerical posts in the Bengal Secretariat were reserved for Europeans and Anglo-Indians - GB Financial (Finance), November 1904, A 20 - who also formed nearly 40% of engineering firms' clerical cadre in 1921 - Census of India, 1921, vol. V (II), Table XXII.
  - 7) Seal, Emergence of Indian nationalism, pp.51-7; Report of the Government of Bengal Unemployment Enquiry Committee, (Calcutta, 1925), vol. I, pp.10-11. However, the Report of the Salaries Commission made no mention of the latter development in a chapter on clerks' problems.



The factory and non-factory groups are not skill categories, but groups of skill categories distinguished by the nature of working conditions and processes. This departure from the identification of skill groups has been necessitated by the paucity of evidence on skill categories among 'manual' workers. Moreover, since reports of trade unionism rarely enable the actions of, for example, weavers and sack sewers in a jute factory to be distinguished, skill group categories would be of little practical use. Instead of treating these employees as one group, it was felt that the categories factory and non-factory would be useful given the general consensus that factories tend to facilitate trade unionism.

In Bengal practically all employees in these two groups were Indian, but this sector of the labour market was quite distinct from that of the subordinate supervisory and clerical groups. Bengalis appear only to have formed a minority of factory and non-factory employees, most of whom came from districts in Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces. Moreover, many if not most of them migrated between the non-agricultural labour market and their homes. They were drawn from among the landless labourers, small tenants and sharecroppers, and dispossessed village artisans, and thus formed a quite distinct social group from other Indian labour market categories.<sup>1</sup>

Since the preceding paragraphs have focussed on what could be called the objective structural determinants of trade unionism it is necessary to emphasise that attention must also be given to employees' consciousness. Some industrial sociologists have assumed that ideology functions to subdue and resolve industrial conflict, but have not examined how this process works, or more importantly considered that employees' (or employers') perceptions contributed significantly to the initiation of conflict. An opposite point of view tends to stress employees' perceptions as the starting point of analysis, but the perspective adopted here is that, in Hyman's words,

social structure and social consciousness are dialectically related, each acting upon and influencing the other, and

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1) R. Das Gupta, "Factory labour in Eastern India: sources of supply, 1855-1946. Some preliminary findings", Indian Economic and Social History Review, XIII (3), 1976, pp.277-329; L. Chakravarty, "Emergence of an industrial labour force in a dual economy - British India 1880-1920", Indian Economic and Social History Review, XV (3), 1978, pp.249-327.

in some situations leading to increased stability, in others to heightened conflict. (1)

Historians of trade unionism and the labour movement often tend to discuss workers' consciousness within a polarised framework of 'true' (i.e., class) consciousness, or 'false' consciousness. Several studies of Indian trade unionism make comments of this nature, linking the emergence of trade unions with the development of 'class consciousness', a change itself inferred from the formation of unions, or strikes.<sup>2</sup> Sen adopted a slightly different perspective, suggesting that though the unions formed prior to the First World War laid the basis for subsequent developments, they were "in a not yet perfect form", while the post-First World War developments heralded "the period of more class-conscious proletarian actions and the growth of trade unions in the true sense of the term."<sup>3</sup> Das Gupta more cautiously concludes that strikes by jute factory workers in the late nineteenth century only indicate the existence of "class feeling", not "class consciousness", but nevertheless implies that the latter grows inevitably from the former.<sup>4</sup>

The notions of 'true' and 'false' consciousness stem from particular variants of Marxism, which suggest that human behaviour is determined by class interests, and that consciousness is 'true' or 'false' according to the extent to which behaviour is related to the preservation of such interests.<sup>5</sup> It has recently been suggested that although this notion of interests is to be found in the writings of Marx, it should be discarded as it hinders rather than assists understanding of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Instead of making such an assumption about behaviour, and therefore consciousness,

The problem to be explained, ... , is how members of the different classes come to define the world and their situation and possibilities in it in a particular way. (7)

As Hyman has noted, the potential for the manifestation of conflict inherent in the capitalist labour market "is subject ... to an important

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- 1) Hyman, Strikes, p.68. The preceding paragraph is based on his pp.66-9. See also Eldridge, Industrial disputes, pp.22-3.
  - 2) Mathur & Mathur, Trade Union Movement in India, pp.12, 15; Punekar, "Trade union movement in India", p.391; Saha, History of the working class movement, p.25; Singh, "Trade union movement", pp.571-2.
  - 3) Sen, Working class of India, pp.91, 116.
  - 4) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, p.150.
  - 5) Allen, Social analysis, pp.224-8; G. Therborn, The ideology of power and the power of ideology, (London, 1980), pp.4-5.
  - 6) Therborn, ibid., pp. 5, 10.
  - 7) Ibid., p.10.

constraint: the degree to which subordinates accept the right of those in control to issue orders."<sup>1</sup> The simple assumption that employees will inevitably resist exploitation cannot be made, particularly in a study such as this which aims to examine the roots of such activity.

Employees' consciousness not only influences whether or not they will engage in some form of trade unionism, but the types of activity in which they take part. Hyman has noted, for example, that coal miners in Britain feel justified in taking an occasional day off if they are not fully fit for work, while steelworkers feel that this is absenteeism, and very reprehensible.<sup>2</sup> Attention given to 'white collar' unionism in Britain also suggests that consciousness played some part in their traditional abstention from activity, though Lockwood suggested that notions of 'prestige' or 'social standing' affect trade unionism among all types of workers, not just clerks.<sup>3</sup>

The perspectives adopted here mark a considerable departure from those usually found in studies of Indian trade unionism, and subsequent chapters will therefore be concerned with two principal objectives. Firstly, to describe evidence for trade unionism, in all forms and among all groups of employees. Secondly, to attempt to account for developments, particularly the process of employees' engaging in or adopting different forms of trade unionism, in terms of both the structural constraints within which they operated, and their own perceptions.

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1) Hyman, Strikes, p.92.

2) Ibid., pp.70-71.

3) Lockwood, The blackcoated worker, p.210.

CHAPTER 2: The roots of trade unionism I: supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical employees.

These sectors of the labour market initially developed in the eighteenth century to meet the European trading companies' need for people to interpret for them, and manage their day to day business affairs. Decisive changes were made in the public sector in 1793 when the supervisory grade civil servants were organized into the Covenanted (later, Indian) Civil Service on a regular salaried basis, and regular grades and pay scales for many Government clerical posts were formalized. Other non-clerical administrative posts which had not been included in the Covenanted Services came to be known as the Uncovenanted Civil Service.<sup>1</sup> Little is known about the history of the private sector demand for these types of employees, except that waged and salaried clerks and other employees were engaged from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>2</sup> Given that the potential for trade unionism exists wherever there are are waged or salaried employees, activity may thus have occurred from around the turn of the eighteenth century.

Supervisory employees

The East India Company's military and civilian supervisory employees did in fact submit collective representations about their terms and conditions of employment from the 1790s, if not before. These usually took the form of collective petitions, circulated among groups of employees for signing, and then forwarded to the authorities. In 1793, for example, Bengal Army officers submitted petitions complaining about the lack of promotion prospects, and the length of service in the lower categories of post.<sup>3</sup> Although individual civilian employees also submitted petitions about pay and conditions in the late eighteenth century,<sup>4</sup> the

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- 1) Report of the Salaries Commission, pp.19-25; Misra, The bureaucracy in India, pp.45-59, 89-93; Sir P. Griffiths, To Guard my People. The history of the Indian Police, (London, 1971), pp.57-8; G.P. Srivastava, The Indian Civil Service. A study in administrative personnel, (Delhi, 1965), pp. 24-53.
  - 2) B.B. Misra, The Indian middle classes: their growth in modern times, (London, 1961), pp.87-104.
  - 3) A Collection of Facts and Documents Relative to Batta &c. with other pending questions concerning the Indian Army ... , (Calcutta, 1829), pp.11-12. See also, Supplement to the Facts and Documents, relative to Batta including correspondence, memorials, &c. from the date of the half-batta order, 29th November 1828 to 19th May 1829, (Calcutta, 1829).
  - 4) See entries in the GB Public Consultations indexes for 1794, 1796, 1799, 1800, 1802 and 1803 under the heading "Company Servants".

earliest evidence for collective activity on their part dates from 1822. In January that year Covenanted civil servants in Calcutta held two meetings, first to discuss a plan for an Annuity Fund, and the second to discuss problems associated with taking sick leave in Europe. As a result of these meetings a sub-committee of Covenanted civil servants drew up a petition, which was sent to the East India Company's Court of Directors in May 1822.<sup>1</sup>

The actual course of trade unionism among these employees during the early nineteenth century remains to be established. It appears from the pattern of rule-making by the authorities that petitioning was probably only a sporadic occurrence prior to the 1870s. Rules made in 1778, 1787 and 1814, for example, merely prohibited civil servants from resigning in order to pursue claims made in a petition, and laid down procedures for presenting petitions.<sup>2</sup> In 1876, however, the Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy, saying,

I have been asked by the Council to represent to you privately the importance of taking every opportunity which may present itself, for checking the combinations among your servants Civil or Military, which are becoming fashionable, for the purpose of conjuring by force of agitation some benefit out of your treasury. ... the position is irregular and does not tend to encourage principles of official obedience and loyalty. (3)

As a result the Government of India revised the petition rules, prohibiting "any combination for the purpose of memorializing any authority to which the memorialists may be subordinate".<sup>4</sup>

This move seems to have been made in response to an increase in collective activity among supervisory civil servants in the early 1870s. In 1870-71 and perhaps earlier members of the Indian Civil Service and expatriates in other departments began pressing for the right to a transfer from unpopular districts after a period of service, and for promotion to proceed strictly according to seniority.<sup>5</sup> The Lieutenant-

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- 1) Bengal Public Consultations, 13 June 1822, Nos. 46-54.
  - 2) Extract, Military Letter to Bengal, 30 January 1778 (IOL&R: L/MIL/5/392, Collection 146); Bengal Public Circular, 28 October 1814 (IOL&R: Bengal Despatches, 12th October 1814 to 28th October 1814); GoI Home (Public), August 1867, A 237A, "Precis of correspondence regarding the transmission of Memorials of Petitions addressed to the Home Authorities". A Despatch of March 1787 referred to in the latter two documents has not been traced.
  - 3) Salisbury to Lytton, 11/8/1876, Private. Lytton Papers, IOL&R: Mss Eur E 218/516/1B (No.40).
  - 4) GoI Home (Public), November 1876, A 97.
  - 5) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Part 1, pp.58-61.

Governor of Bengal reported that this agitation "at one time appeared to be in danger of overstepping the limits of decorous discipline", but that he was able to convince the civil servants that administrative necessity must prevail.<sup>1</sup> This activity was paralleled by the establishment in 1871 of the Indian Observer by some of the younger members of the civil and military services in India. This paper carried critical articles on Government policy, and discussion of employment problems and prospects, but collapsed after a few years when, according to an ICS officer of the time, contributors were made to understand that "it was not safe to write in it any longer."<sup>2</sup>

The question of unfulfilled promotion prospects was raised again by ICS officers in 1874-6, and 1884.<sup>3</sup> This time the problem centred on the structure of the promotion and grading system, not questions of policy as such. Government employees in the higher and middle civil service ranks were grouped into grades, to which particular rates of pay were attached. Regular promotion from one grade to another, and hence regular pay increments, depended on the maintenance of a strict proportion between recruitment, and the number of higher grade posts.<sup>4</sup> However, in the 1860s a relatively large number of officers had been recruited for the ICS, which created problems in the 1870s when those officers began entering the middle years of their careers.<sup>5</sup> By the mid-1880s, for example, an ICS officer in Bengal had to wait up to 15 years before taking charge of a district compared to 12 years earlier in the century.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, by 1884 the salaries of men with between ten and twenty years service were on average Rs.191 lower than would have been

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- 1) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Part 1, pp.60-61.
  - 2) J. Beames, Memoirs of a Bengal civilian, (London, 1961), p.203. The Indian Observer (sometimes called The Observer) began publication in February 1871, and carried many articles on covenanted and un-covenanted civil servants' problems.
  - 3) GoI Home (Public), September 1877, A 223-280; June 1885, A 103-141; GB Appointments, April 1885, A 4-5; Bengal Administration Report, 1874-75, pp.2-3; ibid., Lieutenant-Governor's Minute, pp.2-3, and Report, pp.14-27.
  - 4) GoI Home (Public), January 1885, A 119-29; Bengal Administration Report, 1874-75, Lieutenant-Governor's Minute, pp.2-3; Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Report, (London, 1917, Cd.8382), p.34.
  - 5) Bengal Administration Report, 1875-76, Lieutenant-Governor's Minute, pp.2-3; Report, pp.14-17 identified the problem as concerning men on 7-14 years service. See also GB Appointments, April 1885, A 4-5.
  - 6) GB Appointments, April 1885, A 4-5.

the case had promotion proceeded as normal.<sup>1</sup> This problem was relieved by the introduction of early retirement options for some officers, but it was not finally resolved until after the First World War.<sup>2</sup>

Even as the issue of blocked promotions was being attended to a new problem was coming into prominence which affected all expatriate employees. Although they were recruited abroad, their salaries and pensions were expressed in rupees. This created no problems as long as the exchange rate remained stable, but between 1872 and 1893 the sterling value of the rupee declined by 36%.<sup>3</sup> This might only have been felt in the increased cost of imported goods and reduced pension value had not improved communications enabled expatriates to maintain closer and more regular contacts with Europe than in earlier years, thus making them more aware of the falling value of their incomes.<sup>4</sup>

Petitions about the exchange problem were first submitted in 1885, but nothing was done to relieve the problem, and between June 1892 and July 1893 a total of 1770 individual petitions were sent to the Secretary of State on this issue.<sup>5</sup> In January 1893 the Viceroy received a deputation of ICS and other Government expatriate employees who presented him with a joint statement about their grievances.<sup>6</sup> The large number of petitions indicates the extent to which expatriate opinion had been mobilised by this problem, but the organization of the deputation represented quite a different order of activity. As the Viceroy himself reminded the deputation, the "regulations of the service ... forbid combinations among employes of the Government".<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, ICS officers in Bengal

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- 1) Earnings of 1876 were compared to those of 1884-5, showing decreases for people in the same year of service in each period ranging from Rs.89 to Rs.470 per month - GB Appointments, April 1885, A 4-5.
  - 2) Ibid.; B. Spangenberg, "The problem of recruitment for the Indian Civil Service during the late Nineteenth Century", Journal of Asian Studies, 30 (2), 1971, p.360. The grade system was abolished in 1920 - Calcutta Gazette, IA, 3 March 1920, pp.255-62.
  - 3) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58.
  - 4) Bengal Administration Report, 1872-73, Introduction, p.13. The question of expenses in Europe was emphasised in an expatriates' statement to the Viceroy in 1893 - GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58.
  - 5) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), November 1893, A 1057; Spangenberg, "The problem of recruitment", pp.356-7. Individual petitions were presumably used to circumvent the ban on collective activity.
  - 6) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58-58D.
  - 7) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58A.

went one stage further the following year by forming the Indian Civil Service Association, a trade union.<sup>1</sup>

ICS officers were not the only Government supervisory employees who petitioned over their wages and other conditions. In 1870-71 expatriate police officers also tried to establish a claim to promotion according to seniority, while in 1872-3 both they and education department officials petitioned against the practice of promoting ICS officers to senior positions in their departments. However, the argument for precedence of administrative claims prevailed in both these cases.<sup>2</sup> Employees in these and other services were also involved in the 1893 deputation.<sup>3</sup>

#### Subordinate supervisory and clerical employees

The earliest report of collective agitation among these grades also dates from 1822 when members of the uncovenanted civil service, and section writers, petitioned the Government over new pension rules introduced in 1819, which virtually precluded them from seeking a retirement pension.<sup>4</sup> In 1829, junior members of the Bengal Pilot Service went on strike, or worked to rule (the report does not clearly identify the form their action took). They were dissatisfied with existing rates of pay, and so resolved not to guide ships above a certain point on the river Hugli until their grievances had been attended to.<sup>5</sup> Later reports of agitation among the pilots suggests they confined themselves to petitioning.<sup>6</sup>

Other sections of Government uncovenanted and clerical services were active from at least the 1850s. In July 1853 a petition adopted at a public meeting in Calcutta Town Hall called for increased pay for all members of the uncovenanted services, and sheristadars (head clerks)

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- 1) Confidential, GoI Establishments, March 1919, No.330. The earliest contemporary reference is in GB Appointments, April 1900, A 53-4. For further discussion, see p.76.
  - 2) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Part 1, pp.60-61; GB General (Judicial), April 1873, A 3-6.
  - 3) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58-58D. See also correspondence from engineers in India about their conditions - The Engineer, vol.18, 1864, pp.97, 204-5, 316.
  - 4) Bengal Public Consultations, 31 December 1822, No.27.
  - 5) "The Hooghly and the pilot service: being extracts from a pilot's log", The Calcutta Review, XXV, 1855, pp.232-3.
  - 6) GB Marine, April 1870, A 44-59; see also Calcutta Courier, 15/5/1833.



arguing that

the just claims of these classes themselves have never been fairly considered, and their remuneration and emoluments have never been, and still are not, of an importance at all consonant with their proper station in native society, or the importance of their duties. (1)

The petition drew attention to the wide difference between the covenanted and uncovenanted services' pay, alleging that head clerks only earned as much as menial employees, and stated that 'many representations' (i.e. petitions) had been made, to no avail.

This petition indicates that the uncovenanted grades were motivated to act by a combination of the desire to maintain a distinct status, measured in terms of monetary income, and the view that wage rates should be measured in accordance with status. Inflationary pressures, particularly increased food prices which would have tended to erode living standards, probably contributed to the timing of this petition.<sup>2</sup> Food prices and labourers' wages continued to rise in the 1850s and 1860s,<sup>3</sup> and since uncovenanted civil service pay rates remained unchanged, resulted in further agitation. Government uncovenanted civil servants sought higher pay in 1859,<sup>4</sup> and in 1866, when Christian and Indian employees petitioned separately.<sup>5</sup> Both petitions appear to have been organized and submitted collectively, but although the Christian employees' petition was returned to them on the grounds that it had been incorrectly submitted, the Indian employees pleaded that the urgency of their demands justified their contravening the rules.<sup>6</sup> Assistant surgeons, and clerks in the mint and other departments also petitioned

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- 1) Report on the Proceedings of a Public Meeting of the Native Community held in the Town Hall on Friday, the 29th July 1853, (Calcutta, 1853), pp.44-48. The petition was occasioned by proposed constitutional changes, and also protested at limitations on the Legislative Council, and on the recruitment of ICS officers. See also "The Court Amlas in Lower Bengal", The Calcutta Review, XXII, 1854, p.417.
  - 2) Food prices began rising in the late 1840s - B. Chowdhury, Growth of commercial agriculture in Bengal, (1757-1900), Vol.I, (Calcutta, 1964), pp.195-7.
  - 3) Ibid., "Bengal Village Biographies", The Calcutta Review, XXXI, 1858 p.224; "The labour difficulty in Bengal", ibid., XLVII, 1868, pp.156-87. On price rises between 1853-66 see GoI Finance (Expenditure), October 1866, A 681.
  - 4) The Bengal Hurkaru Semi-monthly Overland Summary of News, 9/1/1860.
  - 5) GoI Finance (Expenditure), October 1866, A 675-82. This petition (from the Indian employees) referred to the earlier one from Christian employees.
  - 6) Ibid.

for pay rises to meet the increased cost of living in the 1860s.<sup>1</sup> There seems to have been little or no agitation over pay in the next decade, but early in the 1880s it was reported that many requests had been received from Government clerks for pay rises to meet changes in living costs.<sup>2</sup>

Pay levels and the cost of living were not the only issues over which agitation occurred in this period. In 1833 Bengal pilots protested in a petition at the treatment they received at the hands of the Marine Board, and asked for the grant of an official status.<sup>3</sup> Bengal Secretariat copyists protested at the introduction of printing in Government departments in 1858, fearing that this would deprive them of work,<sup>4</sup> and in 1868 sub-divisional administrative employees petitioned over changed promotion prospects.<sup>5</sup> In June 1862 Indian clerks employed by the East Indian Railway struck in protest at the search of their desks following a theft. They returned to work the next day after the officer responsible had apologised to them.<sup>6</sup> Another strike took place in 1872, this time when the Government proposed to send partly qualified sub-assistant surgeons on half pay to a fever stricken area to make up for a shortage of fully qualified staff.<sup>7</sup>

European and Anglo-Indian drivers working for the East Indian Railway also threatened to strike in 1876. These men had already formed a union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in India, by the beginning of the year, through which they had presented a petition protesting at changes in workloads and conditions, arbitrary punishments, and pay rates.<sup>8</sup> The petition was presented in March 1876, but it took the threat of a strike, in June, for the authorities to make moves to settle the dispute.<sup>9</sup> This union seems to have disappeared shortly after-

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- 1) GB Finance, September 1866, A 12; September 1867, A 18-52; D.G. Crawford, A history of the Indian Medical Service, 1600-1913, (Calcutta, 1914), vol.II, pp.97-8.
  - 2) Report of the Salaries Commission, p.1.
  - 3) Calcutta Courier, 15/5/1833.
  - 4) Bengal Hurkaru, 8/7/1858.
  - 5) GB Appointments, June 1868, A 4-5.
  - 6) G. Ghosh, Indian trade union movement, (Calcutta, 1961), p.45 (from Somprokash, a contemporary Bengali weekly).
  - 7) The Friend of India, 5,12/9/1872, 3/10/1872; The Times (London), 30/9/1872 (citing the Hindoo Patriot).
  - 8) GoI Public Works (Railways), November 1876, A 71, A 78, A 80. This name implies that the union was conceived of as a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, formed in Britain in 1871 - H. Pelling, A history of British trade unionism, (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp.81-2.
  - 9) GoI Public Works (Railways), November 1876, A 76, A 82, A 84, A 86-7.

wards since no further references to its existence have been found.<sup>1</sup>

There is little evidence for trade unionism among private sector employees in these sectors of the labour market during the nineteenth century. The only report concerns agitation by European assistant managers in the jute factories in 1897-8 for a reduction in working hours, to enable them to have one day a week rest. This question arose after the introduction of electric lighting and the extension of working hours so as to leave only Sunday free for maintenance work, one of the assistants' jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Limited though this account is, several important features of trade unionism among these employees during the nineteenth century are evident. It is clear that by the middle of the century, if not earlier, that all these groups were familiar with some form of collective activity, particularly the use of petitions, to present claims over wages and working conditions to their employers. Some groups were also familiar with strikes, public meetings, and deputations and trade unions. There is also evidence for the utilization of several forms of activity simultaneously or in succession. Government employees generally confined themselves to petitioning, though some also went on strike, but railwaymen combined petitioning with union activity, and a strike threat, while the ICS officers petitioned, organized a deputation, and formed a union. The central issue concerning trade unionism among these employees in this period thus seems to be why activity remained at such an undeveloped level, rather than that of whether or not any activity occurred.

#### ICS and other expatriates

The fact that petitioning was officially sanctioned from the eighteenth century onwards meant that these employees had a recognised channel of communication through which to voice grievances throughout the period under discussion. The development of blockages to the promotion system in the early 1870s, and the loss in the value of their income in the 1880s clearly underlay the two main phases of agitation identified. However, these problems do not in themselves account for the scale of

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- 1) A reference in GoI Home (Police), March 1879, A 38, appears to be retrospective. The similarly named Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma was only formed in 1897 - D.H. Buchanan, Development of capitalistic enterprise in India, (London, 1934, 1966), pp.421-2 - and never seems to have been active in Bengal.
  - 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1898, A 32-47.

activity in the early 1870s, or the organization of collective activity, in clear contravention of established rules, in the early 1890s. In order to account for these developments it is necessary to set them in a wider perspective.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the ICS was largely recruited from amongst the sons of East India Company officials. Following the introduction of open competitive examinations in 1858, the ICS began to be drawn from among the sons of all sections of the British middle class. Initially about one-third of all ICS recruits made after 1858 were graduates, but their proportion fell when lower age limits, introduced in 1879, encouraged candidates to apply straight from school.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century the attractions of the ICS seem to have been wearing thin, partly as a result of reports about conditions in India, and partly as competition for recruits increased. In 1895, for example, when entrance examinations for the Indian and British civil services were combined, 31 of the 66 successful ICS recruits had expressed a preference for the home service. The increasing proportion of non-graduates who often qualified after taking special courses at crammers also implies that in the later nineteenth century people entered the ICS either because of a lack of alternative employment,<sup>2</sup> or because of India's supposed advantages. Given the increasing tendency to maintain financial and other responsibilities in England, later recruits would also be more likely to rely heavily on their salaries than perhaps earlier members of the service had done.

While such dependence on earnings entailed the need for vigilance to protect their conditions, the introduction of recruitment through examinations itself appears to have facilitated the development of trade unionism. The early ICS recruits had owed their positions to the patronage of the East India Company directors, who controlled the nomination of recruits. This power was modified in the 1830s and 1840s, but was not substantially affected until the examination system was introduced.<sup>3</sup> The power of patronage over ICS members was also reduced

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- 1) B.B. Misra, The administrative history of India, 1834-1947, (Bombay, 1970), pp.177-89; The bureaucracy in India, pp.76-82, 200-203; Spangenberg, "The problem of recruitment", pp.342-50.
  - 2) Misra, The bureaucracy in India, pp.104-6; Spangenberg, ibid., pp.349-50, 355.
  - 3) Misra, The administrative history of India, pp.167-70.

by measures which strengthened Government employees' job security, culminating in the passage of Act XXXVII of 1850.<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, it was virtually impossible to dismiss any Government employee.<sup>2</sup> The loss of such control over ICS and other supervisory employees was inferred by the Secretary of State in 1876 to have contributed to the widespread petitioning that took place in the 1870s. He wrote,

It must not be forgotten that this is one of the dangers of the competitive system. Those who have won their places by their own efforts and are not indebted to any one's favour for them are being apt to imagine that they have a proprietary right to all the good things they promised to themselves ... (3)

However, unofficial pressures could still be used to exert control over individuals, as Beames' testimony of this period reveals.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of serious grievances, together with the increasing independence of ICS officers from unofficial control and discipline, goes some way towards explaining the nature of agitation in the 1870s. However, it is not clear why the activity over exchange control problems should have resulted in the formation of a union in Bengal. Patronage not only provides superior officers with a means of controlling their subordinates, but also a channel of communication for the latter. No formal barriers against communication of this type existed in the later nineteenth century, but as the ICS became dominated by men recruited through examinations, so a disparaging attitude towards the ICS ranks developed among the higher officials and Government members.<sup>5</sup> This cannot have encouraged ICS members to seek officials' support, and on the contrary may have led them to feel that they had to rely on their own resources if improvements in their conditions were to be achieved. The authorities' tardy response to the exchange control petitions<sup>6</sup> can only have confirmed any such feeling, thus providing the grounds for establishing a permanently constituted means of safeguarding their interests.

It is also possible that the authorities condoned the formation

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- 1) Misra, The administrative history of India, pp.171-77.
  - 2) GB General, November 1883, File 146, A 1-2; GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1907, A 27-8.
  - 3) Salisbury to Lytton, 11 August 1876, Lytton Papers.
  - 4) Beames, Memoirs of a Bengal civilian, p.203.
  - 5) Spangenberg, "The problem of recruitment", pp.342, 351-5.
  - 6) See pp.25-6.

of the Indian Civil Service Association (ICSA) as a means for restoring a means of communication with if not control over the ICS ranks. Collective activity by Government employees over pay and conditions remained illegal until 1921,<sup>1</sup> but the Government actively participated in illegal activity by corresponding with the ICSA.<sup>2</sup> The Viceroy's remarks to the expatriates' deputation in 1893 provide a clue to the authorities' attitude. Having reminded them that all combinations by Government employees were prohibited, he then said that, nevertheless, it was to the Government's advantage to meet them and hear their statement.<sup>3</sup> Since the Government had been forwarding petitions on the exchange problem for some time it is not clear what possible advantage lay in meeting the deputation, unless it was intended as a political gesture to reassure the civil servants of the Government's concern. The decision which must have been taken to overlook the illegality of the ICSA must also have stemmed from a similar political calculation.

The apparent absence of activity on the part of other expatriate supervisory groups may be due simply to inadequate research, but some features of their labour market contexts suggest that they may have been less prone to engage in trade unionism. Expatriate police officers, for example, were recruited by nomination from among public school boys until the beginning of the twentieth century, when recruitment by examination was introduced.<sup>4</sup> Other employees, such as engineers, doctors, geologists, surveyors and similar specialists, were drawn from narrower labour markets than the ICS or police officers. Insofar as these groups' skills were more marketable than those of the relatively 'unskilled' ICS officers, the Government had to ensure that their pay and conditions were comparable with those elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Consequently these groups would have had less compunction to engage in trade unionism.

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- 1) Royal Commission on Labour in India, Report, (London, 1931; Cmd.3883), p.323.
  - 2) GB Appointments, April 1900, A 53-4.
  - 3) GoI Finance and Commerce (Accounts and Finance), February 1893, A 58A.
  - 4) Misra, The administrative history of India, pp.46-58.
  - 5) In 1919 the Englishman (hereafter: E) noted that since engineers' wages in England had risen during the First World War, wages in India would also have to rise unless inferior men were to be recruited - E, 6/9/1919.

Uncovenanted and clerical services

The pattern of activities among these groups stands in marked contrast to developments among the ICS officers insofar as they remained limited to ad hoc forms of trade unionism - even the railwaymen's union does not seem to have functioned for long.<sup>1</sup> Since no special attempts were made to restrict these groups' activities this pattern implies either that their problems were such as could largely be resolved by petitioning, or that the development of trade unionism was blocked in other ways.

The reports of petitions and strikes indicate that their principal objective was to obtain wage rates consonant with their social status and the responsibilities of their jobs, and to protect established living standards from erosion. Concern with promotion prospects was also connected with these two objectives since the grade system regulated increments.<sup>2</sup> Assuming therefore that these employees were fully dependent on the labour market for maintaining their living standards, we can begin by assessing the utility of petitioning for matching wages with prices during the nineteenth century. While ideally this should involve construction of a cost of living index against which trends in the real value of wages could be measured, a sufficiently useful picture can be obtained without going to such lengths.

The early history of Government uncovenanted and clerical services' pay is difficult to reconstruct, but we do know that Indian subordinates' pay was substantially reduced in the late eighteenth century. Their pay remained low until the 1830s when it was gradually realised that a low wage policy was a source of many problems, such as corruption.<sup>3</sup> The first comprehensive review of Government clerks' pay was undertaken in 1866 when it was proposed to place them on a series of grades ranging from Rs.20-200 per month, a change implemented in 1868.<sup>4</sup> The salaries of uncovenanted officers ranged from Rs.200-700 in 1868,<sup>5</sup> and by 1886

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- 1) It seems probable that the Amalgamated Society of Railwaymen in India was formed because expatriate railwaymen were accustomed to having a union rather than because of a process of development among railwaymen in India, and was therefore an artificial development.
  - 2) See p.25.
  - 3) See p.36.
  - 4) Report by the Committee appointed under Government Order No. 2181 dated 19th July 1867 [sic; 1866] for the Revision of Salaries of Ministerial Officers, Lower Provinces, (Calcutta, 1867), (hereafter: Report of the Schalch Committee, 1867), in GB Finance, October 1867, A 7; GB Finance, February 1868, A 9-11; April 1868, A 6-7; GB Revenues, June 1868, A 34-7.
  - 5) GB Appointments, April 1868, A 43.

the highest grades in the executive service had been raised to Rs.800, and in the judicial service to Rs.1000.<sup>1</sup> These rates of pay remained in force until after the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Subdivisional establishments, intermediate between the uncovenanted and clerical grades, were first introduced extensively in 1873, on monthly salaries ranging from Rs.50-150.<sup>3</sup> By 1886 they earned between Rs.100-200, to which only a new top grade of Rs.250 had been added by 1920.<sup>4</sup> Clerks' wage grades remained unaltered between 1868 and 1904-5, when an interim allowance was granted, and were only revised in 1909.<sup>5</sup>

With a graded wage system it would be possible to alter the incomes of the employees without changing the system by reducing the numbers on the lower rates, and increasing the numbers on the higher rates of pay. The proportion of judicial officers on the Rs.200-300 grades did fall from 56% to 55% between 1886 and 1913, but that of the executive grades on the same rates rose from 43% to 51% over the same period.<sup>6</sup> There is no comparable data for clerical employees, but it seems unlikely that a radical redistribution of the numbers on each grade took place. The general stability of wage rates, and the distribution of employees between the grades, indicates that these employees' wage incomes probably remained virtually unchanged during the second half of the nineteenth century.

How did this compare with the cost of living? The 1866 petition argued that wages should be increased in line with the prices of food, fuel, education fees, medicine, and rents, which had all increased since the mid-1850s, a fact confirmed by the Government's Accountant-General.<sup>7</sup> The Salaries Commission of 1885-6 calculated that the prices of staple foodstuffs had increased by an average of 60% between 1868 and 1884, while other costs had also risen by varying degrees.<sup>8</sup> The index of

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- 1) Report of the Public Services Commission, 1886-87, Calcutta, 1888), Vol. VI, p.27.
  - 2) Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Report, Annexure X, p.225; Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 21/4/1920, pp.495-6.
  - 3) Bengal Administration Report, 1872-73, Report, pp.8-9, 13-15; Calcutta Gazette, I, 23/4/1873, pp.504-5.
  - 4) Report of the Public Services Commission, 1886-87, VI, p.27; Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 23/6/1920, pp.723-5.
  - 5) GB Finance (Financial), April 1905, A 49-53; January 1909, A 34-40.
  - 6) Report of the Public Services Commission, 1886-87, VI, p.27; Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Report, p.225.
  - 7) GoI Finance (Expenditure), October 1866, A 675-82.
  - 8) Report of the Salaries Commission, pp.198-210. The costs of ceremonies, servants, clothing, transport, rent, medicine and education were all said to have risen, but no attempt was made to assess their impact. It was suggested that a 75% increase could have restored clerks' wages to the level of 1868.



foodgrain retail prices for India rose by approximately 40% between the early 1880s and the turn of the nineteenth century, and rose particularly rapidly in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and again in the late 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

This implies that the uncovenanted civil servants' and clerks' standards of living probably declined during the nineteenth century. However, the effect of price rises was mitigated in several ways. Promotion through even a small number of grades, for example, would have enabled individuals' income to rise at a faster rate than prices. Uncovenanted civil servants were distributed between seven grades earning between Rs.200 and Rs.800 per month. Even supposing a worst case example of an employee who only managed to rise through three grades (from Rs.200 to Rs.400 a month) in the twenty years from the 1880s, it is clear that that person's income would have doubled while food prices had only risen by 40% or less.<sup>2</sup> Clerks' wages rose by Re.1 each year within grades, implying that their living standards were under a more serious threat from rising prices than those of uncovenanted civil servants.<sup>3</sup> However, whilst the standard of living of Government employees in 1900 was probably lower than that of the same grades in 1880 or earlier, changes only took place slowly, and such a comparison would have been difficult if not impossible to make.

There were however other ways in which Government employees supplemented their incomes. In the 1840s and 1850s comments about the "venality of the amlas" (clerks) were common, and apparently well founded.<sup>4</sup> Clerks supplemented their wages by taking money from people who came to the offices on business, while law clerks received annual presents from landlords, and special gifts from other clients to ensure the success of their cases.<sup>5</sup> Whether corruption in this form was prevalent later in the century is not known, but in 1884 it was reported that Government clerks worked outside office hours as tutors, contractors, and even

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- 1) J. Kuczynski, A short history of labour conditions in the British Empire, 1800 to the present day, (London, 1942), pp.50-51.
  - 2) Rates of promotion were acknowledged to be slow, but not to the extent of this hypothetical example. See Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Report, pp.34-5.
  - 3) Report of the Schalch Committee, 1867, pp. 2, 4.
  - 4) "The Court Amlas in Lower Bengal", The Calcutta Review, XXII, 1854, p.415.
  - 5) "The efficiency of native agency in Government employ", The Calcutta Review, IX, 1848, p.263; "The zemindar and the ryot", ibid., VI, 1846, p.344.

shop-keepers in order to supplement their wages.<sup>1</sup> Some Government subordinates' pay was fixed on the assumption that wages were only part of their income. In 1871 a system of paying sub-registrars from a portion of the fees they collected, together with a small wage, was introduced,<sup>2</sup> while assistant surgeons were permitted to take up private practice, and their wages fixed accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

This evidence indicates that on the whole the uncovenanted and clerical employees were unable to maintain the standards of living they held in the middle of the century. However, the actual decline in standards was very slow and erratic enough to have been masked by individual wage increases as each generation of recruits was promoted through the grades. Whilst this indicates that the pressures for trade unionism were probably diffuse, changes in the composition of this sector of the labour market, and other possibilities for supplementing or increasing incomes, also contributed towards the restrained level of activity observed.

#### Other constraints on trade unionism

During the course of the nineteenth century an important change in the social origin of uncovenanted and clerical service recruits took place. Insofar as the social homogeneity of a workforce is a factor which can influence employees' propensity to engage in trade unionism, this may have contributed to the nature of activities among these groups.<sup>4</sup> For example, at the beginning of the century a large proportion of uncovenanted civil servants were of European or Anglo-Indian origin, but they were replaced by Indian employees during the course of the century, as indicated in Table 2.1.<sup>5</sup> This trend did not take place equally throughout all departments. In 1879 the Bengal Government proposed to reserve all future appointments for posts carrying monthly salaries of Rs. 200 or more for Indian candidates, but excluded all

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1) Report of the Salaries Commission, p.208.

2) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Report, pp.170-71.

3) Attention was drawn to this in a letter outlining assistant surgeons' grievances in the Amrita Bazar Patrika (hereafter: ABP), 10/7/1920, 28/9/1920, and E, 5/11/1920.

4) Eldridge, Industrial disputes, pp.36-7.

5) "The efficiency of native agency in Government employ", pp.258-60 (for 1847); GoI Home (Establishments), June 1904, A 96-106. The number of Indian employees earning Rs.71 or more in 1847 has been given to facilitate comparison with later data, which excluded people earning less than Rs.75 a month. For the Table, see p.38.

TABLE 2.1: European and Anglo-Indian, and Indian employees under the Government of Bengal, earning Rs.75 or more per month, 1847, 1867-97.

year	European/Anglo-Indian		Indian		TOTAL
	number	percentage	number	percentage	
1847 <sup>a</sup>	1948	69.4	859	30.6	2807
1867	1537	50.4	1511	49.6	3048
1877	1661	44.7	2051	55.3	3712
1887	1355	35.6	2452	64.4	3807
1897	1300	32.8	2668	67.2	3968

(a) all Christians, and civil and military officers, and the total number of Indian employees, earning Rs.71 per month or more.

but the administrative posts from this restriction.<sup>1</sup> In 1913 the proportion of Indians in the excluded departments was still very low although they held nearly all the provincial executive and judicial service posts.<sup>2</sup> The proportions of European and Anglo-Indian, and Indian clerical employees changed in a similar manner during the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> While the effects of this change on trade unionism cannot be demonstrated with certainty, it is indicative of the divisions within the uncovenanted and clerical services that Christians (presumably mostly Europeans and Anglo-Indians) should have petitioned separately from Indians in 1866.<sup>4</sup> Rivalry over jobs, as one group largely replaced the other, cannot have facilitated any cooperation over conditions.

#### Recruitment and promotion

Research into trade unionism in Britain and elsewhere indicates that there is an important relationship between promotion procedures, and methods of regulating wage increments and working conditions, and trade unionism. Thus when individualised relations between employers and employees, and individual treatment of employees in respect of wages and conditions are replaced by impersonal collective treatment, there is a tendency for employees to adopt or modify existing forms of trade unionism.<sup>5</sup> The general trend of activity among ICS officers described

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- 1) GoI Home (Public), April 1879, A 173-76; September 1879, A 31. See p.19.
  - 2) Bagchi, Private investment in India, pp.168-9.
  - 3) Report of the Pauperism Committee, (Calcutta, 1891), p.LV. (This committee investigated the conditions of European settlers and Anglo-Indians in Calcutta).
  - 4) GoI Finance (Expenditure), October 1866, A 675.
  - 5) R. Samuel, Miners, quarrymen and saltworkers, (London, 1977), pp.xiii-xiv, 48-50; R.M. Blackburn, Union character and social class, (London, 1967), p.50; Lumley, White collar unionism, pp.51-56; G. Strauss, "White collar unions are different", Harvard Business Review, 32 (5) 1954, pp.73-82.

earlier appears to represent a similar pattern of behaviour.

Members of the subordinate judicial services had had to pass qualifying examinations before becoming eligible for Government appointments from 1850, although recruitment itself depended on nomination by the High Court.<sup>1</sup> The uncovenanted executive grades were recruited entirely by nomination until 1868, although confirmation in a permanent post had depended on passing departmental examinations.<sup>2</sup> In 1868 preliminary qualifying examinations were introduced, designed to create a pool of qualified personnel from which nominations could be made.<sup>3</sup> Experiments were later made with direct competition for posts, while at other times the examination system was dropped altogether, but nomination remained an important mode of recruitment throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Nomination to the uncovenanted services not only discriminated between individuals, but between social groups. Initial correspondence on the examination system noted that one of its drawbacks was that Hindus and Europeans were favoured by it, as distinct from Muslims and other groups, implying that nomination would continue to be needed to redress any 'imbalance'.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently it was reported that "suitable" European candidates often failed to pass the examinations, and by 1889 it was concluded that while competitive examinations should form the basis for recruitment, nomination was essential in order to ensure a balance of the "races" in the services.<sup>6</sup> Clearly part of the reason for different social groups acting in isolation was their different treatment at the hands of the authorities.

The scope for discriminatory treatment of individuals did not end with recruitment procedures. Deputy magistrates and collectors were all appointed on probation, and remained on that grade until they passed two levels of departmental examinations, a process which could

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- 1) GB Appointments, March 1868, A 57 revealed that munsifs had had to pass the senior pleadership examination since 1850; Report of the Public Services Commission, 1886-87, vol. VI, Part IB, p.28.
  - 2) GB Appointments, March 1868, A 54-7.
  - 3) GB Appointments, April 1868, A 71-2; July 1879, A 9.
  - 4) Bengal Administration Report, 1875-76, Report, pp.18-19; GB General (B - III - Examinations), Collection 1, November 1873, A 3; GB Appointments, March 1883, A 10; File 14E/135, July 1890, A 1.
  - 5) GB Appointments, March 1868, A 59.
  - 6) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Part 1, p.84; GB Appointments, File 14E/135, July 1890, A 1.

take up to four years. Members of the subordinate executive services, and munsifs (subordinate judicial service members) were only appointed in the first place to temporary posts to await promotion as permanent vacancies occurred. Promotion in all the services was based on seniority, and "fitness", the latter quality giving superior officers scope for denying promotion to 'unsuitable' candidates.<sup>1</sup>

Clerks were recruited by nomination throughout most of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, according to an ICS officer's memoirs, head clerks filled all vacancies with their relatives, a view substantially confirmed by an official report compiled in the following decade.<sup>2</sup> Recruits were initially taken on as unpaid apprentices - in 1886 for example the Magistrate of Howrah reported that because there were so many applicants for jobs, he only appointed people who had worked first as unpaid probationers, and then for a period as copyists, and finally for a period on reduced wages.<sup>3</sup> The employment of unpaid apprentices was common throughout the Bengal Government offices, and was also used in some Government of India offices in Bengal.<sup>4</sup> In 1889 the Bengal Government introduced examinations for recruiting clerks for the Secretariat offices, and other departments in Calcutta, but department heads still exercised extensive discretionary powers to recruit people other than those who passed the examinations, or from among the apprentices.<sup>5</sup> Departmental heads also controlled the promotion of apprentices to permanent posts, a real measure of control since apprentices who failed to obtain such posts after three years on the lists lost their chances entirely.<sup>6</sup> Clerks' promotion within the wage grades, once they

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- 1) The Report of the Public Services Commission, 1886-87, vol. VI, Part IB, p.28 noted that senior officers were seldom passed over - unless they had been unfavourably commented on.
  - 2) Beames, Memoirs of a Bengal civilian, p.219; GB General (Education), October 1886, A 32, 38-40, 78-9; Annual General Administration Report, Dacca Division, 1886-87, in GB General (Miscellaneous), September 1887, File 25, A 2-3.
  - 3) GB Financial (Treasury), February 1887, A 19. Copyists were employed to copy Government documents - GB Financial (Finance), March 1904, A 7.
  - 4) Rules governing the proportion of apprentices had apparently been formulated as early as 1865 - GB Financial (Miscellaneous), November 1892, A 7 (but could not be traced). In 1904 there were 1129 apprentices and 4780 permanent clerks in the Bengal Government offices - GB Financial (Finance), June 1904, A 11-12.
  - 5) Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 1/5/1889, pp.804-7; Calcutta Gazette, I, 1/5/1889, pp.368-70; GB Financial (Miscellaneous), October 1894, A 4-5.
  - 6) GB Financial (Miscellaneous), June 1892, File M1A/4, A 1; December 1894, A 6-8.

had obtained permanent posts, still depended on their superior officers for increments granted under the 1868 revision could be withheld if an individual's work was judged to be unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup> As in the uncovenanted services, promotion depended on seniority, and assessment of merit, while if necessary, superior officers could appoint people directly into senior positions.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that all Government employees below the supervisory group largely depended on the discretion of their superiors for recruitment, promotion, and regular wage increments. In such a situation where conformity was encouraged and rewarded, thus offering the prospect, however illusory, of maintaining income levels through securing their superiors' goodwill, collective action must have been almost unthinkable. Legal restrictions on petitioning would also be likely to have more effect in these conditions than in the case of the ICS officers, whose superior position gave them a degree of immunity from official pressures.

#### Labour market relations

There still remains one important factor that must be taken into account if the behaviour of subordinate supervisory and clerical employees during the nineteenth century is to be understood. So far discussion has proceeded on the assumption that these employees were entirely dependent on the labour market for their incomes. However, since some members of these two labour market groups had access to non-labour market sources of income during and after the nineteenth century, we might expect to find that variations in the pattern of trade unionism corresponded to changes in the significance of such income.

Little is known about Anglo-Indians' labour market relationships, but since two committees of enquiry into the community's conditions emphasised the need for more employment opportunities, and blamed competition from Indian employees for their decline, this implies that they had few if any other resources.<sup>3</sup> A proportion of Indian employees on the other hand do appear to have depended only partly on wages for

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- 1) GB Financial (Treasuries), February 1887, A 19. See also GoI Home, Revenue and Agriculture (Public), July 1880, A 107.
  - 2) GoI Home, Revenue and Agriculture (Public), July 1880, A 107; GB Financial (Miscellaneous), October 1894, A 4-5.
  - 3) Report of the Pauperism Committee; Report of the Calcutta Domiciled Community Enquiry Committee, 1918-1919, (Calcutta, 1920).

their total income. They were drawn from the Bengali 'middle class' who, in addition to being employees, or members of the legal and other professions, were also landlords and rentiers, and thus able to supplement wage incomes to some extent.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1870s Bengal Government officials were noting that subinfeudation had developed to such a degree in some parts of Bengal that landholders were being forced to take up employment in order to maintain their incomes. It also seems that the value of rent extracted from lower tenants and cultivators in the latter part of the century did not keep pace with rising living costs, thus contributing to the rentiers' dependence on wages.<sup>2</sup> In 1914 the Collector of Bakarganj district wrote that thirty years earlier most of the Bengali middle class possessed landed property, and while some chose to work for the Government, most were content to live off their rents. However, as prices began to rise, and rents could not be increased proportionately, so the need for employment increased.<sup>3</sup> We should note that this development may not have affected all Bengali middle class employees. The Salaries Commission of 1885-86, for example, devoted a whole chapter to the question of changes in clerks' living costs since 1868, but made no mention of the loss of rental income.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless it appears that up to the turn of the nineteenth century Indian subordinate supervisory and clerical employees' need for trade unionism was mitigated by their access to other sources of income.

A related factor which probably made collective activity very difficult to organize was the intense competition for Government jobs that existed among Indians. Since the proportion of non-Indian employees in the uncovenanted and clerical services fell rapidly in the second

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- 1) Bengal Administration Report, 1874-75, Part 1, p.15; Report of the Salaries Commission, p.208; Seal, The emergence of Indian nationalism, pp.51-7, 62-4.
  - 2) Ibid. The Bengal Rent Act, 1859, and the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885, gave rights to a section of tenants such that they could resist attempts to enhance rents more successfully than hitherto - A. Ghosh, K. Dutt, Development of capitalist relations in agriculture, (New Delhi, 1977), pp.20-26, 59 ff.
  - 3) Report of the Bengal District Administration Committee, (Calcutta, 1914), Appendix III, p.38; see also the Report of the Government of Bengal Unemployment Enquiry Committee, vol.I, pp.10-12.
  - 4) Report of the Salaries Commission, pp.198-210. However, it was noted that rising living standards of peasants and rural artisans forced clerks to seek wage increases. See also the Report of the Government of Bengal Unemployment Committee, vol.I, pp.10-11.

half of the nineteenth century, it seems safe to assume that most recruits made after the introduction of examinations in 1868 were Indians. However, so many people qualified for uncovenanted service posts, despite the introduction of increasingly higher educational qualifications, that the number of successful examinees continually exceeded the number of vacancies in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> A measure of the extent of competition was provided by the remarks in 1884 that in the 1860s graduates could command jobs with monthly salaries of Rs.200, but that in the 1880s they were competing for jobs paying only Rs.20-30 a month.<sup>2</sup> Suitably qualified clerical candidates had been available to Government offices in excess of demand since the 1860s, while by 1886 it was reported that the overall increase in the supply of clerks had led to a fall in the wages of those in the private sector.<sup>3</sup> The degree of competition for Government clerical posts was reflected in a report that the Government of India's Financial Department received on average 50 applications for each vacancy in the late 1870s.<sup>4</sup>

The intensity of competition for Government posts implies that other jobs were simply not available, or were considerably less desirable. Whatever the case, such competition, developing at the same time as alternative income sources began to diminish in importance, must have made it extremely difficult for established employees to contemplate offending their superior officers.

The virtual absence of reports of trade unionism among private sector employees belonging to these groups must in part be due to the lack of sources of evidence. However, a similar imbalance of activity marked later periods, and one observer, writing in 1922, attributed the lack of dissatisfaction among private sector employees to their more

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- 1) GB Appointments, March 1868, A 54-60; March 1883, A 10; July 1890, File 14E/135, A 1; GB General (B - III - Examinations), September 1875, Collection 1, A 1; November 1875, A 1; Bengal Administration Report, 1874-75, Part 1, pp.5-9.
  - 2) Report of the Salaries Commission, p.208.
  - 3) GoI Finance (Expenditure), October 1866, A 682; Bengal Administration Report, 1874-75, Part 1, p.44; Report of the Salaries Commission, p.208; GB Financial (Treasuries), February 1887, A 22; Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 6/4/1887, p.601. It is not clear whether private sector wages were actually cut, or just that they were generally lower than those in the public sector by the mid-1880s.
  - 4) GoI Home Revenue and Agriculture (Public), July 1880, A 107.



flexible conditions of employment.<sup>1</sup> The multiplicity of private sector employers, and therefore employment conditions, probably also contributed to the relative absence of activity.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusions

The evidence discussed in this chapter shows that many employees in the public sector supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical grades had engaged in some form of trade unionism by at least the middle of the nineteenth century. However, it appears that practically all these groups had confined themselves to occasional manifestations of ad hoc forms of activity, only the ICS officers developing a trade union as a consequence of earlier activity.

This pattern of trade unionism developed because of the limited need and organizational potential for collective activity among these employees during most of the nineteenth century. Many of them, particularly in the subordinate supervisory and clerical groups, could mitigate pressures from rising living costs by combining wages with other forms of income, and all could obtain higher wages through promotion. While living standards probably fell, they did so almost imperceptibly, over decades rather than from year to year. Only in the case of the expatriates, who measured their needs in sterling while the value of their rupee salaries was falling, did appreciable economic pressures for trade unionism develop. However, even if living costs had risen more rapidly or steeply, divisions between and within groups of subordinate supervisory and clerical workers, and an abundant supply of potential recruits for such posts, also made the development of trade unionism on a significant scale unlikely. Conversely, the ICS officers' social homogeneity, and perhaps more significantly, their relatively secure job situation, enabled them to pursue their demands more militantly.

Employers' attitudes to claims, and legal constraints on collective activities, undoubtedly influenced the development of trade unionism. If employers conceded demands, no need for further agitation existed,

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- 1) H.A. Young, "Labour in India", Edinburgh Review, vol. 233, April 1922, p.292, writing about expatriate engineers in private firms.
  - 2) In Britain a similar disparity between private and public sector unionization has been noted - Jenkins and Sherman, White collar unionism, p.26; G.S. Bain, The growth of white collar unionism, (Oxford, 1970), p.39.

and new forms of agitation would not be required. However, it seems that employers refused to entertain demands as often if not more than they conceded them, generally without leading to further agitation. Employees evaded the rules prohibiting collective agitation over pay and conditions by submitting individual petitions en masse, while the ICS officers' actions show that a cohesive and determined group could ignore these rules with impunity. It seems therefore that factors such as these were essentially of a secondary nature, and that the restrained pattern of trade unionism in the nineteenth century was largely due to the deeper structural constraints. Insofar as these were tending to weaken towards the end of the century, partly as non-labour market income sources were ceasing to be of importance, so the potential for further development was beginning to build up in the 1890s.

CHAPTER 3: The roots of trade unionism II: industrial and other occupations

This chapter focusses on early evidence for trade unionism among the factory and non-factory groups of workers. As has been noted, the activities of factory workers in the late nineteenth century have already received some attention from historians, who generally consider that trade unionism could not have started much before 1860-70.<sup>1</sup>

However, factory and non-factory forms of waged labour began to be employed in Bengal from at least the end of the eighteenth century, when a degree of industrialization, and the introduction of new factory based manufacturing processes, took place.

By the late eighteenth century cotton weaving, salt and saltpetre production were controlled by the East India Company to such an extent that while the production processes themselves remained virtually unchanged, the workers' status was hardly different from that of employees. In other long established industries, particularly silk thread and indigo manufacture, the production processes as well as the relations of production were transformed in a manner similar to that which took place in early eighteenth century Britain.<sup>2</sup> Among the newly introduced industries, ship-building began on a large scale around Calcutta from the 1780s, and was paralleled by the development of docks and ship repair facilities, and allied industries such as saw mills, and rope and canvass factories. Other enterprises established in the first quarter of the nineteenth century included flour and edible oil mills, sugar factories and rum distilleries, foundries, paper factories, a cotton mill, and coal mines.<sup>3</sup> The simultaneous development of Calcutta

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1) See pp.9-10, 12-13.

2) Buchanan, Development of capitalistic enterprise in India, pp.31-4, 36-52; K.N. Chaudhuri (ed.), The economic development of India under the East India Company, 1814-58, (Cambridge, 1971), p.4; East India Company, Report and Documents connected with the Proceedings of the East-India Company in regard to the culture and manufacture of cotton-wool, raw silk, and indigo in India, (London, 1836); H.R. Ghosal, Economic transition in the Bengal Presidency (1793-1833), (Calcutta, 1966), pp.41-5, 54-5, 96-106, 134-8; D.B. Mitra, The cotton weavers of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1978), pp.43-92.

3) "Statistics of coal in India", The East India and Colonial Magazine, 1841, pp.146-8; C.N. Banerjee, An account of Howrah, past and present, (Calcutta, 1872), pp.70-97; A.B. Chatterji, Howrah: a study in social geography, (Calcutta, 1967), pp.35-9, 80-81, 83-9; D.G. Crawford, Hughli medical gazetteer, (Calcutta, 1903), pp.21-32; J. Phipps, A guide to the commerce of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1823), pp.60-63, 72-9, 80-81.

as a stable commercial and administrative centre required the development of a service sector of domestic servants, palanquin bearers, sweepers, and similar non-factory employees.<sup>1</sup> The view taken here therefore is that factory and non-factory labour markets, and thus the potential for trade unionism among such employees, existed in Bengal from at least the turn of the eighteenth century.

Several studies of trade unionism in India have sought to explain why there is so little evidence for strikes even in the late nineteenth century, a problem of particular concern to authors who hold that trade unionism is an inevitable consequence of industrialization. Morris has suggested that when factories were established employers would have been able to impose such work relations as they saw fit since the new workforce would only develop norms of behaviour appropriate to their new situation after some time. Trade unionism being one of the manifestations of a workforce's adaptation to industrialization, a period of quiescence between the initial recruitment of a factory labour force, and their engagement in forms of trade unionism, is therefore to be expected. He also suggested that trade unionism is only likely to develop when workers become "committed" to the labour market.<sup>2</sup> A different though in some respects complementary explanation has been put forward by Das Gupta. He noted that in the 1870s and 1880s jute factory workers engaged in various forms of 'hidden' resistance to the factory labour process, but that although strikes did occur towards the end of the century, the earlier forms of activity persisted. He attributed this to the fact that "the dynamics of genuine capitalist industrialization was ruled out by the colonial order", which retarded the development of "characteristically modern working class forms of action".<sup>3</sup> The relevance of these two arguments for understanding the development of trade unionism among these groups of employees will be noted in the course of this chapter.

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- 1) B.K. Deb, The early history and growth of Calcutta, (Calcutta, 1905, 1977), Chapters II, IV, VI; P. Sinha, "Social forces and urban physical growth - Calcutta from the mid-Eighteenth to mid-Nineteenth Century", in Essays in Honour of Professor S.C. Sarkar, (New Delhi, 1976), pp.267-82.
  - 2) M.D. Morris, "The labor market in India", in W.E. Moore and A.S. Feldman, (eds.), Labor commitment and social change in developing areas, (New York, 1960), pp.191-3.
  - 3) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.26-8, 30; see also "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India," passim.

Combinations and 'hidden' resistance

It is worth noting that the cotton weavers and salt manufacturers whose industries had been subjected to the East India Company's control in the eighteenth century protested against adverse working conditions by desertion, petitioning, mass meetings, and even strikes, indicating that such forms of collective activity were well known before the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The earliest reports of similar forms of agitation on the part of workers employed in the newer manufacturing industries, however, only date from the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Between 1814 and 1819 several bye-laws were enacted in Calcutta which were aimed at controlling the workforce. The first bye-law provided for the summons of any labourer who absconded before their agreed term of work had ended, or who failed to complete a piece of work.<sup>2</sup> Similar bye-laws affecting domestic servants, and employees in the Calcutta Mint, were passed in 1816 and 1819 respectively, while Regulation VII of 1819 extended the law concerning employees' contracts to the whole of the Bengal Presidency.<sup>3</sup>

Another bye-law introduced in 1816 not only reaffirmed that employees could be tried for breach of contract, or failure to attend work at the stipulated time, but specifically prohibited all forms of of trade unionism.<sup>4</sup> It provided for the summons and trial of

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- 1) Chaudhuri, Economic development of India, p.4; Mitra, Cotton weavers of Bengal, pp.45-92, Appendix 3; N.K. Sinha, The economic history of Bengal, from Plassey to Permanent Settlement, vol.I, (Calcutta, 1955), p.158; Ghosal, Economic transition in the Bengal Presidency, pp.134-6; A. Mukhopadhyay, "Peasants of the Parganas", in A.R. Desai, (ed.), Peasant struggles in India, (Bombay, 1979), pp.639-40. K.N. Chaudhuri, The trading world of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760, (Cambridge, 1978), pp.269-70 refers to a petition from bleachers in Madras seeking a wage rise in 1736, and a strike by Hindu weavers at Surat, in 1742, indicating the widespread nature of these forms of protest.
  - 2) "A Rule, Ordinance and Regulation for the good Order and Civil Government of the Settlement of Fort William in Bengal", passed in Council, 26 July 1814, in W.H. Smoult, Rules, Ordinances and Regulations for the good order and civil Government of the Settlement of Fort William in Bengal ..., (Calcutta, 1826), pp.6-7.
  - 3) Smoult, ibid., pp.20-22, 63-6; Bengal Regulations, 1815-1819.
  - 4) "A Rule ...", passed in Council, 19 October 1816, in Smoult, ibid., pp.40-41.

any Journeyman Working Artificer, or other Workman, Handicraftsman or Labourer, or other persons, who shall within the Town of Calcutta and Settlement of Fort William ... , enter into any Combination to obtain an advance of, or to raise the rate of Wages, or to lessen or alter the hours of duration of the time of Working, or to decrease the quantity of Work, or shall by giving Money, or by persuasion, or intimidation or any other means, wilfully and designedly prevent, or endeavour to prevent, any un-hired or un-employed Journeyman Working Artificer from hiring himself to or serving under any person or persons ... .

This law was still in force in 1826, and perhaps as late as 1832, but seems to have been repealed or simply allowed to lapse by the middle of the century.<sup>1</sup>

This bye-law was introduced at the instance of thirty-nine "Manufacturing Tradesmen, Artificers, Mechanics and others" of Calcutta, who petitioned the Calcutta Grand Jury in June 1816 for measures to control their employees.<sup>2</sup> They claimed that their workers'

evasive tricks and fraudulent abuses, have of late years increased to an extent almost ruinous, and beyond all possibility of Compromise, management or endurance (3)

and drew attention to three problems. Firstly, employees absconded after receiving advances for work, or asked for more money before actually starting to work. Secondly, that workers often took advances from more than one person at a time; and thirdly, that they generally refused to begin work before 11 or 12 a.m. unless given additional advances, and insisted on observing all religious festivals, regardless of their own religion.<sup>4</sup> A letter from a Government engineer which

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- 1) Smoult printed this Rule in the section of his book dealing with laws in force - Smoult, Rules, Ordinances and Regulations. In 1832 strikers at Jessop's foundry were summonsed under a law, presumably this one - Supplement to the Calcutta Courier, 11/8/1832. No reference was made to the prohibition of trade unionism in 1859 when a new labour contract law was enacted - General Report on the Administration of British India, 1859-60, p.4.
  - 2) Bengal Law Council Proceedings, 31 August 1816, No.16. The signatories included five coachmakers, three cabinet, and boot and shoe manufacturers, two coopers, a shipwright, and a rum distiller and sugar manufacturer, according to information in The Original Calcutta Directory and Bengal Register for 1817, (Calcutta, n.d.). (No directory for 1816 has been found).
  - 3) Bengal Law Council Proceedings, 31 August 1816, No.16.
  - 4) Ibid. In the early nineteenth century, labour was obtained by paying a proportion of the cost in advance, a system which gave peculiar advantages to the workers. See The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XLVII, 1825, p.141 for a good description of this mode of engaging labour.

accompanied this petition described how labourers employed to move planks refused to work even after their headman had been sent before a Magistrate (to try and compel them to work), and additional advances had been given. In the end the men simply walked off the job.<sup>1</sup> In 1817 the launching of a ship was postponed by "difficulties with the native workmen", which may have been of a similar type.<sup>2</sup>

Another form of collective activity reported at this time was the picketing of unpopular employers. This was described in a contemporary letter, apparently written by a recent immigrant, who complained that

if a person happens to take a bad set of servants, he must not discharge them without subjecting himself to "having a bad name in the Bazar"; and that the servants who are turned off beset one's house, in order to prevent other persons from entering one's service ... (3)

He also complained that servants would only perform specific tasks, and would not do work for which they had not been specifically engaged, or which was normally another person's task, and that his palanquin bearers were frequently drunk, and would only work when they wanted to.<sup>4</sup> Even allowing for a degree of exaggeration, these remarks indicate that domestic servants and other service employees had clear ideas as to how they should be treated, and what and how much work they should perform, and were prepared to enforce such norms by collective action.

Although reports of strikes have been found from the 1820s onwards (discounting the engineer's letter of 1816), these forms of trade unionism, or 'hidden' forms of resistance to pressure from employers, continued to be manifested throughout the nineteenth century. In 1825 it was reported that "combination prevails amongst the Mechanics, and serving men of Calcutta, to a degree that is hardly suspected by many".<sup>5</sup> Apparently the 1816 bye-law was of little consequence. In 1858, Calcutta tradesmen again petitioned for a law to enforce labour

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- 1) Bengal Law Council Proceedings, 31 August 1816, No.17. The "Rule, Ordinance and Regulation ..." enacted in July 1814 provided for taking employees before a Magistrate should they break their contract - Smoult, Rules, Ordinance and Regulations, pp.6-7 - but in 1816 the Calcutta tradesmen said this was inadequate.
  - 2) The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XXXI, 1817, p.446.
  - 3) Anonymous letter, dated Calcutta, 18 October 1816, in The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XXIX, 1816, p.294.
  - 4) Ibid., pp.295, 311-12.
  - 5) The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XLVII, 1825, p.449.

contracts, claiming

That the native workmen, well knowing the facility with which they can avoid punishment, take advantage on the slightest pretence, to desert their work, or break their contracts if higher wages can be obtained and frequently combine together, to prevent other workmen from taking contracts or employment, which from the peculiarities of their caste, they have every facility of doing, and your Petitioners ... are often compelled to submit to humiliating terms with their workmen, or pay them greatly advanced rates to induce them to return to their work. At other times, your Petitioners are left entirely helpless, and are frequently heavy losers. (1)

This clearly implies not only that desertion and other forms of resistance persisted, but that strikes had become relatively serious on occasion. No details of these activities have come to light, but in the 1860s it was reported that agricultural and other labourers often refused to work except at rates set by themselves.<sup>2</sup> In the 1870s and 1880s factory workers often took time off work, apparently at their own initiative and convenience,<sup>3</sup> and in 1886-7 the Collector of Bhagalpur (in Bihar) noted that labourers there were "holding out" for a two pice increase in their wages.<sup>4</sup> Such informal bargaining methods, conducted collectively, were clearly very widespread by the 1880s if not earlier.

### Strikes

The earliest indisputable reports of strikes by factory and non-factory employees date from 1827. In May that year the Calcutta police issued regulations governing the licensing and rates of hire of palanquins.<sup>5</sup> Even before these rules had been issued it appears that the palanquin bearers had petitioned against the bye-law under which the rules were issued on the grounds that their income would fall if they had to pay

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- 1) Bengal Hurkaru, 12/7/1858. As a result of this petition the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, Act XIII of 1859, was passed - General Report on the Administration of British India, 1859-60, Legislative Council Report, p.4.
  - 2) The Calcutta Review, XXXI, 1858, p.224; ibid., XXIV, 1860, pp.224-5; ibid., XLVII, 1868, pp.167-81.
  - 3) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.14-22.
  - 4) Annual General Administration Report, Bhagalpur Division, 1886-87, in GB General (Miscellaneous), October 1887, File 140, A 1-2.  
1 pice = 1/32 of a Rupee.
  - 5) Bengal Hurkaru, 12/1/1827, 10,16/5/1827. A letter about the strike said that the bearers had to pay Re.1 each for a badge under the new system - Bengal Hurkaru, 26,29/5/1827.



a license fee, and the rates of hire were fixed.<sup>1</sup> However, this petition received no response, and was followed by meetings, a demonstration, and a strike.<sup>2</sup>

It seems that the palanquin bearers' opposition to the new regulations crystallised in the week following publication of the police notice, and that they had decided to strike by 20 May. This can be inferred from a letter of that date, apparently written by two bearers to their employer, or a regular customer, published in a newspaper, explaining their reasons for going on strike.<sup>3</sup>

Most Humble Sir, - We begged to tell your honor that to-morrow we come not to take Master to Duftercanna in the consequence of we gotted to attend the Poolice about the new Regulation. O Dear Master how you musto walked in the Sunny Morning but we cannot be helped if Master be so good write Magistreet not come so hard on we poor bearers we not got any watch to see what the time when come one hour, when come five hour, when come fourteen hour and Master very hard give Money to Gentleman and Gentlemans not gived to us anything; we poor Bearers run in the sunny day we life come out and not give more than one Ropees; we beg Master do something or we live this Country and run-way to Houme tell Magistreet give us all one watch every Bearers and not take the Tax from us we then be very willing to listen to Regulations - Master we begged you not being hungry with us for this.

Clearly the bearers' main concerns were that the new regulations would reduce their income, since rates of hire were to be fixed by time, not distance, and with the cost of the license fee, which they regarded as a tax.

The day after this letter had been written the bearers held a meeting at which they pledged not to carry any palanquins until the regulations were repealed. Anyone breaking the pledge was to be outcasted. Shortly before midday a crowd of about 1000 men went to the police station to present their demands, but they were driven off, and later held another meeting where they "raised loud clamours".<sup>4</sup> The strike continued at least until the beginning of June with some

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- 1) Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, pp.4-5. Unfortunately Ghosh does not give his original sources in detail.
  - 2) Ibid., pp.5-6.
  - 3) Bengal Hurkaru, 26/5/1827. The letter was headed "Bearers' Petition" but it clearly seems to have been a letter rather than a formal petition. All spelling is as in the newspaper report. "Duftercanna" = office; "live" = leave (?); "hungry" = angry (?).
  - 4) Bengal Hurkaru, 26/5/1827.

bearers staying in Calcutta, while others left the city.<sup>1</sup> When the police began issuing the new licenses at the beginning of June the bearers came forward, after some initial hesitation, paid the fees and wore the license badge.<sup>2</sup> By June 1828 nearly 7000 bearers and 1500 palanquins had been registered.<sup>3</sup> The collapse of the strike and other resistance to this change was probably due in part to the lack of any viable alternative, and partly because of a degree of security conferred by the new Regulation.<sup>4</sup> In the first year of its operation, for example, 76 of the 83 suits registered under this law were brought by bearers against members of the public, presumably for the realization of fares.<sup>5</sup>

The day following the palanquin bearers' strike men employed by Jessop & Co. stopped work over the withholding of an allowance for extra hours.<sup>6</sup> About 200 workmen were brought to the Police Office where Mr Jessop conceded payment of the allowance. However, it appears that the head mistri (mechanic) leading the men was not entirely satisfied, and

it was accordingly found necessary to put him in confinement as an example to his companions who appeared to draw a very salutary conclusion from the fate of their brother: viz. that they must return to their employment, or it might be their lot likewise. (7)

Blacksmiths in Jessops' foundry went on strike in 1832 when an allowance

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- 1) The Bengal Hurkaru, 29/5/1827, quoting the India Gazette, reported that the men were returning, but its own editorial said many men were still on strike. Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, p.7 said that the strike lasted for a month.
  - 2) Bengal Hurkaru, 2/6/1827.
  - 3) Chief Magistrate's report on the Police of Calcutta, for 1827, in Bengal Criminal Judicial Consultations (Lower Provinces), 10 July 1828, No.33.
  - 4) The bearers' threat to abandon palanquin bearing and return to their homes (see p.52) does not seem to have been carried through, at least not by many bearers.
  - 5) Chief Magistrate's report on the Police of Calcutta, for 1827. The report noted that if the bearers had found the regulation curbed profits made from overcharging, the bearers had made up for this loss by their ability to take the public to Court for non-payment of fares.
  - 6) Bengal Hurkaru, 23/5/1827. "Mr Jessop", "the contracting Engineer in Calcutta" began erecting steam engines from as early as 1822 - The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XLII, 1822, p.660. The firm was also involved with building in construction, and had iron foundries - Bagchi, Private investment in India, p.332.
  - 7) Bengal Hurkaru, 23/5/1827. It appears that the mistri was summarily tried and imprisoned.

was suspended as a punishment for slack work. The firm responded to the strike by sending out for more men, but as they were about to begin work the strikers surrounded them and threatened to ill-treat the black-legs' families, so the new men also refused to work. Finally, seven strike leaders were taken to court and fined Rs.50 (or one month in prison), a sentence mitigated by the Magistrate on the grounds that this was their first offence.<sup>1</sup>

No systematic research has yet been made for reports of strikes during the nineteenth century from contemporary documents, so information from a variety of sources has been used to compile the following list.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE 3.1: Preliminary list of strikes in Bengal, 1853-1893

Occupation	Year
<u>General labour:</u>	
river transport porters	1853
railway construction labour	1859/60
railway station	1862
docks	1877
railway maintenance labourers	1877/78
labourers	1889
<u>Transport:</u>	
carters	1862, 1889
carriage drivers	1873
palanquin bearers	1863
sailors	1872
<u>Municipal:</u>	
water carriers	1865, 1879
sweepers	1877
<u>Factory:</u>	
cotton	1881, 1885, 1890
jute	1893 (2 strikes)
<u>Other:</u>	
farriers	1879
tailors	1879

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- 1) Supplement to the Calcutta Courier, 11/8/1832.
  - 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), November 1886, File 49-3; GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; Progress and Administration Report of the State Railways in Bengal from April 1873 to March 1878, (Calcutta, 1879), p.21\*; Royal Commission on Labour, Foreign Reports, Vol.II, The colonies and the Indian Empire, (London, 1893; C.6795), p.141; Indian Daily News, 18/6/1889, 30/7/1889\*\*; Nautical Magazine, 1873, p.80; The Times, 18/11/1873, 19/5/1879; "Eastern Bengal and its Railways", The Calcutta Review, XXXVI, 1861, pp.166-7; Ghosh, Indian trade union movement, pp.44-5; S.W. Goode, Municipal Calcutta, (Edinburgh, 1916), pp.171, 252; N. Mukherjee, "Port labour in Calcutta, 1870-1953", in N. Ray (ed.), Trends of Socio-economic change in India, 1871-1961, (Simla, 1969), p.465; Sen, Working class of India, p.79. \* courtesy of Dr. I. Kerr; \*\* courtesy of Pauline Rule.

Strikes also occurred on some north Bengal tea plantations some time before 1895, and may also have taken place on indigo plantations.<sup>1</sup> The table indicates that a low though persistent level of strike activity characterised most of the nineteenth century. Despite the paucity of data this table may reflect the actual level of strike activity given that when in 1892 the Royal Commission on Labour enquired about strikes, they were informed that though small ones were common, none involving more than one factory had ever taken place.<sup>2</sup> The complacency of the employers' replies to this Commission contrasts markedly with their demands for police protection following a small number of riots and strikes in 1894-6, which tends to confirm the impression that strike activity was comparatively rare for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Most of these strikes were directly concerned with wages in some form. Those by the railway construction labourers (1859/60), palanquin bearers (1863) and seamen (1872) were for pay increases, while those by cotton factory employees (1881, 1885 and 1890), and one of the jute factory strikes (October 1893) were against wage reductions.<sup>4</sup> Four other strikes can perhaps be included in this category as they were against new municipal taxes, which would have reduced income. These were the dock labourers' strike (1877) due to the imposition of a license tax on the labourers' sardars (foremen-recruiters)<sup>5</sup>, and the strikes by water carriers, farriers, and tailors in 1879 in protest at a new trades'

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- 1) D.H.E. Sunder's Settlement Report, Western Duars (1895) noted that influential tea plantation labourers sometimes persuaded the workforce to remain in the labour lines instead of attending work - see A. Mitra, Census of India 1951: West Bengal District Handbooks - Jalpaiguri, (Calcutta, n.d.), p. ccxx. In 1877 or 1867 indigo press workers in Champaran (Bihar) went on strike for higher wages - Beames, Memoirs of a Bengal civilian, p.174 - implying that strikes may also have taken place in indigo factories in Bengal.
  - 2) Royal Commission on Labour, C.6795, pp.105, 141.
  - 3) D. Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour: Bengal's jute mill-hands in the 1890s", Past and Present, 91, May 1981, pp.140-41; IJMA, Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1895, (Calcutta, 1896), pp.32, 77-9; ibid., 1897, pp.40-43.
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), November 1886, File 49-3; GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; Royal Commission on Labour, C.6795 p.141; "Eastern Bengal and its railways", pp.166-7; Nautical Magazine, 1873, p.80; Ghosh, Indian trade union movement, p.45.
  - 5) Sardars performed a variety of functions of which these two were central. See also pp.67-8.

license tax.<sup>1</sup> The 1889 carters' strike began when a private company tried to force carters to register with them in order to get work, a move which the carters interpreted as another tax. This strike was prolonged by an attempt to secure the release of pickets arrested at the beginning of the strike.<sup>2</sup> Other strike objectives included the demand for a reduction in working hours to those of a neighbouring department (railway station, 1862);<sup>3</sup> protests against moves to replace workers by mechanization (water carriers, 1865),<sup>4</sup> or with other employees (sweepers, 1877);<sup>5</sup> and, for the release of arrested colleagues (labourers, 1889).<sup>6</sup> The railway maintenance strike (1877/78) and one of the jute mill strikes (early 1893) appear to have stemmed from conflict between work gangs, and their immediate supervisors.<sup>7</sup>

The strike reports and other data on trade unionism among factory and non-factory workers provide little information about the relationship between different forms of collective activity, or about employees' organization. The 1827 palanquin bearers' strike, however, indicates that employees' sometimes engaged in a sequence of forms of trade unionism prior to striking, suggesting that not only were they already familiar with a variety of forms of collective activity, but were prepared to move from one form to another as necessary. In 1863 the palanquin bearers again petitioned before going on strike, but there is no similar evidence from other strike reports in this period.<sup>8</sup> In this connection it is worth noting that in 1899 a cotton factory strike was preceded by several meetings between workers and management, a go-slow during which production fell by 30%, and a further meeting at which the manager presented an ultimatum, so precipitating a strike.<sup>9</sup> It does not seem likely that such complex tactics were developed suddenly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and further research into the earlier strikes will probably yield comparable evidence.

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- 1) Mukherjee, "Port labour in Calcutta", p.465; The Times, 15/5/1879.
  - 2) Indian Daily News, 27-9/6/1889, 1/7/1889.
  - 3) Ghosh, Indian trade union movement, pp.44-5.
  - 4) Goode, Municipal Calcutta, p.252.
  - 5) Ibid., p.171.
  - 6) Indian Daily News, 30/7/1889.
  - 7) Progress and Administration Report of the State Railways in Bengal from April 1873 to March 1878, p.21; GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24.
  - 8) Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, p.12.
  - 9) GB Police, December 1899, A 24-7.

It is important to note that all the forms of trade unionism discussed here imply not inconsiderable forms of organization and organizational skill on the part of the employees. Petitioning, for example, required agreement on issues to be raised, and the wording, as well as to finance and canvass support among the group concerned. One of the petitions presented by palanquin bearers in 1863 was drawn up by a lawyer to whom a fee of Rs.200 had been paid.<sup>1</sup> Picketing, demonstrations, and the maintenance of a degree of solidarity during a strike must also have required organization, the nature of which we are unfortunately ignorant to a large extent. There is however some evidence to indicate that caste or community links formed the basis on which solidarity, if not more concrete forms of organization, was sometimes based. In 1827, the palanquin bearers, for example, took oaths to outcaste people who carried palanquins during the strike.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in 1889 the carters swore that they would rather eat beef or pork than return to work without redress of their grievances.<sup>3</sup> This example is particularly interesting since it implies that Hindus and Muslims took separate vows based on their religious allegiance, in order to facilitate their solidarity as strikers. Strike organization was also undertaken by labour market or workplace intermediaries, or skilled workers. In 1816 a Public Works Department engineer wrote that

the generality of the Sircars, or those employed to procure workmen, encourage and uphold them in every act of vexation and villany they are guilty of, and not unfrequently [sic] compel them to demand greater advances than they usually require ... (4)

Similarly, the strike at Jessops' works in 1827 was led by the head mistri (mechanic),<sup>5</sup> while dock labour sardars and labourers struck together in 1877 following the introduction of a tax on the sardars.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear therefore that many forms of trade unionism, with the exception of formally constituted trade unions, existed in Bengal among factory and non-factory employees by the 1820s. Some employees, notably the palanquin bearers, were already by then capable of a high

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1) Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, p.12.

2) Bengal Hurkaru, 26/5/1827.

3) Indian Daily News, 28/6/1889.

4) Bengal Law Council Proceedings, 31 August 1816, No.17, a letter from Thomas Anbury.

5) Bengal Hurkaru, 23/5/1827.

6) Mukherjee, "Port labour in Calcutta", p.465.

degree of sophistication and organization, employing different techniques of collective activity in turn. Indeed, it seems that strike action was generally a final resort, implying that the level of other forms of trade unionism must have been considerably higher than indicated here, particularly as some workers submitted petitions, but do not appear to have gone on strike.<sup>1</sup> Morris' hypothesis about the unformed nature of first generation labour market recruits is not supported by this evidence.<sup>2</sup> Nor does there seem to be any discernable difference between activity by palanquin bearers, or water carriers, on the one hand, and railway or factory employees on the others, as some historians have suggested.<sup>3</sup>

While this evidence indicates that factory and non-factory employees' trade unionism had its roots in the eighteenth century, it is also apparent that there was little development throughout the nineteenth century, either in terms of levels or forms of activity. The rash of legislation concerning the labour market in 1814-19 could be interpreted as implying either the emergence of or at least a significant increase in the level of trade unionism. The preamble to Regulation VII of 1819 lends support to such a view since it stated that the Regulation was required in order

to empower the magistrates and joint magistrates to take cognisance of certain misdemeanours committed by workmen and domestic servants, in cases not expressly provided for by any existing regulation ... (4)

However, the merchants' petition of 1816 had only stated that their problems had recently increased beyond endurable and manageable proportions, not that workers' combinations were a new phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the 1858 petition tells us nothing more than that the Calcutta traders needed a new labour law, which may or may not have been connected with changes in employees' behaviour.<sup>6</sup> It thus appears that 'non-militant' forms of trade unionism predominated throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, and the contrast between this period and the early twentieth century is still very marked.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) For example, Mint hammer-men (1866), and Court messengers (1867) - GB Financial, September 1866, A 3; September 1867, A 57-65.
  - 2) Unless it were to be argued that the labour market began to form even earlier than has been suggested above.
  - 3) See p.13.
  - 4) Bengal Regulations 1815-1819.
  - 5) Bengal Law Council Proceedings, 31 August 1816, No.16. (See p.49).
  - 6) Bengal Hurkaru, 12/7/1858.
  - 7) See Chapters 4 and 5.

This could imply that workers found petitioning and similar methods which did not involve the confrontation which characterises strikes were adequate, but there is no means of verifying this short of further extensive research. Another hypothesis concerning the nature of trade unionism in the nineteenth century could be that awareness of forms of collective activity, and notions of norms governing the relations between employers and employees had only developed in isolated sectors of the labour market - hence the uneven distribution and sporadic occurrence of trade unionism. However, this seems unlikely given that traditions of collective protest seem to have been well established in eastern India.

The existence of indigenous concepts for both petitions and strikes suggests that awareness of these forms of behaviour predated the imposition of British rule, and thus the development of a capitalist labour market. The notion of petition was expressed by two words - arzi and darkhast - the former denoting the general concept, and the latter referring particularly to petitions over land questions. These words seem to have been in use throughout northern India.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest reference found so far to a collective petition was one submitted by Madras cloth bleachers in pursuit of higher wages, in 1736, while petitioning was also used frequently by Bengal cotton weavers from the 1770s if not earlier.<sup>2</sup> However, it is important to note that petitioning was not a practice confined to employees. In the 1780s rai-yats (cultivators) in Bengal and Bihar collectively petitioned the authorities over revenue payment problems, in one case presenting the petition during a demonstration by 1500-2000 people.<sup>3</sup> In 1810-11, collective petitions and other forms of mass mobilization were used in a protest against a new house tax in Benares, Patna, Sarun, Bhagalpur, Murshidabad and Dacca towns.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century the concept

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- 1) H.H. Wilson, A glossary of judicial and revenue terms, (London, 1855); S. Sen, An etymological dictionary of Bengali, c.1000-1800 A.D., (Calcutta, 1971), vol.I, p.53.
  - 2) Chaudhuri, The trading world of Asia, pp.269-70; Mitra, Cotton weavers of Bengal, Appendix 3, pp.227-39 reproduces several weavers' petitions.
  - 3) N.K. Sinha, The economic history of Bengal, (Calcutta, 1962), vol.II, pp.198-9. See also S.B. Chaudhuri, Civil disturbances during the British rule in India (1765-1857), (Calcutta, 1955), pp.59, 61-2, 65.
  - 4) Chaudhuri, ibid., pp.79-81; N.K., "Popular agitation against the British police of taxation (1811)", Problems of National Liberation, 2 (2), 1977, pp.27-36.



of collectively petitioning the authorities for redress of grievances was very widespread, as the report of a petition from the tribal Kol people to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in 1867 indicates.<sup>1</sup>

The Bengali word for strike - dharmaghat - originally referred to a religious ceremony involving a pitcher of sanctified liquid. Subsequently it acquired shades of meaning referring to collective activities - a water-pot before which people combined and pledged to act collectively, the act of a community in vowing to do something together, and the vow made by labourers to stop work.<sup>2</sup> Collective action in the form of a strike took place among the cotton weavers in the 1780s, and accompanied the anti-house tax agitation of 1810-11, but we do not know what term if any was used to describe such action.<sup>3</sup> In 1846 however it was reported that cultivators sometimes "make Dharma Ghut or combine en masse not to pay rent to the Zamindar",<sup>4</sup> implying that this word could have been used earlier.

The source of employees' notions concerning relations with employers is less evident, but their behaviour is identical in form to that of other social subordinates faced with unwelcome changes for which those in authority bore some responsibility. Studies of mass uprisings in eastern India indicate that many were precipitated by new impositions, excessive demands, or a failure to modify established demands when other conditions, such as a poor harvest, warranted a change.<sup>5</sup> Peasants and agricultural labourers had also developed clear ideas as to the limits of their zamindars' or employers' prerogative in the early nineteenth century. Peasants, for example, would sometimes

- 1) "The Kols of Chota Nagpore", The Calcutta Review, XLIX, 1869, pp.133-135 described a deputation from the Kols, with a petition, which came to Calcutta in 1867.
- 2) S.C. Mitra, The student's Bengali-English dictionary, (2nd edition, Calcutta, 1923); J.M. Das, Banglarbhashar abidhan, (Allahabad, 1916); H.C. Banerji, Bangiya shabdakosh, (Calcutta, B.S. 1344 [1937-8]). Sen, Etymological dictionary of Bengali, states that dharmaghat in the sense of strike is a New Bengali word, but does not date its origin. I am grateful to Dr. J. Gourlay for translating entries in the dictionaries.
- 3) Sinha, Economic history of Bengal, vol.I, p.169; N.K. "Popular agitation", pp.31, 33-4.
- 4) "The zemindar and the ryot", The Calcutta Review", VI, 1846, p.344. Early Bengali-English dictionaries such as those by W. Carey, A Dictionary of the Bengalee language, (Serampore, 1825), or J.C. Marshman, Dictionary of Bengali, (Serampore, 1826-7) do not list the word at all.
- 5) Chaudhuri, Civil disturbances in India, pp.56-7, 59-64, 65-6; Chowdhury, Growth of commercial agriculture, pp.37-8, 153-6, 192-203.

resist attempts to enhance rents above customary levels,<sup>1</sup> and a contemporary observer noted that while agricultural labourers were willing and submissive, coercion was of no avail if the workers were neglected.<sup>2</sup>

Insofar as no rigid line can be drawn between factory and non-factory employees, and the poorer strata of peasants, rural artisans and agricultural labourers, the latter groups could clearly carry with them already formed notions of their relations with employers as they entered the labour market.<sup>3</sup> Since all classes of social subordinates in nineteenth century Bengal can be presumed to be equipped to engage in many forms of collective activity short of armed uprising, we must search elsewhere for an explanation of the restrained nature of trade unionism among factory and non-factory employees. Two broad hypotheses will be examined: that there was little need for these employees to engage in trade unionism for much of the nineteenth century; and that their ability to engage in collective activities was often severely limited.

#### Wages and living costs

The question of the extent to which factory and non-factory employees needed to engage in trade unionism is very difficult to discuss satisfactorily since we cannot adequately define what constituted their needs. Even if the fact that need is defined socially as well as in terms of the minimum necessary for subsistence and reproduction is ignored, the significance of wages cannot easily be established because of the variety of employees' connections with the labour market. Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, it appears that a substantial proportion of factory and non-factory employees retained economically significant ties with the land, as tenant cultivators, and circulated between cultivating on their own account, and working in the agricultural and non-agricultural labour markets.<sup>4</sup> We can

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- 1) S.T. Jassal, "Agrarian contradictions and resistance in Faizabad District of Oudh (India)", Journal of Peasant Studies, 7 (3), 1980, pp.312-37.
  - 2) J. Gibbon, "Remarks on the state of agriculture in Behar", Transactions of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India, II, 1836, p.182 (the paper was read in 1833).
  - 3) See pp.20, 62-4. Morris' hypothesis concerning the formation of norms of behaviour does not take this possibility into account.
  - 4) See the following section, pp.62-4.

therefore only assume that wage incomes must have been necessary to supplement other sources of income.

Bearing this in mind we can note that up to the 1870s wage rates appear generally to have risen in relation to food prices. Between 1855 and 1860 for example, daily labour wage rates in several Bengal districts rose by between 50% and 75%,<sup>1</sup> while in the 1860s wages in most parts of Bengal and Bihar apparently rose faster than food prices.<sup>2</sup> By 1871-2 it was also being reported that wages in the "cheap labour" districts of southern Bihar and Chota Nagpur had begun to rise.<sup>3</sup> However, in the early 1880s, factory employers in the Calcutta area were able to reduce wage rates, if only temporarily.<sup>4</sup> These impressionistic statements appear to indicate that wage rates probably rose in rough correspondence with minimum needs up to the 1880s, but then were susceptible to arbitrary reductions by employers. Insofar therefore as the need to enhance wage rates in line with changes in living costs was a significant factor underlying nineteenth century trade unionism, there appears to have been less need for it prior to the late 1870s.

#### Labour market and trade unionism

Evidence from the early nineteenth century onwards suggests that factory and non-factory employees migrated between the labour market, and the lower stratum of cultivators and rural artisans, combining income from both forms of occupation either simultaneously or sequentially in order to make a living. "Every labourer and artizan", wrote Hamilton in 1815, "who has frequently occasion to recur to the labours of the field, becomes a husbandman", while boatmen also "follow the petty occupations of agriculture, or fill up the intervals of their employment as fishermen, and occasionally augment the bands of dacoits or river pirates".<sup>5</sup> In 1837 the same phenomenon was described in the following way:

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- 1) Chowdhury, Growth of commercial agriculture, p.195.
  - 2) "The labour difficulty in Bengal", The Calcutta Review, XLVII, 1868, pp.167-83. Wage rates rose particularly rapidly in eastern districts of Bengal. On the other hand, wages in northern Bihar seem to have remained virtually unchanged in the late nineteenth century - G. Mishra, Agrarian problems of Permanent Settlement. A case study of Champaran, (New Delhi, 1978), p.210.
  - 3) Bengal Administration Report, 1871-72, Part 1, p.38.
  - 4) Royal Commission on Labour, C.6795, p.141; GB General (Miscellaneous), November 1886, File 49-3.
  - 5) W. Hamilton, The East India Gazetteer, (London, 1815), pp.121, 126.

The Indian artizan hardly ever confines himself exclusively to his business. The weaver, the carpenter and the tailor are for the most part agriculturists; and the loom, the adze, and the needle are constantly interchanging with the plough, the harrow and the hoe. (1)

In 1858 an article describing a 'typical' Bengal village listed a variety of ways in which people combined the status of cultivator, or tenant, with that of employee.<sup>2</sup> Small landholders worked their land by hiring labourers, or through sharecropping arrangements, while themselves working as day labourers in the village, or in a nearby town. Some small cultivators took up full time menial jobs, for example in the Post Office, and managed their land through labourers, or the family. Landless labourers (who might nevertheless possess a house in the village) either worked as labourers in the village, in neighbouring districts, or might even migrate seasonally to Calcutta or other towns for work. This description matched that of a village in Nadia district, written in 1891.<sup>3</sup> Here, small landowners and landless labourers migrated to Calcutta, or to other districts where harvesting still continued, in the agricultural off-season.

It is important to note that the separation of these employees from agricultural ties, even in the case of landless labourers, was not necessarily complete. In 1867 an article on the problem of obtaining wage labourers in Bengal suggested that people preferred to work as indentured labourers than on the Assam tea plantations because the former enabled them to acquire some capital.<sup>4</sup> Presumably this could then have been used to buy or rent land, or pay off a debt, and resume a portion of mortgaged land. In Nadia, for example, labourers took up utbandi (tenant-at-will) tenancies, thus becoming cultivators once again.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1) John Crawford, "A Sketch of the Commercial Resources and Monetary and Mercantile System of British India, with suggestions for their improvement, by means of Banking Establishments", (1837), in Chaudhuri, (ed.), The economic development of India, p.227.
  - 2) "Bengal Village Biographies", The Calcutta Review, XXXI, 1858, pp.195-223.
  - 3) R. Nathan, "Some notes on work and workers in a sub-division of the Nuddea District", The Calcutta Review, 1891, pp.115-26.
  - 4) "The land and labour of India", The Calcutta Review, XLV, 1867, pp.410-11. Approximately 80% of the indentured emigrants who left between 1882 and 1891 returned to India - Royal Commission on Labour, C.6795, p.203.
  - 5) Nathan, "Some notes on work and workers", pp.120-21.

When people entered the labour market a wide variety of opportunities presented themselves, which increased with improvements in transport and communications in the later nineteenth century. This is not to suggest that there was anything like a homogeneous labour market. On the contrary, distinct patterns of regional migration, indicating a degree of rigidity in the distribution of labour, were apparent from the mid-nineteenth century. People from districts in Bihar and the United Provinces supplied agricultural and industrial labour to Bengal proper, but little to none to the coal mines, or Assam tea plantations. Migrants from Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas travelled to north Bengal to work on the tea estates, and to Assam, but rarely to the Calcutta industrial labour market. In Bengal proper, labour migration seems to have been limited to an inter-district exchange of labour during harvest periods, seasonal migration to Arakan (Burma), and a limited movement to the Calcutta region.<sup>1</sup>

Within such limits however it appears that there was little rigidity as regards the types of occupation sought. In 1842 when a man from Orissa described how he had travelled up to Calcutta with three other people to look for work, it seems that he just accepted the first offer made to him.<sup>2</sup> Records show that this man was not alone in thus making his way to Calcutta, while others already employed as domestic servants, for example, readily left their jobs if better prospects were offered.<sup>3</sup> In 1884 an enquiry into Indian seamen in Calcutta noted that, in addition to working on sea-going ships, they also worked in the docks, in factories and workshops, on the railways, and on river steamers, and as carriage drivers.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon persisted at least until the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1) Das Gupta, "Factory labour in Eastern India: sources of supply, 1855-1947", pp.285-309; "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", pp.1795-7; Chakravarty, "Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in a Dual Economy", *passim*; A.K. Chattopadhyay, Slavery in the Bengal Presidency, (London, 1977), pp.154-5.
  - 2) Extract, Bengal Hurkaru, 10/10/1843, quoting the testimony of a man falsely recruited as an indentured emigrant, in P. Saha, Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900, (New Delhi, 1970), pp.89-90.
  - 3) Ibid., pp.89-93.
  - 4) Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the system of Engaging Native Seamen in Calcutta, July 1884, (Calcutta, 1885), p.8 and Appendix.
  - 5) Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission. Volume I: Reports and Appendices, (London, 1908; Cd.4519), p.120.

The supply of labour for the factory and non-factory sectors of the labour market seems generally to have begun to exceed demand (or at least to have become more favourable to employers) from the 1880s. One indication of this is that in the 1870s cultivators in the United Provinces, an area which supplied factory labour to Bengal, began begging landlords to let land to them, the converse of the situation earlier in the century.<sup>1</sup> Another was that cotton factory managers were successfully able to reduce wages in the 1880s without apparently jeopardizing their labour supply.<sup>2</sup> In 1893 one jute mill also reduced wages,<sup>3</sup> while in 1895 employees in two jute factories struck for higher wages when new mills offered higher rates to attract a workforce. The fact that these workers went on strike, but did not apparently attempt to leave the old for the new factory, suggests that for some reason they were more tightly bound to their particular workplace than had been the case in earlier years.<sup>4</sup> The absence of serious complaints from employers of labour shortages in the latter part of the century also implies that sufficient supplies were forthcoming.<sup>5</sup>

It thus appears that many employees may have had little need to confront employers in order to guarantee that portion of their income contributed by wages, at least until the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Only then when something approaching a labour market surplus began to develop, and pressures on land reached a critical point in many parts of eastern India, was employees' freedom to move around within the labour market curtailed, and the need for trade unionism stronger. Even so it was reported of factory workers as late as 1908 that

Frequently no definite demands are formulated, no grievances are stated, no indication is given as to the cause of the discontent; the operatives simply leave work in a body, or more commonly drop off one by one without an explanation, and accept employment under more congenial conditions in other factories. (6)

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- 1) A. Siddiqi, Agrarian change in a north Indian State. Uttar Pradesh 1819-1833, (Oxford, 1973), p.38.
  - 2) Royal Commission on Labour, 1892, C.6795, p.141; GB General (Miscellaneous), November 1886, File 49-3.
  - 3) In October 1893 - see GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24.
  - 4) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2.
  - 5) Coal mine and tea plantation managers complained of labour shortages in the 1890s but the resulting Labour Enquiry Commission, (Calcutta, 1896) found that communications, not supply, was the main problem.
  - 6) Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, vol.I, p.120.

Coercion and trade unionism

Up to the mid-nineteenth century the 'free' labour market coexisted with domestic and agrestic slavery or bonded labour in eastern India. Some forms of slavery seem in many respects not to have differed significantly from the 'free' labour market so far as the actual workers' conditions were concerned. Slaves were sometimes paid wages, or were sent out by their masters to the labour market, or even permitted to hire themselves out for work.<sup>1</sup>

Whether any of the workers in the early nineteenth century factories or other non-factory occupations were actually bonded labourers remains to be established, but they were certainly treated as such. In 1822 for example, one Amin Mistri, a painter by trade, took a leading Calcutta coachmaker to court for having locked him and his men up until they had completed a job. At the trial the Advocate-General was reported as saying that tradesmen often confined workmen in this way.<sup>2</sup> Ten years later a correspondent in a monthly journal wrote that although

the pressure [i.e., impressment] of coolies and other workmen is strictly forbidden by the Government, ... it is daily practiced, and after the fatigue of their labours as frequently are they dismissed unremunerated. (3)

In 1859 it was reported that coal mine managers retained bands of armed men at each mine, and often forced people to work down them. Two men who had been imprisoned by a manager complained to a Magistrate, who, on investigating in person, found three more men locked up in the manager's compound. He also noticed a stand of the type used to hold people on whom corporal punishment was being inflicted near the manager's office.<sup>4</sup> As late as 1882 it was reported that mine managers stationed guards outside a pottery in order to prevent miners from seeking work there.<sup>5</sup> Most of the coal miners were also tenants of the coal companies, who used their position as landlords to compel

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- 1) Chattopadhyay, Slavery in the Bengal Presidency, pp.32-3, 73-4, 250-1. Slavery was formally abolished in 1843. Gibbon, "Remarks on the state of agriculture in Behar", p.182 noted that agricultural labourers and slaves were in a very similar situation (in 1833).
  - 2) The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XLIII, 1822, p.717.
  - 3) Ibid., LXXI, 1832, p.87. See also ibid., pp.1-5 on the forced requisitioning of hackeries by Government officials even when already hired.
  - 4) GB Judicial, 7 July 1859, A 43; 17 November 1859, A 48-9; 8 December 1859, A 75-6.
  - 5) B. De, "Reminiscences of an Indian Member of the Indian Civil Service", Part VIII, The Calcutta Review, 1954, pp.32-3.

people to work in the mines for wages, a method used throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> While positive evidence that other employers, or labour market intermediaries or contractors, were also sometimes employees' landlords has yet to be found, it would be surprising if this mode of obtaining and controlling a labour supply was unique to the coal mines.<sup>2</sup>

Another potential source of control over factory and non-factory employees was the labour market intermediary system itself. Employees were recruited through several classes of middlemen from at least the late eighteenth century. Among seamen these people were called ghat serangs and serangs, and the equivalent terms for other types of employee were sircar and sardar. It appears that ghat serangs and sircars were more in the nature of labour contractors, while the serangs and sardars were equivalent to gang leaders or foremen, and were actual workers.<sup>3</sup> Other reports suggest that a mistri (mechanic) may also have been a gang leader, and perhaps a recruiter, as well as a skilled worker.<sup>4</sup> Both serangs and sardars took money from their subordinates in return for providing employment, while by the early twentieth century if not before sardars sometimes fed and housed new

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- 1) C.P. Simmons, "Recruiting and organizing an industrial labour force in colonial India: the case of the coal mining industry, c.1880-1939", Indian Economic and Social History Review, XIII (4), 1976, pp.463-71; Das Gupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", pp. 1787-89. The system was already in vogue in 1840 when a mine manager advised the purchase of some land since "it would throw the villages under your influence, and no doubt numbers could be persuaded to work in the collieries" - C.B. Taylor to Messrs Carr, Tagore & Co., 25 February 1840, in Bengal Coal Company Papers, Bundle of 1840 letters, No.94 (Birla Industrial and Technical Museum).
  - 2) Letters from the Bengal Coal Company's zamindari manager showed that they were in competition with Bird & Co. over villages - Bengal Coal Company Papers, File 158, "Mouza Senarah", letters dated 4 June 1919, 24 June 1919. While Bird & Co. engaged in coal mining - Report of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, 1900, Part II, (Calcutta, 1901), p.74 - they also supplied contract labour to the Calcutta docks - ibid., 1905, Part II, (Calcutta, 1906), pp.457, 463-4 - implying that they could have based their labour supply business on the zamindari system.
  - 3) Ghat serangs and serangs: The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register, II, 1816, pp.378-80; Confidential, GoI Commerce (Lascar Seamen), August 1922, A 1-7. Sircars and sardars: The Calcutta Monthly Journal, XLVII, 1825, pp.141-2; J.H. Kelman, Labour in India, (New York, 1923). pp.106-8, 154.
  - 4) Bengal Hurkaru, 23/5/1827 (see p.53).



recruits, and were responsible for the allocation of jobs on the shop-floor.<sup>1</sup>

These groups of middlemen were thus well placed to exert control over the rest of the workforce. They could suppress manifestations of trade unionism by, for example, preventing an alternative leadership from developing simply by denying work to other potential leaders or agitators. However they cannot be regarded as having been a wholly countervailing force to trade unionism, for their position as actual workers also led them to take steps to safeguard their subordinates' interests. As one observer wrote,

While the sirdar [sic] is on one hand the millowner's recruiting agent, spy and the prop of oppression ... on the other he is the natural patron and protector of the worker and is regarded by him as such ... the sirdar is able to harmonise his two roles. (2)

Similarly there is evidence that sardars and mistris sometimes led strikes,<sup>3</sup> and that workers could combine against sardars if the latter were felt to be too oppressive.<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusions

The data discussed in this chapter leads to similar conclusions concerning the early development of factory and non-factory workers' trade unionism during the nineteenth century as were reached in the previous chapter. Firstly, it is clear that members of these groups engaged in what have been called "characteristically modern" as well as other equally appropriate forms of trade unionism from at least the second decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, given the evidence suggesting that notions of collectively representing grievances to

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- 1) Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the system of engaging Native Seamen, 1884, pp.8-9; T. Johnston & J.F. Sime, Exploitation in India, (Dundee, n.d.), pp.8. 12; GB Municipal (Medical). January 1914, B 287-95 (actual file); Das Gupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", pp.1791-3.
  - 2) H.K. Chaturvedi, "On jute industry in Bengal", Marxist Miscellany, No.7, April 1946, p.121. Chaturvedi was involved in a field survey of jute workers in 1945 - K.P. Chattopadhyay, A socio-economic survey of jute labour, (Calcutta, 1952), p.2.
  - 3) See p.57.
  - 4) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24 reporting a strike at the Sibpur jute mill in 1893. It is interesting to note that in 1876 Indian indentured labourers in Surinam struck work demanding the removal of their "Driver" or "overseer" and his replacement by a Creole, "because their countryman cheated them" - IO (Home Department), Home Correspondence File 27/28 (1876), (IOL&R: L/PJ/2/168).
  - 5) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.30-31.

employers were 'imported' into the labour market, it is surprising that no earlier evidence has come to light, and that there was apparently so little activity during the nineteenth century. It should also be noted that there does not seem to be any justification for rigidly distinguishing between factory and other types of 'manual' employee, at least so far as their forms and reasons for engaging in trade unionism were concerned.

Legislation prohibiting trade unionism enacted early in the century seems to have been of little avail, and the paucity of activity due on the one hand to little need, and on the other to coercive constraints by the employers. Many if not all the factory and non-factory employees made a living by migrating between waged employment opportunities, and between the labour market and other occupations, a mode of existence which only began to be seriously threatened in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Insofar as this rendered employees relatively independent of particular employers for much of the time, there was no need for them to collectively confront one employer in order to obtain suitable conditions of work.

A major constraint on trade unionism, particularly in the early and mid-nineteenth century, was institutionalised coercion, which existed to such an extent that one historian has described these workers as constituting an "unfree" labour force.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the century many factory and non-factory workers seem to have been treated as bonded labourers, even if they were not actually so in practice. Even later in the century coercion continued to characterise relations with employers in certain sectors of the labour market, and seems likely to have prevented the development of any forms of collective activity on the part of those groups of employees.

As with the supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical groups, these structural constraints were beginning to weaken and change towards the end of the nineteenth century, thus increasing the potential for more consistent levels or developed forms of activity to emerge.

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1) Das Gupta, "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India", passim.

CHAPTER 4: New levels and forms of activity: the mid-1890s  
to the end of the First World War

This period can be regarded as a transitional phase in the development of trade unionism in Bengal between the low levels and ad hoc forms of the earlier nineteenth century, and the post-First World War upsurge of strikes and unionization. Existing accounts of the period have focussed on the jute mill strike wave of the 1890s, and a phase of strike activity and union formation between 1905 and 1908. The impression is given that there was virtually no activity between the late 1890s and 1905, and again between 1909 and 1917.<sup>1</sup> Since new evidence presented here modifies this account somewhat, it is necessary to begin the chapter with a brief review of evidence for trade unionism on which a new periodization can be indicated.

Patterns of activity

It should be noted that many employees still continued on occasion to resolve workplace or labour market problems by desertion or evasion. Although some jute factories invested in electric lighting in 1894-5 other still operated by daylight only in 1896. However, by the following year most factories had modernized their lighting system mainly to ensure that they retained their workforce since people tended to move to the electrified factories where higher earnings could be obtained.<sup>2</sup> In 1899 the Indian Jute Manufacturers Association, an employers' organization, was so concerned with the problem of new recruits leaving the factories for which they had been recruited for ones which offered better pay that they sought advice on means of restraining such behaviour.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1911, when many jute factories worked for only four days a week, it was reported that workers tended to leave those factories for others which still worked for a longer period, or in order to return to their villages.<sup>4</sup>

Some non-factory group employees also behaved in a similar fashion. In 1904, for example, it was reported that constables in the Calcutta police force were resigning "in large numbers" to become watchmen, who

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- 1) Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.19-26; Sen, Working class of India, pp.90-116.
  - 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), September 1898, A 21.
  - 3) IJMA, Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1899, (Calcutta, 1900), pp.3, 49-52.
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1912, A 37-44.

earned more money for less work. An officer explained:

The fact is that with Rs.8 and Rs.9 as pay and all the maskabari [ 'monthly dues' - i.e. extortion ] they used to collect they found it hard enough to make two ends meet, and now that I have put, or nearly put, an stop to all maskabari etc., they can't live, and won't enlist and won't stay. (1)

Employees who did decide to seek concessions from employers sometimes did so through meetings or other informal methods of communication. In 1899, for example, cotton factory spinners fought a proposed wage cut through meetings with the management, and then a go-slow.<sup>2</sup> Similar forms of activity are implied by a report in 1912 that a strike had been averted because concessions were made to the workforce.<sup>3</sup> In the latter case it is possible that communication of grievances was made in the form of a petition, arguably the most widespread form of trade unionism.

More than 100 reports of petitions have been found from between 1895 and 1917, which can only represent a small and unevenly biased sample as most of the evidence comes from file lists of the Government of Bengal's Finance Department.<sup>4</sup> Similar lists of other department's

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- 1) GB Judicial (Police), March 1904, A 3 KWs.
  - 2) GB Police, December 1899, A 24-7. The spinners eventually went on strike.
  - 3) GB Police, October 1912, B 170 (abstract).
  - 4) GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), January 1907, A 18-19; March 1907, A 35; June 1907, A 15; July 1907, A 1-2; March 1908, A 6-9; September 1908, A 3-4. GoI Home (Public), November 1907, B 254-68 & KWs\*. Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, Judicial (Police), October 1909, A 11-14. GB Finance (Finance), Index, B Proceedings (abstracts), July 1898-December 1917. GB Finance (Miscellaneous), Index, B Proceedings (abstracts), January 1903-August 1916. GB Finance (Separate Revenue), August 1908, B 195-9; October 1908, A 6-15; December 1908 A 2-6. GB Finance (Customs), July 1914, B 35-9. GB Political (Police), August 1908, A 28-33 KWs; October 1912, B 170; November 1912, B 214-5; January 1913, B 210-11; July 1913, B 374-5\*; October 1915, B 154-8. GB Judicial (Police), September 1896, A 70-71. GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1898, A 32-47; October 1899, B 112-4; August 1904, A 45-6; January 1906, B 16; January 1907, B 41-44\*; March 1907, B 53-55\*. GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24. GB Marine March 1902, A 15-19. Report of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for the year 1902, Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1904), pp.376-80; *ibid.*, 1912, Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1913), pp.701-2. S.C. Sen to A.C. Banerji, 23/12/1908, A.C. Banerji Papers, File 127, Serial 331. Unidentified newspaper cutting, dated 1907, Surjya Kumar Ghosal Papers. ABP, 5/11/1918, 22/2/1919, 24/3/1919, 27/6/1919, 26/5/1920. S, 10/2/1915, 17/8/1918. E, 25/2/1919. Saha, History of the working class movement, p.25; S. Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908, (New Delhi, 1973), pp.202, 204, 207-8, 211, 219, 238. \* - only these B proceedings files have actually been seen; other B Proceedings references are to file abstracts.

files have yet to be thoroughly searched, while there is no comparable source for the private sector. Indeed, most reports of petitions from private sector employees were of petitions sent to the Government. In view of these limitations this data cannot be used to identify trends in petitioning, or levels and phases of activity. All that can usefully be said in this context is that petitions were submitted in the periods historians have implied were devoid of any activity.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to yielding some data on employees' objectives, petition reports also reveal that this form of trade unionism was used by all sections of the labour market. The range of occupational groups involved is illustrated by Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1: Classified list of employee groups which engaged in petitioning, 1894-1917 (2)

Supervisory group:

- senior police officers

Subordinate supervisory group:

- jute factory assistants
- Customs preventive officers
- Post Office superintendents
- telegraphists
- expatriate railwaymen (drivers, firemen, guards)
- river surveyors
- Bengal Secretariat assistants
- High Court officials

Clerical group:

- Government clerks (various departments)
- Government printers and compositors
- police head- and writer-constables
- railway clerical staff
- Post Office subordinates
- bank and mercantile office clerks
- jute press clerical employees

Factory group:

- jute mill weavers
- oil (petroleum) depot workers
- Government printing press menials
- railway workshop employees

Non-factory group:

- Government office menials (peons, chaprasis, record suppliers, book-binders, orderlies)
- police department boatmen
- Post Office lower grades
- carters
- tram drivers and conductors
- taxi drivers

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1) The number of petition reports in the activity phases suggested by current accounts was: 1894-6: 2; 1897-1904: 18; 1905-8: 31; 1909-17: 63.

2) See footnote 2, p.71 for references.

The number of strikes recorded in this period indicates a marked change over nineteenth century levels. Annual strike figures, given in Table 4.2<sup>1</sup> suggest that there were three phases of heightened activity - 1894-7, 1905-8, and 1912-16 - although problems with the interpretation of the evidence, and the limited nature of research, mean that these phases can only be tentatively delimited.<sup>2</sup>

There seems little doubt that factory workers' behaviour registered an important change in the mid-1890s, although the significance of these developments is still the subject of debate.<sup>3</sup> After the relative calm of the 1880s and 1890s, factory workers appear suddenly to have engaged in a series of strikes, reinforcing their action on at least five occasions with small riots. However, since most of the strike references come from a report on policing problems of the factory areas, around Calcutta, initiated after one of the riots, it seems likely that only strikes associated with other disturbances, or which were recorded

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- 1) Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13\*; November 1907, B 254-68\*. GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), March 1908, A 23-5. Confidential, Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, File 458 (1-16), 1907. Confidential, GB Political, File 43 (D), 1905; File 114, 1906; Collection of Fortnightly Reports submitted to the Government of India, on the Partition Agitation and boycott movement in 1907. GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24. GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2; September 1897, A 7; July 1901, A 20; August 1905, A 12; September 1906, A 24; August 1907, A 35-52; July 1908, A 53-7; July 1909, A 53-4; August 1910, A 81-3; August 1911, A 33-5; August 1912, A 45-9; June 1913, A 11-12. GB Judicial (Police), December 1899, A 22-9; December 1901, A 14-29; July 1905, B 7; Index, B Proceedings (abstracts), July-August 1910; June 1911; June-September, November, 1912; January-December 1913, 1914, 1915; January-May, August-December 1916; April, May, July, December 1917; February 1918. GB Political, August 1910, B 687. GB Financial (Miscellaneous), February 1909, B 20-27. Detailed Report of the General Committee of the Duars' Planters' Association, 1916, (Calcutta, 1917), p.285. Indian Mining Association, Report of the Committee from 1st March 1905 to 28th February 1906, (Calcutta, 1906), p.31. Bengal Times, 31/7/1895, 7/7/1897\*\*. E, 2/10/1920. S, 8/5/1914, 5/2/1915, 19/2/1915, 30/5/1915, 2/6/1915. The Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser, K.C.S.I. 1903-1908, (Calcutta, 1908), pp.24-30; Buchanan, Development of capitalistic enterprise in India, p.421; Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.94-5; Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, pp.4, 16; Indian trade union movement, p.54; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.190, 198-213, 223-40; Sen, Working class of India, pp.83-4, 93-7. \* only these B Proceedings have been seen; others have all been destroyed. \*\* references courtesy of Dr. Muntasir Mamun.
  - 2) Research into 1918-22 indicates that newspapers are the single most important source of strike reports, and they have not yet been studied systematically for this period.
  - 3) See, Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects; D. Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour", pp.140-69; D. Chakrabarty, R. Das Gupta, Some aspects of labour history of Bengal in the nineteenth century: two views, (Calcutta, 1981).

TABLE 4.2: Classified summary of strike evidence 1894-1917

labour market group	subordinate supervisory & technical	clerical & subordinate literate	factory	non-factory	railway	TOTAL
occupation	tele-graphists	clerks printers postmen	jute cotton other (1)	sweepers docks other (2)	line workshop	
year						
1894			2			2
1895			5 1		1	7
1896			3			3
1897					1	1
1898						-
1899			1			1
1900			4			4
1901					1	1
1902						-
1903						-
1904			1		1	2
1905		3 2	5	1	3	17
1906		6	12 1	2	1	26
1907		1	4 2	2	1	13
1908	1	1	5 1	2	2	12
1909			1			1
1910			2 2 1		1	6
1911			3 1			4
1912			15 1		1	17
1913		1	34 4		2*	41
1914			34 3			37
1915			15 1		4	20
1916			14		2	16
1917			4		1	5
TOTAL	1	3 10 1	163 13 6	5 3 18	11 2	236
<p>Key: * 1 railway yard strike            (1) iron works, 1; jute drumming/press, 3; oil depot, 2.            (2) carters, 3; trams, 3; boatmen, 2; taxis, 1; hackney carriage, 2; barbers, 1; general labour, 1; police constables, 1; telegraph peons, 1; tea estate, 1; jute warehouse, 1; Post Office lower grades, 1.</p>						

casually in the course of making the report, are known at present from the 1890s.<sup>1</sup> One indication that many other strikes took place comes from the report of a factory inspector in 1896 that "small strikes" were "more frequent" than usual, while the table shows that strike levels fell in 1896.<sup>2</sup> Further research will therefore be needed to determine the real extent of any change in strike levels in the mid-1890s.

1) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; IJMA, Report ... 1895, pp. 32-6.  
 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), September 1897, A 7.

The identification of the second phase of increased strike activity is more soundly based since it is supported by a variety of contemporary reports and sources.<sup>1</sup> Strikes by such groups as printers, railway running staff, and telegraphists, were also unprecedented, thus further strengthening the particular identity of this phase. However, since much of the attention paid to this period has focussed primarily on the mass nationalist activity that took place, and not on trade unionism as such, there can again be no certainty that the figures in Table 4.2 indicate the actual levels of activity.

The evidence for the third wave of strikes, 1912-16, is also difficult to interpret, although for different reasons. Most of these strike reports only exist at present as references in police department file indexes. It seems that the police suddenly began to compile records of jute factory strikes in particular in the middle of 1912, and continued to open new files until 1917-18. The reason for this decision has not been discovered, and since all the files have been destroyed, it has not been possible to study these reports.<sup>2</sup> While the occurrence of at least these numbers of strikes in each year is indisputable, comparison with earlier levels is not possible because these figures may for the first time provide a relatively complete record, at least for the jute mills. In view of the mass of contemporary comment surrounding the small number of strikes in the 1890s it seems surprising that no similar remarks have come to light.<sup>3</sup> However, one factory inspector's report did refer to an increase in strikes in 1912 following changes in working hours.<sup>4</sup>

The same limitations which apply to identification of strike phases also restrict analysis of variations in the propensity of different labour market groups to strike, in particular a comparison of the factory and non-factory groups. Most reports of factory workers' strikes come from Government sources, while those of non-factory workers from non-official sources, implying that systematic searching of newspapers will reveal proportionately more new non-factory than

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- 1) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, Chapter 5, *passim*.
  - 2) The files may have been opened because of fears that Muslim concern over the British Government's attitude towards developments in Turkey might have led to rioting on the scale of the 1890s. For reports of Muslim political agitation in 1912-13, see particularly: Confidential, GB Political (Political), Files 290, 1912, and 66, 1913.
  - 3) The reports of the Indian Jute Mills Association, and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, for these years contain no references to strikes.
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), June 1913, A 11-12.



factory strikes. However there seems no reason to question the broad distinction apparent between the subordinate supervisory and clerical groups on the one hand, and the factory and non-factory groups on the other, the rarity of strikes by employees in the first two groups being consistent with earlier and subsequent evidence.

One feature which clearly distinguished this period from earlier years was the formation of a number of trade unions. These have been listed in Table 4.3 according to the year of formation, and the group of employees involved. Seven of these organizations are known from contemporary evidence of formation or activities, and there can be little doubt that they should be classed as unions.<sup>1</sup> However, the evidence for the formation of the remaining eight organizations is largely retrospective, and since their inclusion could be disputed, some justification for classifying them as unions is required.

The formation of the Indian Civil Service Association was not reported until 1919, when its existence was officially admitted for the first time. However, in 1900 the ICSA was in correspondence with the Bengal Government over leave rules, and further research may lead to evidence of more activity.<sup>2</sup> As has already been noted, this union was formed in the aftermath of expatriate civil servants' agitation over exchange rates in the early 1890s.<sup>3</sup> The Mahomedan Association is largely known from a statement by the president of the organization to the Indian Factory Labour Commission of 1908. He claimed that this organization had been established in 1895 to attract Muslims to work in jute factories, but that by 1908, if not earlier, non-Muslims had been admitted to the Association, and the MA had organized meetings to discuss hours, holidays, and the problem of oppression by factory sardars and clerks.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the nature of the MA at the outset, it had clearly developed into a trade union by 1907-8.<sup>5</sup> Evidence for

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- 1) For the Table, see p.77. The seven unions were: Carters' Union, Indian Mill Hands' Union; Press Workers' Union; Railwaymen's Union; Taxi-Cab Union. For detailed references see Appendix III.
  - 2) GB Appointments, April 1900, A 53-4; Confidential, GoI Establishments, March 1919, A 330.
  - 3) See pp.26-7.
  - 4) Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, Vol.II: Evidence, (London, 1909; Cd.4619), pp.263-5.
  - 5) In 1898 a Naihati Muhammedan Association sought to establish certain religious rights for Muslim factory workers in the same area as the MA was formed - Confidential, GB Judicial (Police), File 59 (1-2), 1900. It is possible that in fact there was only one organization, or that of two similar organizations, one developed into a trade union.

TABLE 4.3: Trade union formation, 1894-1917<sup>1</sup>

labour market group	supervisory	subordinate supervisory & technical	clerical & subordinate literate	factory	non-factory	TOTAL
year						
1894 -	ICSA	-	-	-	-	1
1895	-	-	-	MA	CSC	2
1896-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1904	-	-	-	-	-	-
1905	-	-	PWU	-	-	1
1906	-	-	RU AISASC	IMHU	-	3
1907	-	ITA	-	-	-	1
1908	-	-	CPC PL	-	ISAJ	3
1909	-	-	-	BLA	-	1
1910	-	-	-	-	-	-
1911	IPA	-	-	-	-	1
1912-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1914	-	-	-	-	-	-
1915	-	-	-	-	TCU	1
1916	-	-	-	-	-	-
1917	-	-	-	-	CaU	1
TOTAL	2	1	5	3	4	15

**Key:** AISASC All India Sub-Assistant Surgeon's Conference  
 BLA Baranagar Labour Association  
 CPC Calcutta Postal Club  
 CSC Calcutta Seamen's Club  
 CaU Carters' Union  
 ICSA Indian Civil Service Association  
 IMHU Indian Mill Hands' Union  
 IPA Indian Police Association  
 ISAJ Indian Seamen's Anjuman  
 ITA Indian Telegraph Association  
 MA Mahomedan Association  
 PL Postal League  
 PWU Press Workers' Union  
 RU Railwaymen's Union  
 TCU Taxi-Cab Union

1) Confidential, GoI Establishments, March 1919, A 330; GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), May 1908, A 4; GB "List of Labour Unions and Associations in Bengal ...", pp.1, 16-17 (courtesy of Dipesh Chakrabarty); GB Police, October 1915, B 154-8 abstract. Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, I, p.263; S.C. Sen to A.C. Banerji, 23/12/1908, A.C. Banerji Papers, File 127, Serial 331. Indian Police Association Bulletin, III (6), July 1923, p.372. M. Daud, The Indian Seamen's Union - history and developments 1908-1924, (Calcutta, n.d.), p.1, and 'Presidential Address', 9th AITUC Session, 1928, Report, (Bombay, 1929), pp.20-21. ABP, 8/1/1918. K. McPherson, The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935, (Wiesbaden, 1974), p.37; Sarkar, The Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.209, 217, 233.

the Indian Police Association, an organization of expatriate police officers, also shows that it was functioning as a trade union shortly after its reported formation. In 1913, for example, officers in Madras and Punjab presented statements of general grievances and demands to the Royal Commission on the Public Services in the name of the IPA, and in 1915 the Association coordinated the submission of petitions from all over India to the Government.<sup>1</sup>

Three organizations for which no contemporary record of formation or activities has been found definitely functioned as unions in the post-First World War period. The All India Sub-Assistant Surgeon's Conference held its 12th annual session in 1917, from which the foundation date of 1905 has been calculated, and references to pay and conditions were made at the next conference, in January 1919.<sup>2</sup> Police intelligence sources reported that an All India Sub-Assistant Surgeon's Association was set up in April 1919 to improve their conditions, but it seems likely that the Conference (which continued to exist alongside the Association) had also performed a similar function.<sup>3</sup> The foundation dates of the Calcutta Postal Club and the Baranagar Labour Association were also given in an intelligence report, while contemporary references to these organizations showing their concern with pay and conditions date from 1918 and 1920 respectively.<sup>4</sup> There being no reason to suppose that these organizations did not function as unions before 1918, their inclusion in Table 4.3 is therefore justified.

The formation of the Indian Seamen's Anjuman in 1908 is testified to by both official and trade union sources.<sup>5</sup> Although these reports suggest that the Anjuman may have been mainly a benevolent institution, the fact that it gave rise to the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union in 1918 means that it should be considered in the same light as the Mahomedan

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- 1) Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Appendix XIII, (London, 1915; Cd.7901), pp.11-15, 21, 183; Indian Police Association Bulletin, II (6), January 1923, pp.262-5. The Bengal branch of the IPA was active by 1917 at the latest - E, 21/11/1918 reported on a petition submitted by this branch in May 1917.
  - 2) ABP, 8/1/1918; Speeches delivered by His Excellency the Right Honourable Lawrence John Lumley Dundas, Earl of Ronaldshay, G.C.I.E., Governor of Bengal, during 1918-1919, (n.p., n.d.), pp.387-8.
  - 3) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.2. Pay was also discussed at the 15th Conference session in 1920 - E, 18/12/1920.
  - 4) GB "List of Labour Unions", pp. 1, 16 (which also reported that the Baranagar Labour Association was dormant until 1919); ABP, 9/10/1918, 5/2/1920.
  - 5) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.2; Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, pp.1-2.

Association of 1895.<sup>1</sup> The existence of the Calcutta Seamen's Club in or around 1895 is supported by two retrospective but apparently independent pieces of evidence. The claim that this organization was formed in 1895 was made to the 1928 session of the All India Trade Union Congress by Muhammed Daud, an Indian seamen's union leader. He said that the CSC had been formed by Calcutta seamen, inspired by a European seamen's missionary, Father Hopkins, and a member of the British seamen's union.<sup>2</sup> Support for Daud's claim comes from remarks by Father Hopkins himself to an internal meeting of the British seamen's union in 1919, when he said that he had presided over the formation of a branch of the union at Calcutta 29 years before.<sup>3</sup> It thus seems indisputable that some kind of seamen's union was formed at Calcutta in the early 1890s, though whether actually in 1895, or for Indian or European seamen, cannot at present be determined. While therefore the inclusion of one or two organizations in this list could perhaps be disputed, Table 4.3 probably conveys a relatively accurate picture of the overall pattern of union formation in this period.

Taking the evidence for all forms of trade unionism into consideration, it is clear that despite the continued manifestation of 'hidden' forms of resistance, this period is distinguishable by the level of strike activity, and the formation of unions. It seems likely that there were three phases of heightened activity. The first, in the mid-1890s, was characterised by strikes, minor riots, and the formation of a trade union on the part of factory workers, and isolated reports of unionization among other groups of employees. In 1905-8 another strike upsurge was accompanied by union formation, particularly among 'white collar' groups of workers. The level of unionization fell sharply after 1908, but groups of factory workers continued to resort to strikes as occasion demanded, and engaged in another round of heightened strike activity from 1912 to around the middle of the First World War.

#### Trade unionism and living costs

The objectives which employees sought can be established from petition and strike reports, and other references to demands made of employers. Unfortunately this data is of too poor a quality to present statistically

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- 1) Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, p.2.
  - 2) Daud, 'Presidential Address', 9th AITUC Session, Report, pp.20-21.
  - 3) National Seamen's and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Minutes of Proceedings of AGM, (Part 1), 22-25 September 1919, pp.362-3.

or to enable the character of demands in the different phases of activity to be identified.<sup>1</sup> Hence what follows is necessarily impressionistic.

Insofar as requests for higher pay have been found from nearly every year between 1894 and 1917 this was probably the most widespread and frequent demand. Reports such as that peons (messengers) in the Dacca District Court, or Bengal Government Finance Department office, petitioned for higher wages, occur frequently in the file indexes.<sup>2</sup> Strikes for higher wages also took place involving, for example, jute mill workers in 1895, Anglo-Indian railway guards, and postmen, in 1905, and telegraph peons in 1908.<sup>3</sup> Increased pay was also sought in the form of a demand for grain compensation allowances, granted when food prices rose above a certain level. Thus in 1898 Bengal Secretariat messengers and bookbinders petitioned for the renewal of their grain compensation allowance, while railwaymen and dockers sought the grant of such an allowance in 1906 and 1908 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Demands for higher wages appear to have been justified by reference to increases in food prices. This was the reason given in petitions from peons and other office menials in 1901, during the railway workshop strikes of September and October 1906, and in a sweepers' strike in August 1906.<sup>5</sup> The demand for grain compensation allowances was of course nothing less than the demand for protection against high food prices. Occasionally demands for higher wages were also justified by reference to those received by other groups of employees.<sup>6</sup>

Assuming therefore that demands for higher wages or other measures to meet rising living costs were the most common throughout the period, we might expect to find a positive correlation between the phases of

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- 1) Nothing is known about the objectives of 138 of the 236 strikes recorded from this period.
  - 2) See for example, GB Financial (Finance), October 1898, B 2-4; April 1899, B 230-32; July 1900, B 311-31; May 1905, B 97-9; February 1906, B 314 (all file abstracts). For other references see p.71.
  - 3) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; GoI Commerce & Industry, (Telegraph Establishments), March 1908, A 23; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.202, 204.
  - 4) GB Financial (Finance), July 1898, B 36; September 1898, B 475-6 (file abstracts); Sarkar, ibid., pp.219, 238.
  - 5) GB Marine, March 1903, A 15-19; Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file); Sarkar, ibid., pp.223-4; Saha, History of the working class movement, p. 25.
  - 6) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2; Sarkar, ibid., p.230.

trade unionism, and periods of increasing living costs. No cost of living index relating to the whole workforce as defined in this thesis exists, and instead data concerning industrial workers alone has to suffice. Datta's index of industrial workers' average real wages for 1890-1912 suggests that real wages fell slightly in 1892 and, apart from an upward flutter in 1895-6, did not rise significantly until after 1898-9.<sup>1</sup> It has recently been suggested that this index is too optimistic and since nominal wage rates in several jute mills hardly changed during the 1890s, while food prices continued to rise, many industrial workers' living standards were under attack.<sup>2</sup> Earnings in the jute industry at least could only have been maintained or increased by working the longer hours made possible by the introduction of electric lighting (1894-7), and the longer working week - or by successful action to raise wage rates.<sup>3</sup>

A more adequate working class cost of living index has been calculated for the period from 1900 by Mukherji, the trends of which are shown in Fig. 4.1.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that there is a close though not precise correlation between the 1903-8 and 1911-16 phases of rising living costs, and the 1905-8 and 1912-16 periods of increased trade unionism. The significance of this relationship is emphasised by the trends of real wages of jute factory employees, and probably of factory employees in general, calculated by Mukherji. Throughout this period real wage levels tended to move synchronously, but in the opposite direction, to the cost of living index. Phases of increased trade unionism thus also coincided with periods of falling real wages, at least for factory workers. However, it is equally apparent that strike levels began to fall before the cost of living in both the 1905-8 and 1912-16 periods. This suggests that workers initially tried to protect

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- 1) K.L. Datta, Report on the Enquiry into the Rise of Prices in India, (Calcutta, 1914), Vol. III, p.206.
  - 2) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.47-52.
  - 3) A short time working agreement in the jute industry was terminated in February 1891 - The Indian Yearbook, 1920, (Bombay, 1921), p.318. A new agreement made in 1905 contained a clause that "no electric light wages were to be paid", implying that a special allowance had been conceded in the 1890s - IJMA, Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1905, (Calcutta, 1906), p.2. See also Sir J. Leng, Letters from India and Ceylon including the Manchester of India, the Indian Dundee, and Calcutta Jute Mills, 1895-96, (Dundee, n.d.). On nominal wages, see Das Gupta, ibid., pp.48-50.
  - 4) K. Mukherji, "Trends in real wages in the jute textile industry from 1900 to 1951", Artha Vijnana, 2 (1), 1960, pp.57-69; (see p.82).

FIGURE 4.1: Calcutta working class cost of living 1900-1920



living standards, but then abandoned the attempt. It is conceivable that they tried to seek higher wages by petitioning, for example, but such evidence as there is on the relationship between different forms of trade unionism suggests that strikes were usually engaged in as a last resort,<sup>1</sup> making this an unlikely explanation of reductions in strike levels.

Reports of petitions and other forms of trade unionism show that a variety of other objectives were sought, indicating that levels of activity could have reflected other changes besides those in living costs. Much activity was aimed at restoring the status quo following adverse changes in working conditions. Jute factory workers struck against both reduced and increased working hours, the reason for this apparently contradictory behaviour lying in the effect of such changes on incomes. Longer working hours were opposed in 1896, for example, in what was probably an attempt to secure an extra allowance for working with electric lighting, while in 1906, 1911 and 1912, reductions in working hours were opposed since this resulted in lower incomes.<sup>2</sup> A clerks' strike against longer working hours in 1905 seems to have been against the increase itself, partly because this was arbitrarily imposed

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1) See pp. 56, 90-91, 171, and Chapter 6 passim.

2) GB General (Miscellaneous), September 1897, A 7; August 1907, A 35-52; August 1912, A 45-9; June 1913, A 11-12; Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.91-2; Ghosh, Maiden strike in India, p.14.

by the head of their department.<sup>1</sup> Other issues included protests at the loss of promotion prospects,<sup>2</sup> changes in shift arrangements,<sup>3</sup> attempts to enforce time-keeping,<sup>4</sup> increased work loads,<sup>5</sup> and fines.<sup>6</sup> Factory workers also struck several times in an attempt to obtain the reinstatement of sacked colleagues,<sup>7</sup> and the introduction of new regulations by the police occasioned strikes by carters in 1901 (and a petition from them the following year),<sup>8</sup> and a petition from the Taxi-Cab Union in 1915.<sup>9</sup>

The relations between workers in managerial positions and their subordinates sometimes led to strikes or less overt forms of conflict. In 1904, for example, a European assistant manager in a jute mill hit an Indian shop-floor worker who had been absent without leave, and was himself assaulted later that day. When the Indian worker was arrested and charged with assault the whole workforce came out on strike, "because the case was not allowed to be compromised", according to a factory inspector.<sup>10</sup> Some of the disputes between European assistants and Indian shop-floor workers seem to have arisen from purely personal conflicts, but others stemmed from attempts by assistant managers to interfere with established working practices.<sup>11</sup> Shop-floor workers' relations with factory sardars and clerks was also a source of conflict on some

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- 1) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.204.
  - 2) GB Judicial (Police), September 1896, A 70-71 (police head- and writer-constables).
  - 3) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1901, A 20 (jute mill); August 1911, A 33-5 (cotton mill).
  - 4) Confidential, GB Political, File 43 (D), 1905, p.308 (clerks); GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1907, A 35-52 (jute mill); Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, p.27 (jute mill).
  - 5) Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, pp.29-30 (telegraphists).
  - 6) IJMA, Report ... 1895, p.77 (jute mill); Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.94-5 (jute mill); Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.202 (tramwaymen), 228 (jute mill).
  - 7) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1901, A 20 (jute mill); July 1909, A 53-4 (jute mill); August 1911, A 33-5 (cotton mill).
  - 8) GB Judicial (Police), December 1901, A 14-29; Report ... of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce ... 1902, vol.II, pp.378-80.
  - 9) GB Police, October 1915, B 154-8 (abstract).
  - 10) GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1905, A 12. See also GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24 (jute mill); Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.205 (clerks), 227-8 (jute mills); S, 7,8,12,13/5/1915 (court case of an ex-jute mill assistant who unsuccessfully sued the manager over his dismissal).
  - 11) See e.g. E, 8/7/1920; S, 8/7/1920, 21/8/1920, 31/10/1920, reporting a jute mill strike, and its aftermath, following an assistant's attempt to change working practices. No clear example has been found from this period.



occasions. In 1895 Baj Baj jute factory workers sought the dismissal of an unpopular sardar, and struck work and rioted when this was refused. They went on strike again later that year when the sardar was reinstated.<sup>1</sup> It is not clear why this dispute arose, but a remarkable letter from some of the workers in the same factory, written in 1906, sheds considerable light on the problems factory workers often faced at the hands of the sardars and clerks. They wrote,

We have to take leave from the Sahibs but if we do not give bribes to the clerks and sardars and pay them something monthly, and every year during Durga Puja, they comment adversely on our work, and make the Sahib punish us, and lose the job. As a result we are forced to fulfil all their demands.

In 1906 they had attempted to pay less than usual in the way of bribes because prices had risen, much to the sardars' chagrin:

... we have stopped giving the dues altogether. In order to take revenge on us they are now finding fault with us for no reason, and making the Sahib punish us, forcing us to give money to the Company. (2)

Besides revealing that disputes over fines could at heart stem from conflict with sardars, this also shows that workers who did not strike in response to rising living costs may have chosen to confront the sardars rather than their employers. Similarly, that workers who successfully held out against the sardars may thereby have reduced any financial need to strike.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about defensive objectives such as these since they had characterised trade unionism from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whether the increased level of activity was due to more adverse changes occurring, or to a greater propensity for employees to resist any such changes, is difficult to determine. A general reduction in jute factory working hours in 1911-12, for example, seems to have resulted in both strikes to reverse the change, and a move away from factories to alternative occupations.<sup>3</sup> There were however several other objectives which were more evidently aimed at achieving new working terms and conditions.

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- 1) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2; Sen, Working class of India, pp.83-4.
  - 2) [28 Baj Baj jute mill beaming department workers] to A.C. Banerji, 11 Pous 1313 (December 1906), A.C. Banerji Papers, Bengali Letters (translated by Dr. J. Gourlay).
  - 3) GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1912, A 37-44; A 45-9; June 1913, A 11-12.

The range of these 'offensive' demands was nearly as great as that of defensive objectives. Some employees, including expatriate police officers, copying clerks employed by the Government, printers, and tramway conductors and drivers, sought changes in the whole spectrum of their working conditions.<sup>1</sup> Other groups only raised one or two demands at a time, such as for free housing,<sup>2</sup> holidays,<sup>3</sup> shorter working hours,<sup>4</sup> pensions,<sup>5</sup> the abolition of racially discriminatory wage rates,<sup>6</sup> and in once case, for the recognition of their union.<sup>7</sup> The fact that many groups of employees made demands aimed at establishing future conditions appears an interesting development, although further research will be required before it can be stated with some certainty that such objectives had not been sought earlier, or any implications about employees' outlook drawn. Action over demands for holidays, shorter hours, and the abolition of racially discriminatory wage rates, as well as a handful of essentially 'political' strikes deserve closer examination.

In 1894 and 1895 workers in cotton and jute factories along the river Hugli began to demand holidays, or longer leave than had previously been granted, on certain religious occasions, and when such requests were rejected, strikes or even minor riots ensued.<sup>8</sup> At Titagarh jute mill, for example, the manager refused to grant more than the customary three hours leave at Id ul Fitr in 1895, and a strike and riot took place when he attempted to fine men who stayed away for longer (or to arrest some men standing at the factory gate, urging workers not to return after the sanctioned leave had expired).<sup>9</sup> Although an enquiry into these strikes and riots revealed that many factories had granted leave on religious occasions prior to 1894-5, and that riots and strikes

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- 1) GB Financial (Finance), March 1904, A 7 (copyists); Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Judicial (Police), October 1909, A 11-14 (expatriate police); Ghosh, Indian trade union movement, p.54 (printers). Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.202 (tramwaymen).
  - 2) GB Financial (Finance), August 1903, B 268 (abstract); May 1904, B 56 (abstract) - messengers
  - 3) GB Financial (Finance), January 1903, B 47-9 abstract (mercantile office clerks); Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906 (jute mill); Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.238 (docks).
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), January 1907, B 41-44, actual file (jute mill - see p.87).
  - 5) GB Financial (Finance), December 1912, B 177 abstract (record suppliers); November 1913, B 110-18 abstract (record suppliers and binders).
  - 6) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.216, 219, 226-7 (railwaymen).
  - 7) Ibid., pp.212-3 (printers).
  - 8) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24.
  - 9) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2; IJMA, Report ... 1895, pp.77-9 (slightly different accounts were given in the two sources).

only took place in a small number of factories,<sup>1</sup> it was also clear that this demand, and more particularly the militancy with which it was pursued, were new developments.

Recent studies of factory workers' agitation in the 1890s have suggested that the holiday demand arose partly because of changes in the composition of the workforce.<sup>2</sup> Much of the agitation was for holidays on Muslim rather than Hindu occasions, although often this was because the latter had already been granted. Data on the composition of the jute labour force indicates that the proportion of Muslims reached a peak in the 1890s, coinciding with a period of rapid growth in the size of the labour force, and Das Gupta has suggested that the demand for a holiday represented an attempt by new recruits to preserve some of their religious practices in a new environment.<sup>3</sup> While there is some force in this argument, it is noticeable that most of the late nineteenth century growth in the jute labour force took place after 1895,<sup>4</sup> that is, after the phase of strikes and riots. More immediate reasons for the holiday demands in 1894-5 seem to lie elsewhere.

Up to 1892 jute factory output was restricted by a short-time working agreement concluded between the companies. Full time working was resumed in 1892-3, and in 1894-5 working hours were extended by the introduction of electric lighting and a new shift system.<sup>5</sup> Until 1892, therefore, workers would have had ample time to observe religious festivals, but subsequently would have been faced with an unprecedented demand for their labour, and hostility to requests for time off. This itself would probably have been a sufficient cause for agitation over festival leave in the mid-1890s, had not tension also been heightened by Hindu opposition to cow-sacrifice, a practice followed by Muslims at Bakr Id. A phase of anti-cow-killing agitation began in the same districts of Bihar from which many factory workers originated in the 1880s, and seems to have spread to the Calcutta area around 1892-3. Overt conflict between groups of Hindu and Muslim workers over cows

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- 1) GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24.
  - 2) Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour", pp.148-54; Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.44-5, 60-66, 77-9.
  - 3) Das Gupta, ibid., pp.77-9; "Factory labour in Eastern India", pp.281-99, 327.
  - 4) Das Gupta, "Factory labour in Eastern India", p.327 (table).
  - 5) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1895, A 38-9; September 1898, A 21; Leng, Letters from India and Ceylon, pp.64-8.

the latter intended to sacrifice took place in 1895-6, and in this context Muslim workers would probably have been more militantly concerned about observing their ceremonies than might otherwise have been the case.<sup>1</sup>

Demands for the reduction of working hours (as distinct from opposition to increased hours), and for the abolition of racially discriminatory wage rates were made for the first time in 1905-8. In 1906 jute mill weavers working in the Hastings factory complained to the Bengal Government

That your petitioners get only an hours' leisure during working hours for dinner, and 5 hours' rest at night, which time as fixed by the mill-owner, is very insufficient for recreation, there being no other shifting, but one in the weaving department.

That your petitioners, by excessive and hard toil, suffer from constant illness, and thereby gradually decay in health; slowly drag themselves towards their graves.

That your petitioners further beg to state that long working hours is injurious to their health; this place being infected with an epidemic of cholera and malarious fever.

and asked that an eight hour working day should be enforced under the Factory Acts.<sup>2</sup> This demand does not seem to have been taken up elsewhere, and probably lost much of its force when jute mill hours were reduced. It may also have only reflected the problems and outlook of a small group of jute factory workers, particularly since the reduction of working hours itself led to disputes because of lost earnings. However, this document clearly shows that some workers were concerned with obtaining acceptable working conditions, not simply with securing an adequate material return. The demand for the abolition of pay differences between European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen on the one hand, and Indian railway employees on the other, raised by Indians in 1906 and 1907, also involved moral as much as material issues.<sup>3</sup> Since such racial grading had existed from the inception of the railway network it is not immediately clear why this issue had not been raised earlier. While its appearance probably reflects in part the influence of the nationalist movement on trade unionism,<sup>4</sup> it certainly implies that a new determination to establish

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- 1) Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour", pp.142-8 gives a good account of Hindu-Muslim tensions in the Calcutta region.
  - 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), January 1907, B 41-4 (actual file). An enquiry dismissed their claim - GB General (Miscellaneous) March 1907, B 53-5 (actual file). For the full text of the petition see Appendix I, pp.276-7.
  - 3) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.216-22, 226-7.
  - 4) See pp. 91-2, 98-9.

equitable working conditions had developed.

Several other indications that a mood of unusual militancy developed in 1905-8 also deserve notice. In October 1905 several strikes took place on the day of the rakhi bandhan ceremony, which on that occasion was used by nationalists to emphasise the brotherhood of all Indians.<sup>1</sup> At the Fort Gloster jute mill this strike was combined with opposition to the end of electric light working, and the consequent loss of a special allowance.<sup>2</sup> In December another strike took place at this factory when the management objected to men shouting the nationalist slogan "Bande Mataram". It seems that men took to shouting this slogan at the European assistants, and when the Manager had two men from one slogan-shouting group arrested, the whole factory came out on strike. According to a police account, the rest of the workforce struck because they felt

that they were "all brothers in the mill, all brothers in Bengal, that in arresting the two men arrested they had all been insulted". (3)

The Fort Gloster workers struck for the third time in this period in March 1906 in continuation of their dispute over working hours.<sup>4</sup>

The formulation of offensive demands, and evidence of a new-found militancy on the part of some factory workers was paralleled by two other trends in 1905-8: the increasing willingness of some groups of clerks to strike, and unionization. Since the reasons for these developments appear to be linked together, they can best be examined in the course of discussing unionization.

### Unionization

In view of the emphasis usually placed on unions as formally identifiable bodies, it should be noted that the absence of unions did not mean that employees were entirely unorganized. The drafting and submission of petitions, as has already been noted, must have involved not inconsiderable organizational skills.<sup>5</sup> Strikes too must have involved

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- 1) Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.203-4, 287; The rakhi bandhan (rakhi tying) ceremony involves tying coloured threads around the wrists of others. These strikes have not been counted in Table 4.3 since they had little to do with industrial relations.
  - 2) GB General (Miscellaneous), September 1906, A 24; Sarkar, ibid., p.228.
  - 3) Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906; Sarkar, ibid., pp.228-9.
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1907, A 44-52. The strike collapsed after the arrest and dismissal of several leaders.
  - 5) See p. 57.

organization to maintain solidarity, and to ensure that colleagues were able to continue to support a strike for as long as necessary. The report in 1900 that spinners at the Kamarhati jute factory collected money to support strikers at the Kankinara factory (some 10-15 miles away) testifies to the existence of some form of inter-factory organization, although we are ignorant of the form it took, or its significance for the subsequent formation (or absence) of formally named trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence for the transformation of the Mahomedan Association of 1895 into a jute factory workers' union by 1907-8 at the latest has already been discussed.<sup>2</sup> This report is particularly interesting insofar as it indicates that unions could have been formed from other types of workers' organizations, but it is also unique in this respect. Further research will perhaps provide evidence that similar organizations provided the institutional support for strikes and petitioning. Other unions, however, appear largely to have been formed as unions, and in the course of agitation over pay and other conditions, conducted by other forms of agitation.

The Indian Civil Service Association was formed the year after a prolonged petitioning campaign had culminated with a deputation to the Viceroy over exchange allowances. Although no direct link can be established between the deputation and the formation of the ICSA it is reasonable to infer that the union was formed partly because of the demonstrable inadequacies of petitioning.<sup>3</sup> A remark by a member of the Indian Police Association, an expatriate police officers' union, founded in 1911, that the IPA had been established "because officers were tired of endeavouring to get a living wage by petitions and they wanted organized agitation" supports this contention.<sup>4</sup> The detailed evidence concerning the formation of several other unions in this period shows they were formed through a similar process.

In 1906 a telegraphist named Henry Barton went on leave, and began to publicise telegraphists' grievances in a journal, the Telegraph Recorder. Later that year he became the Secretary of a Telegraph

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1) GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1901, A 20.

2) See p.76.

3) See pp.26-7.

4) Office note by H. Williamson, 16/3/1921, in IO File J&P 6306/20 (IOL&R: L/SG/7/453).

Memorial Committee, which organized the submission of several petitions to the authorities from telegraphists throughout India in 1906-7.<sup>1</sup> The Telegraph Memorial Committee had probably been formed in response to a Government committee of enquiry into telegraph department conditions, the work of which was completed by April 1907.<sup>2</sup> When it appeared that nothing was being done to implement the committee's report, or even to publish it, Barton organized a series of meetings through the Telegraph Memorial Committee, in November 1907.<sup>3</sup> This reference indicates that the Telegraph Memorial Committee as such still existed in November 1907, but a reference to the Indian Telegraph Association the following month suggests that the Committee became the Association in December 1907. The link between these two organizations was also made through Barton, who became the ITA's general secretary either at its foundation, or at the latest in February 1908, when he resigned from the telegraph service.<sup>4</sup> This shows how an ad hoc committee formed simply to coordinate petitioning could, in the face of what was felt to be the authorities' indifference, and under the pressure of rising prices, develop into a permanently constituted organization concerned with safeguarding members' interests in general.<sup>5</sup>

At least two other unions - the Press Workers' Union and the Railwaymen's Union - appear to have been formed through similar processes. Government printers, who formed the PWU in 1905, began agitating for improved service conditions, and over the attitudes of some supervisors, in 1904. Early in 1905 a general petition was presented to the authorities, but the printers' resentment was fuelled during the course of the year by the lack of response to this petition, and then by a reduction in the puja holiday allowance.<sup>6</sup> In September they met to coordinate further activities, the first of which seems to have been the submission of another

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- 1) GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), May 1908, A 4; petitions - GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), January 1907, A 18-19, A 27-8; March 1907, A 35; June 1907, A 15; July 1907, A 1-2. The term "Memorial" refers to 'petition'.
  - 2) Report of the Telegraph Committee, 1906-07, (Calcutta, 1907).
  - 3) GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), December 1907, A 1-15; March 1908, A 6-7.
  - 4) GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), May 1908, A 4; Confidential, GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), September 1918, No.6.
  - 5) The ITA continued to exist until 1946 when it amalgamated with other post Office unions to form the Federation of Posts and Telegraph Unions - Singh, Indian P & T Employees, p.69.
  - 6) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.206-7.

petition. On 27 September, at the same time or shortly after the second petition had been presented, printers and compositors in the Government of India presses in Calcutta, and then the Bengal Government presses, went on strike over hours, pay, arbitrary demotions, supervisors' behaviour, and overwork. This strike ended within a few days when another petition was presented, and the men then took their annual holiday.<sup>1</sup> However, a week or so later seven strike leaders were dismissed, and the petitions were rejected as having been improperly submitted. As a result, on 21 October, the printers met and decided to form a union, and two days later launched their second strike, which eventually resulted in the concession of an enquiry into their grievances.<sup>2</sup>

The first report of agitation among Indian railwaymen on the East Indian Railway, who formed the Railwaymen's Union in 1906, dates from June that year, when one or two small strikes took place.<sup>3</sup> By July a 17 member delegation of railwaymen had been formed, which began negotiating with the authorities towards the end of the month. However, within a few days a leading member of the delegation was dismissed for having raised the issue of the abolition of racially discriminatory wage rates. This precipitated a lengthy strike on the East Indian line during the first week of which the Railwaymen's Union was established. Although this union was very active during the strike, it ceased to function after the collapse of the strike, in September 1906, suggesting that in effect, the RU was little more than a strike committee.<sup>4</sup>

Reports about the formation of the PWU and the RU show that dissatisfaction with existing forms of trade unionism was not the only factor in their formation. The first printers' meeting in September 1905 was not only attended by press employees, but also by three barristers - A.K. Ghosh, A.C. Banerji, and B.M. Chatterji - who had been invited by

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- 1) Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, p.25; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.207-8; Sen, Working class of India, pp.92-3.
  - 2) GoI Home (Public), October 1905, B 275-83 (actual file); Sarkar, ibid., pp.208-11; Sen, ibid., p.93. This union appears initially to have been called the Printers' and Compositors' League - Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.20, 218.
  - 3) Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, p.27. In June 1906 the Printers' Union sent a message to Indian strikers on the East Indian Railway loop line - Sarkar, ibid., p.213 - thus confirming that a strike took place in June. European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen struck in October 1905, but had no connections with the Indian workers' agitation. - Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906.
  - 4) Sarkar, ibid., pp.215-22; Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 73 (actual file).



some of the men. The printers' committee formed at this meeting was set up to liase with Banerji, who it was proposed would advise the printers on the conduct of their agitation. Ghosh seems to have taken the initiative to form the PWU, and he became the first secretary, and later (in 1906) president of this union. Two other barristers, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Shyamsundar Chakrabarti, were also associated with the formation of the PWU, while in 1906, the posts of secretary and treasurer were both held by non-employees, or "outsiders" as such people were often termed.<sup>1</sup>

Ghosh, Banerji and the PWU secretary, Premtosh Bose were also involved in the formation of the RU, together with some of the railwaymen who had participated in the July 1906 deputation. Ghosh became the RU president, and Premtosh Bose the secretary; both men were very active in setting up new branches throughout Bengal and eastern Bihar, and in organizing the July-September 1906 strike. Banerji and a number of other outsiders were also associated with the RU and this strike, and it was a dispute between groups of outsiders over strike tactics, leading to the ousting of the original union leaders, which contributed to the collapse of the strike and the RU in September 1906.<sup>2</sup>

Banerji was also closely associated with the Indian Mill Hands' Union, of which he was the founder president.<sup>3</sup> Another barrister, P.K. Ray Chaudhuri, was the IMHU secretary, while local activists included a school master, and an unemployed associate of Banerji's, Surjya Kumar Ghosal.<sup>4</sup> Banerji's correspondence with factory workers also provides unique information about the participation of actual factory workers in the running of their union. In December 1906, not long after the union had been inaugurated,<sup>5</sup> workers in the beaming department of Baj Baj jute factory wrote to Banerji saying, "By forming our union you have done real good for us and we are grateful for that." They described their conflict with sardars and clerks over the payment of bribes, and asked Banerji to come to a meeting in January and advise

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1) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.209-11; Sen, Working class of India, p.93.

2) Sarkar, ibid., pp.217-22; Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file).

3) Sarkar, ibid., p.233. The IMHU is sometimes called the Indian Labour Union - Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, vol.II, p.278.

4) Sarkar, ibid., p.233; Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file).

5) In August 1906 - Sarkar, ibid., p.233.

them what further steps they could take - "Please save us by telling us what to do so that they get a proper lesson".<sup>1</sup> Another letter from a man working in the engine room of the National jute mill, written in February 1908, informed Banerji that a meeting to discuss the union had been organized, and advised him to exercise caution in dealing with the head clerk, who could otherwise sabotage all their efforts.<sup>2</sup> Banerji thus seems largely to have been seen as someone to whom workers could turn to for advice once the idea of forming a union began to develop.

The outsiders associated with the PWU, the RU and the IMHU were also active in the 1905-8 nationalist agitation against the partition of Bengal, the Swadeshi movement.<sup>3</sup> This led to allegations that these unions were simply the creation of subversive "briefless barristers". Alternatively, nationalists have been credited with having initiated most trade unionism during the 1905-8 period, if not more generally in Bengal.<sup>4</sup> Such interpretations receive some support from the collapse of the RU following the removal of the original leaders in September 1906, and the demise of the IMHU some time in 1908, coinciding with A.C. Banerji's retreat from controversial political issues.<sup>5</sup> However, nationalists were not the only outsiders associated with trade unions. Henry Barton of the ITA was technically an outsider since he resigned from the telegraph service early in 1908, but his situation was unique in this period. The Calcutta Seamen's Club had been promoted by an English seamen's union leader, and a seamen's missionary; the Indian Seamen's Anjuman of 1908 had the political loyalist Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Choudhury, C.I.E., Khan Bahadur, as a "patron"; and the Carters' Union was founded by Y.C. Ariff, the brother of a leading Calcutta merchant.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that the role of outsiders was more complex than suggestions that unions and workers were 'manipulated' or 'led' by

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- 1) [28 Baj Baj jute mill beaming department workers] to A.C. Banerji, 11 Pous 1313 [December 1906], A.C. Banerji Papers, Bengali letters.
  - 2) Krishnapada Haldar to A.C. Banerji, 24 Magh 1314 [February 1908], A.C. Banerji Papers, Bengali letters (translated by Dr. J. Gourlay).
  - 3) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, Chapter V, passim.
  - 4) Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, pp.24-5; GOI Home (Public) October 1906, B 13 (actual file). For the 'nationalist' view, see Sen, Working class of India, pp.91-2, 97, 116; Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.19-20.
  - 5) Sarkar, ibid., pp.221-2, 241; see also p.197.
  - 6) Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, p.1; McPherson, Muslim microcosm, p.37; see also p.79.

nationalists imply.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of outsiders has been explained largely as being a consequence of employees' illiteracy, migratory tendencies, and poverty, which allegedly rendered them dependent on outsiders for finance and organizational skills. An additional, though subsidiary factor, was employees' fear of victimization for openly engaging in trade unionism.<sup>2</sup> The fact that employees, particularly the factory and non-factory groups to which these characteristics largely refer, had organized petitions, strikes, and unions, before outsiders began to concern themselves with trade unionism should be sufficient to cast doubt on some if not all of these explanations. All the groups of employees among which outsiders were active in 1905-8 - printers, railwaymen, jute factory employees, and telegraphists - appear to have been quite capable of a degree of independent organizational initiative. Printers organizing their September 1905 meeting invited the barristers to attend, and subsequently ignored the latter's advice to petition the authorities again, and collect funds, rather than to strike.<sup>3</sup> In 1906, the East Indian railwaymen began agitating for better conditions before outsiders were involved, according to an intelligence report.<sup>4</sup> Outsiders were active in the organization of this strike, but it was the militancy of a section of railwaymen which precipitated the coup by another group of outsiders leading to the collapse of the RU.<sup>5</sup> The Baj Baj workers' letter quoted earlier shows that they were well able to formulate quite ambitious goals for themselves, get access to people other than the organizing outsiders to write them down if necessary, and largely looked to Banerji for advice rather than direction. Barton was effectively a full-time organizer of the telegraphists' agitation, since he was on leave from early in 1906, but the actual organization of the vast quantity

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- 1) E.A. Ramaswamy, "The role of the trade union leader in India", in Human Organisation, 33 (2), 1974, pp.163-72, and A.K. Sengupta, "Trade unions, politics and the state: a case from West Bengal", in S. Saberwal (ed.), Process and institution in urban India. Sociological Studies, (New Delhi, 1979), pp.45-67 criticise such views from a contemporary perspective. For further historical discussion, see Chapter 7.
  - 2) Buchanan, Development of capitalistic enterprise, pp.432-5; Mathur & Mathur, Trade union movement in India, pp.229-30; Sen, Working class of India, p.116; Royal Commission on Labour in India, Report, (London, 1931: Cmd.3883), pp.321-4.
  - 3) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.207-8.
  - 4) "Bengal, Abstract of report regarding the Anti-Partition Agitation during the first half of August", H.A. Stuart, 13/9/1906, in Confidential, GOI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file).
  - 5) Ibid. Sarkar, ibid., pp.219-22.

of telegraphists' petitions must have required something more than just leadership.

There is however something in the argument that outsiders' involvement may have been related to the problem of victimization which active employees frequently faced. In October 1905, just before the formation of the PWU, printers who had led the September strike were dismissed; in July 1906 a leading member of the railwaymen's delegation was sacked for raising a controversial issue; and in 1908 Barton was about to be transferred to a relatively remote post.<sup>1</sup> Factory employees in jute and cotton mills, clerks in Government service, and in an engineering factory, tramwaymen, European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen, and dock jetty labourers also saw strike leaders dismissed, or themselves faced dismissal or arrest after strikes.<sup>2</sup> Factory workers also feared retribution from sardars or clerks in the factory, as has already been indicated. In 1908, for example, an employee at the National jute mill wrote to A.C. Banerji warning

The things I have told you in private about our Bara Babu, please do not raise them in the forthcoming meeting. If you do it will seriously hard me ... At present get the job done [organizing the union] by pleasing the Bara Babu with words ... (3)

In this context the collapse of the RU and IMFU imply not that these unions were artificial creations of outsiders, but that employees were unable openly to continue to develop their unions when the outsiders' support was withdrawn for whatever reason. The anonymity given to individual employees by the participation of outsiders in unions, as officers, was a condition of the existence of these organizations. Unions like the PWU and the ITA did continue to exist, but the former was quiescent after 1908, and became a provident society in 1914.<sup>4</sup> The ITA became a limited company in 1910,<sup>5</sup> which presumably gave the

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- 1) GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), May 1908, A 4.
  - 2) GoI Home (Public), November 1907, B 254-68 Appendix (actual file); Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906; GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1901, A 20; August 1907, A 35-52; July 1908, A 53-7; GB Judicial (Police), January 1900, A 48-51; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.203-4, 238.
  - 3) Krishnapada Haldar to A.C. Banerji, 24 Magh 1314 [February 1908].
  - 4) Sarkar, ibid., p.214; M.K. Bose, Smriti katha, (Calcutta, 1949, 1956), p.179.
  - 5) ITA, Memorandum of Association, dated 24 September 1910, IO File PW 1496/18 (IOL&R: L/PWD/6/1022).

organization some degree of legal status and thus protection. In addition, as the police discovered in 1916, when they raided the ITA's offices,

every member on joining the Association has to make a 'Declaration of Allegiance' which practically amounts to an oath to place the interests of the Association before all other considerations. (1)

Such secret society methods may have played a part in ensuring the survival of other unions conspicuous by their lack of activity. The telegraphists' privileged labour market status doubtless contributed to the authorities' tolerance of the ITA, and similarly the ICSA and the IPA.<sup>2</sup>

### Context and consciousness

Discussion so far has focussed narrowly on seeking to identify the immediate causes of activity. This indicates that one reason for the increasing propensity of employees to engage in trade unionism from the mid-1890s was simply that there were more problems, at least in the form of relatively sudden price rises. It is equally evident that engagement in trade unionism was in no sense an automatic process, but was one in which employees continually made decisions about what constituted a problem for them, and how (if at all) they were going to tackle it. The Baj Baj jute mill workers, for example, apparently chose to confront the factory sardars and clerks in order to protect living standards rather than to seek higher wages from their employer. Similar decisions must also have been made about whether to petition, strike, or form a union, and even when the latter step had been taken, to continue to support the new organization. The transformation of the PWU into a provident society suggests that some unions disappeared not because of suppression, but simply because their members could no longer see any need for them.

The variety of particular reasons why employees engaged in particular forms of trade unionism do not themselves provide any understanding of why there was a distinct change in the tempo of

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- 1) Confidential, GoI Commerce & Industry (Posts & Telegraphs), September 1918, No.6.
  - 2) 75% of telegraphists were Anglo-Indians, "to ensure that the telegraph at all important centres should be under the control of a staff whose loyalty is beyond question." - Confidential, GoI Commerce & Industry, May 1918, A 1. The ICSA and IPA were technically illegal until 1921 - see pp.243-4.

activity in the early twentieth century - why employees in general increasingly made decisions to engage in collective activity vis-a-vis their employers. In order to examine this issue, and thus deepen our understanding of the nature of changes in this period, it is necessary to set events in the context of changes in the labour market, and in relation to other social movements, particularly nationalism.

It was suggested earlier that much of the need for employees to engage in trade unionism, particularly those in the factory and non-factory sectors, was mitigated by their access to alternative income sources, sited in agriculture. Blyn's study of agricultural production trends in India from 1891 shows that in the region comprising Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, all-crop output tended to decline from the early 1890s to the middle of the next decade, and then consistently from about 1911 onwards. All-crop acreage tended to remain static throughout the whole period. As against these trends, population grew continuously, though at varying rates, and Blyn suggests that an unfavourable disparity between Population growth and foodgrain output probably developed in this part of eastern India at least from the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Islam, while criticising Blyn's detailed results, has confirmed his general conclusions regarding agricultural trends. His suggestion that Blyn's inclusion of Bihar and Orissa together with Bengal depressed the analysis of trends in Bengal proper is interesting for it implies that conditions in Bihar and Orissa, from where many factory and non-factory workers in Bengal proper came, were considerably worse than Blyn estimated.<sup>2</sup>

These trends imply firstly that while the labour force continued to expand, the proportion of labour needed for agricultural production declined. However, it appears that the number of male general and agricultural labourers per all crop acre actually increased, from 0.385 in 1901 to 0.391 in 1911, and 0.415 in 1921.<sup>3</sup> Given the general tendency for agricultural output to fall, the real income from agriculture of agricultural labourers, or cultivators and rentiers (or both groups) must also have declined, making it more necessary for them to supplement

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- 1) G. Blyn, Agricultural trends in India, 1891-1947: output, availability, and productivity, (Philadelphia, 1966), pp.94-6, 98-100, 131-2.
  - 2) M.M. Islam, Bengal Agriculture 1920-1946. A quantitative study, (Cambridge, 1978), pp.37-8, 50, 54, 61, 65, 81-2, 201.
  - 3) Blyn, Agricultural trends, p.206.

this income with a wage, and more dependent on that wage if they already participated in the labour market. At the same time, the number of people seeking non-agricultural labour market occupations also increased, and almost certainly at a faster rate than demand.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to the nineteenth century agriculture must have been of declining significance as an adjunct to labour market occupations. As a result, the range of alternatives other than trade unionism which employees faced with labour market problems had, narrowed considerably. Even assuming that workers' needs and expectations remained unchanged, a general increase in the level of trade unionism was thus almost inevitable at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it should also be noted that, insofar as supply to the non-agricultural labour market increased, so competition for jobs may also have made collective action more difficult to achieve.

Turning to the social context, it has already been indicated that both the 1894-6 and 1905-8 phases of trade unionism coincided with agitation over other issues in which employees took part. While these parallels are well established, the fact that there was also mass agitation in Bengal from 1912-16, coinciding with the putative third strike phase, has not been noted before. Briefly, this phase of political agitation only involved Muslims, and began over concern for developments in Turkey. In 1912-13 this took the form of meetings to collect funds for the Turks (under attack first from Greece and then from Italy) and to criticise the British Government for their attitude. Subsequently, in 1913-16, the focus of attention changed to the question of mosque demolition both in India in general, and in Calcutta. In the latter case this centred on opposition to the demolition of several small mosques in the Kidderpur area where the Government wanted to extend the docks.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalist involvement with trade unionism during the Swadeshi period began in September 1905, simultaneously with the inception of the mass phase of nationalist agitation against the partition of Bengal. Clerks at the Burns' engineering factory struck in protest at

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- 1) Blyn, Agricultural trends in India, pp.209-10; Islam, Bengal agriculture, pp.149-51. While undoubtedly true, this is difficult to demonstrate because of the inadequacies of workforce statistics.
  - 2) See particularly Confidential, GB Political (Political), Files 290, 1912; 66, 1913; 279, 1913; 155, 1914; 86, 1915.

the introduction of a time-keeping device, and other petty changes in working conditions, and found their action hailed as part of the Swadeshi movement at a nationalist meeting. Pledges were made at the meeting, and later carried out for at least a month, to support the strikers, and barristers like A.C. Banerji and A.K. Ghosh defended workers arrested during the strike.<sup>1</sup> Banerji and Ghosh also defended men arrested during the tram drivers' strike in October 1905, and were later emulated by others, such as P.K. Ray Chaudhuri.<sup>2</sup> Nationalists also assisted with the organization of several strikes in 1906, but the only large one in which they were involved was the East Indian Railway strike of July-September 1906.<sup>3</sup> Banerji also attempted, sometimes successfully, to mediate in strikes in factories and at a petrol depot in the Calcutta area.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to this evidence it must be noted that most of the other strikes appear to have taken place without any nationalist involvement, while the strikes of European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen in October 1905 and November 1907, and the largely Anglo-Indian telegraphists in April 1908, involved employees who were generally hostile to the nationalist movement. The East Indian Railway guards who struck in October 1905 specifically disclaimed any connection between their actions, and the nationalist movement.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1890s Muslim leaders in Calcutta had lent some support to the factory workers' agitation over holiday demands, and for cow-

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- 1) Confidential, GB Political, File 43 (D), 1905; File 114, 1906; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.189, 200-202.
  - 2) P.K. Ray Chaudhuri to A.C. Banerji, 25 March 1906, in A.C. Banerji Papers, File 115, Serial 300 (seeking advice in connection with a strike in a jute factory); Sarkar, ibid., pp.199-203.
  - 3) Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file); Confidential, GoI Home (Political), February 1907, A 138; A.C. Banerji Papers, File 7, Serials 24, 26, 27; Sarkar, ibid., pp.198-9, 214-22. Nationalists were also involved in the March 1908 Kidderpur dock strike - Confidential, GoI Home (Political), April 1911, Deposit No.7; A.C. Banerji Papers, File 150 ('Biographical note about A.C. Banerji'); Sarkar, ibid., pp.238-9.
  - 4) A.C. Banerji Papers, File 94, Serial 258 (from Benode Behary Mookerji); File 130, Serial 334 (from James Sime, Belvedere jute mill); File 145, Serial 378 (anon, re the Belvedere jute mill); Sarkar, ibid., pp. 234-5, 239-40.
  - 5) Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906. Also - GoI Home (Public), November 1907, B 254-68 (actual file); Report of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for the year 1907, Vol. I, (Calcutta, 1908), p.80; ibid., Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1909), pp.411-7; Sarkar, ibid., pp.224-5, 240.



sacrifice rights,<sup>1</sup> but it does not seem that the organizers of support for Turkey, and against mosque demolition, assisted factory or other workers' strikes in 1912-16. Indeed, although the police were looking for such connections, they could only discover that an itinerant Muslim ascetic was collecting funds for Turkey from factory workers' meetings in the Hugli and 24 Parganas districts, which he passed on to the Calcutta leaders.<sup>2</sup> However, the absence of a direct link between factory workers and the leaders of the Muslim agitation in 1912-16 does not necessarily mean that the latter movement had no influence on trade unionism.

Mass political activities can be seen to have influenced trade unionism 'indirectly' by creating a social atmosphere conducive to collective agitation. This is difficult to demonstrate empirically since little is known about employees' consciousness, and how the Swadeshi and Turkish support movements might have influenced it. Insofar as the Swadeshi movement involved intense public debate over the whole question of suitable collective action to confront unpopular decisions on the part of the authorities, and involved mass meetings, it must surely have provided some stimulus to trade unionism. As a newspaper editorial commented in July 1906, referring to both the nationalist and trade union movements, "Organization has become the watchword of the hour".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a report on the Namasudra social uplift movement, written in 1909, noted that although this movement had existed for some eight years or more, it only spread rapidly when the Swadeshi tactic of boycott provided an example of how to proceed.<sup>4</sup> Since the Namasudras do not appear to have participated in the Swadeshi movement, and may even have opposed it, this indicates how nationalist activity could even 'inspire' non-participating groups to take to collective action on their own behalf. By extension, the European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen could also have been moved to extend their collective activities from petitions to striking as a consequence of the general social atmosphere created primarily by the Swadeshi movement. The

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- 1) Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour", pp.154-68.
  - 2) Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 66 (1-3), and KWs, 1913.
  - 3) Bengalee, 31/7/1906, quoted in Saha, History of the working class movement, p.22. For the Swadeshi debates, see Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, passim.
  - 4) Confidential, Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, Political Department, File 404, 1909. The Namasudras were mainly in conflict with the 'middle class' upper caste Hindus who dominated the leadership of the Swadeshi movement. See also: Freedom Movement Papers, File 66, "An account of the Swadeshi movement (1903-7)".

1912-16 Muslim agitation, by involving workers in meetings and demonstrations, could have had a similar influence on the factory workers, thus contributing to the apparent increase in activity.

Assuming that the collapse of political agitation did remove a significant stimulus to trade unionism, a possible explanation for the fall in strike activity in 1907-8, and 1915-16, before the cost of living index showed any decline, emerges. The Swadeshi movement's impetus declined from the middle of 1907, and throughout 1908, due to a combination of internal dissention, and repression - restrictions were imposed on newspapers and public meetings, and leading activists were arrested and even deported.<sup>1</sup> The removal of any stimulus to militancy, together with the physical restrictions on mass public activity, could thus have combined to bring about a fall in the level of trade unionism, despite the continuing rise in prices. Such a decline could of course also have taken the form of abandonment of unions and strikes, and a return to less controversial methods, like petitioning. The 1912-16 Muslim agitation also took on a reduced form after the declaration of the First World War, becoming a more localised movement. Political and other leaders, including trade unionists like Barton of the ITA were also interned during the War, thus again depressing any tendency towards overt agitation of any kind.<sup>2</sup>

This raises the problematic issue of developments in employees' consciousness. In order to question interpretations of trade unionism emerging as a unilinear process, implicit in many studies,<sup>3</sup> attention has been drawn to the range of options open to employees regarding their labour market or workplace problems. Trade unionism did not develop simply as an automatic response to situations, but involved choices over the categorization of situations, and appropriate forms of action. To this extent, the developments described in the chapter certainly imply that some changes in employees' consciousness must have occurred since many more workers engaged in trade unionism. However, it is difficult to amplify this conclusion since little evidence illustrating employees' conceptualizations of their behaviour has come to light. All that perhaps be indicated with some confidence is that these developments

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- 1) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp. 243, 263-5, 281-2.
  - 2) Confidential, GoI Commerce & Industry (Posts & Telegraphs), September 1918, Nos. 6-8; IO File PW 1406/18, in IOL&R: L/PWD/6/1022, which gives details about Barton's internment in 1916.
  - 3) See Chapter 1 for a brief review.

do not necessarily indicate the emergence of 'working class consciousness' - in the sense of a view by workers of themselves as a distinct social group with interests opposed to those of employers - as has recently been suggested.<sup>1</sup>

Petitions and strikes were well established, almost traditional forms of trade unionism, by the end of the nineteenth century, and their existence cannot therefore imply any development of consciousness. Moreover, many of the employees' objectives seem to have concerned the preservation (or restoration) of the status quo not only of working conditions and practices, but also of living standards - insofar as demands for increased pay only followed higher living costs. Such behaviour is not inconsistent with that of employees during the earlier nineteenth century, and thus again does not necessarily imply any new development. The main change in this respect was in the number of groups of employees which engaged in action of this type, and who considered strikes and petitions appropriate forms of action. In addition, the identification of objectives such as the demand for secure employment prospects, reasonable working hours, or modification of the sardari system, could imply that employees were developing notions of possessing relatively permanent interests in the labour market. The same could also be implied by the formation of trade unions - although we have no way of knowing whether their members conceived of them as permanently constituted organizations, their continuation could itself have contributed to the formation of ideas of a permanency of interests. In addition, it is clear that most employees held employers responsible for compensating for adverse changes even when these were not the direct outcome of employers' actions; thus they sought compensation for increases in the cost of living by asking for higher wages.

It could be thought that if employees had notions of permanent labour market interests, and of the responsibility of employers to meet price rises with wage increases, this involved conceiving employers as protagonists, but this is not the case. According to the ITA's rules, for example, the union aimed to promote good relations between employer and employees, officers and staff, and to resolve all disputes without resorting to strikes, and by legal means.<sup>2</sup> Such aims were clearly

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1) Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.36-8, 148-50.  
2) ITA, Memorandum of Association, dated 24 September 1910.

premised on the notion of there being two sides to any dispute, but also of there being a community of interest which enabled problems to be resolved without resort to militancy on the part of the employees. The ITA might be considered exceptional since its members occupied a relatively privileged position, but it is likely that such ideas were commonplace at the time. As will be shown later, employees actions in 1918-22 were often motivated by the view that employers had certain duties towards employees, the neglect of which justified collective action on the part of the latter, and it would be surprising if such ideas were not widespread in this period.<sup>1</sup>

Employees' conceptions of the community of interests among themselves also seems to have been very limited. Petitions, strikes and trade unions on the whole only involved narrowly distinguished groups of employees. Several strikes took place in a department within a factory, and did not extend to the whole shop-floor, but involved spinners, weavers, or clerks, for example.<sup>2</sup> Other strikes did involve all shop-floor workers, but not all groups of workers within a factory or a similar work unit, such as a Government department, or the railway lines. The telegraph signallers, for example, petitioned and formed the ITA and even went on strike for a short period, but did not support the telegraph peons' strike in February 1908. On the railways, engine drivers and guards on the one hand, and clerical and workshop staff on the other agitated separately over pay and conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Isolated examples of more extensive cooperation between employees can be found. In 1893, just before the formation of the ICOSA, members of all the supervisory civil service grades combined in the deputation to the Viceroy, but only the ICS and later the Indian Police formed unions. The PWU was formed by employees in the two Government printing presses in Calcutta, and soon spread to include printers

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1) See Chapter 6.

2) Confidential, GB Political, File 43 (D), 1905; GB General (Emigration), December 1895, A 24; GB General (Miscellaneous), July 1896, A 21-2; July 1901, A 20; GB Judicial (Police), December 1899, A 22-29 provide some examples of departmental strikes.

3) Signallers - Report of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for the year 1908, Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1909), pp.411-17; peons - GoI Commerce & Industry (Telegraph Establishments), March 1908, A 23-5. Railways - Confidential, GoI Home (Public), October 1906, B 13 (actual file); Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906; GoI Home (Public), November 1907, B 154-68 (actual file); Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.216-22; 223-7.

from private presses in the city. In addition, during a strike at the Thacker-Spink press in June 1906, printers from all over Calcutta held solidarity demonstrations.<sup>1</sup> The IMHU had members in several jute factories, and in 1907-8 began spreading to other factories outside the jute industry in the Baj Baj, Bauria and Sankrail areas to the south of Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> The report that employees at the Kamarhati jute factory collected funds to support a strike at the Kankinara factory in 1900 has already been referred to.<sup>3</sup>

When some of these examples are examined more closely it is evident that unity was probably achieved on the basis of shared social or other characteristics other than or in addition to that of being employees. The supervisory civil service grades' unity in 1893 was based on their concern as expatriates with the decline in value of their salaries in England.<sup>4</sup> Railwaymen's unity in different strikes and petitions was also largely achieved between racially similar groups (Europeans and Anglo-Indians, or Indians) rather than as employees. While it would have been surprising to find that the former supported Indian demands for the abolition of racially discriminatory wage rates, other issues did not involve a similar conflict of interests.<sup>5</sup> The PWU may have in fact confined its membership to literate employees, as its first name, the Printers' and Compositors' League, implies.<sup>6</sup>

Factory employees unity was certainly hindered, but occasionally also facilitated, by regional or religious differences. Muslim factory workers' agitation over cow-sacrifice rights in the 1890s led them to clash with Hindu workers on three occasions, although it does not seem to have impaired cooperation over other issues, such as hours or wages.<sup>7</sup> In November 1905, Muslim weavers at the Wellington jute mill struck over the shortness of leave granted to them at Ramadan, but they did not

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- 1) A reference to "the 'Statesman' Press Union" occurs in a letter from Peary Mohun Chatterji to A.C. Banerji, 11 July 1906, in A.C. Banerji Papers, File 27, Serial 82. See also Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.211-3; Sen, Working class of India, pp.94-5.
  - 2) All references to the IMHU indicate that it was limited to this area.
  - 3) See p.89.
  - 4) See pp.25-7.
  - 5) A degree of unity as employees was achieved among different racial groups of railwaymen in 1919-20, but collapsed over the issue of discriminatory wage rates - see pp. 152-9, 204-8.
  - 6) Saha, History of the working class movement, p.218.
  - 7) Chakrabarty, "Communal riots and labour", pp.143-7; Das Gupta, Material conditions and behavioural aspects, pp.31-8.

apparently obtain any support from other workers in the factory.<sup>1</sup> Religious vows were used to enforce solidarity in strikes by printers in 1905, and railwaymen in 1906 and 1907, suggesting that religious community was sometimes at least as strong a unifying factor as socio-economic grouping.<sup>2</sup> Regional divisions between workers were apparent on several occasions in 1905-8. In November 1905 the predominantly Bengali workers at the Fort Gloster jute mill struck saying that they "all brothers in the mill, all brothers in Bengal",<sup>3</sup> but in March the following year Bengalis and up-country workers fought during another strike at the same factory.<sup>4</sup> Bengali workers' objections to the recruitment of up-country men also contributed to riots at the Belvedere and National jute mills in January 1908.<sup>5</sup> Such conflict created problems for the IMHU as a letter from a National jute mill employee, written in February 1908, shows:

The way Bara Babu was criticised at the last meeting could damage our samiti /society/. Most of the people, namely the up-country people, are under Bara Babu's control. If he comes to know that our samiti criticised him, he may ask his people not to join our samiti. (6)

While sardars and clerks often hindered trade unionism, there is also evidence that unity was achieved under their leadership, presumably through threats and coercion similar to that about which employees sometimes complained.<sup>7</sup> The carriage and cart drivers' strike and petition (1901-2) over police harassment and municipal regulations received the active support of cart and carriage owners,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that the strike could in part have been organized by the latter as a means of protesting against changes which also hurt their interests. The strike at the Fort Gloster jute mill in March 1906 ended with the dismissal of seven clerks and four sardars, implying that they had been the effective leaders,<sup>9</sup> while the jute drummers' strike at Serajganj

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- 1) Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906.
  - 2) Administration of Bengal ... 1903-1908, p.25; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, pp.223, 226.
  - 3) Confidential, GB Political, File 114, 1906. (See also p.88).
  - 4) GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1907, A 35-52.
  - 5) Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, Vol.II, p.234; James Sime to A.C. Banerji, 8/1/1908, A.C. Banerji Papers, File 130, Serial 334; Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.235.
  - 6) Krishnapada Haldar to A.C. Banerji, 24 Magh 1314 [February 1908].
  - 7) See pp.83-4.
  - 8) GB Judicial (Police), December 1901, A 14-29, Appendix B; Report ... of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce ... 1902, Vol.II, pp.376-80.
  - 9) Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.229; GB General (Miscellaneous), August 1907, A 35-52.

in 1907 also seems to have been organized by the sardars.<sup>1</sup> A comment about the behaviour of Indian seamen indicates that this form of trade unionism could have been very widespread:

Very rarely has a single lascar [Indian seaman] come to the Consulate to complain. It is only when the serang himself is aggrieved that he declares a general strike on deck or in the stoke-hold, and brings his gang on shore. He acts as their representative, and assumes responsibility; or he may plead that they have mutinied in spite of him ... (2)

The names which employees gave to their organizations is also indicative of their consciousness. From the list of unions formed in this period (Table 4.3) it can be seen that five organizations were called "union", five "association", two "club", while the remaining three had other names - "conference", "anjuman", and "league". Two of the "unions", the Carters Union, and the Taxi Cab Union were ephemeral organizations, while a third, the PWU, had initially been called a "league". The Indian Mill Hands' Union was sometimes referred to by members as a "union", but on other occasions as a "samiti",<sup>3</sup> that is, simply a 'society' or 'association', no different from other types of organization. "Anjuman" has a similar range of meanings as "samiti" only with specifically Muslim connotations, not surprising for an Indian seamen's union since most were Muslims, but again reinforcing the idea that religious identity could have been as strong a force for unity as notions of employees' solidarity. On the other hand, those unions which called themselves "association" clearly seem to have been claiming affinity with other political and social organizations formed among people from all walks of life - the founder of the Indian Police Association for example claimed that the IPA was formed on the same lines as "existing Associations" in India.<sup>4</sup> The conception that trade

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- 1) Confidential, Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, File 458 (1-16), 1907. The 'drummers' packed raw jute into drums for export.
  - 2) D.A. Cameron, His Britannic Majesty's Consul, Port Said, to the Assistant Secretary, Marine Department, Board of Trade, printed in Report of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for the year 1905, Vol.II, (Calcutta, 1906), p.216. A serang was the marine equivalent of the sardar (see pp.67-8).
  - 3) The Baj Baj jute mill beaming department workers' letter to A.C. Banerji referred to the IMHU as a "union", but Krishnapada Haldar's letter called it a "samiti" - A.C. Banerji Papers, Bengali letters.
  - 4) Evidence, D. Petrie, to the Royal Commission on the Public Services in India, Appendix XIII, p.21. GB Political Department indexes contain periodic references to a 'List of Recognised Associations' indicating that some organizations were accorded some form of status (but it has not been possible to determine what this was).

unions were something new does not seem to have been manifested to any extent.

Conclusions:

It is evident that there was a considerable increase in the overall level of trade unionism, with three phases of heightened activity - 1894-6, 1905-8, and 1912-16. The range of employees resorting to established forms of trade unionism increased, and members of all labour market groups formed unions, which for the first time began to play a part in Bengal's industrial relations.

The general increase in activity is related to the increasing dependence of factory and non-factory workers in particular on labour market incomes, and to the relatively sudden and steep price rises to which all employees were subjected. However, the narrowing of options before employees did not automatically lead to an increase in trade unionism. Some groups of workers still chose not to confront their employers, but to seek other means of resolving or evading their problems. Where they did begin to engage in trade unionism, employees tended to start with traditional forms of action, only adopting others as the former proved inadequate. The propensity to confront employers, and to adopt new forms of trade unionism, was directly and indirectly encouraged by other mass movements in each of the three periods.

No firm conclusions can be reached about the nature of employees' consciousness in this period. It appears that employees' cooperation and solidarity may well have been achieved on the basis of notions of community other than that of being employees, people with common interests vis-a-vis employers. Moreover, existing ideas about the relations between social subordinates and those in authority could have sufficed to justify engaging in trade unionism. This is not to deny the possibility that significant changes were beginning to take place in employees' outlook, if not prior to the events of this period, then perhaps as a consequence of them.



CHAPTER 5: The post-First World War upsurge, 1918-22

The tremendous outbreak of activity immediately after the First World War is well known. It has received considerable attention in studies of trade unionism, which generally refer to the period as that of the beginning of trade unionism in Bengal. These studies, however, are largely composed of an indication of aggregate strike levels, using official data, together with descriptions of selected strikes and trade unions. The recent access gained by some historians to lists of trade unions prepared by the Intelligence Branch has augmented the number of unions known to have been formed, but no attempt has been made to analyse the developments of this period in more detail.<sup>1</sup> In the course of the present study it was found that, in their published form, the Government strike statistics were of little use except for indicating the total number of strikes each year, while the lists of trade unions were far from complete. In view of this, and the lack of a systematic outline of developments in this period, it is necessary to begin with a review of evidence in order to identify trends and patterns of activity in some detail.

The historical boundaries of this period can readily be identified from changes in the number of strikes, and of trade unions formed, and in existence in January each year, presented in Table 5.1.<sup>2</sup> Accepting these figures at their face value for the present, it is clear that there was nothing remarkable about the level of activity in 1918 and 1919, but that 1920 and 1921 stand out by the intensity of strike action, and trade union formation that occurred. In fact, as will be shown in

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- 1) See for example, R. Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism. Pressure groups and conflict of interests in Calcutta city politics, 1875-1939, (New Delhi, 1979), pp.83-98\*; Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.26-66, 218-229\*; and Sen, Working class of India, pp.119-91. \* contains lists extracted from Intelligence Branch sources.
  - 2) See p.109. Sources: 1918-22, see pp.123-4, 128. For 1923-5 - strikes: Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour, No.43, "Industrial disputes in India, 1921-1928", (Calcutta, 1930), pp.24-6; unions: GoI, Industries & Labour, files L 881 (7), May 1924; L 881 (10), 1924; L 881 (13), 1925; L 881 (15), 1926; L 881 (16), 1927; Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol.XIII, 15-18, 20-21 August 1923, pp.77-9; AITUC, Report, 1926 (Bombay, 1926), p.37; R.R. Bakhale (ed.), The Directory of Trade Unions, (Bombay, 1925); Johnson & Sime, Exploitation in India, p.15; Saha, History of the working class, pp.222, 227-8.

Chapter 6, an intense social ferment was developing in 1918-19, which only occasionally gave rise to the forms of trade unionism described by this table, but which laid the basis for subsequent developments.

TABLE 5.1: Strikes and trade unions in Bengal, 1918-1925

year	strikes starting	trade unions	
		formed	existing in January
1918	24	3	6
1919	27	4	8
1920	147	40	12
1921	135	62	38
1922	89	11	46
1923	70	15	37
1924	55	9	36
1925	43	9	31

Turning to developments after 1921, this table shows that levels of strikes and trade union formation began to decline from 1922 onwards. It is possible that strike levels remained at a higher level than before 1920, but equally that this impression is a misleading one, produced by changes in the quality of strike data. However, there is no doubt that a comparatively large number of trade unions continued to exist from 1921 onwards. The successful formation in April 1922 of a provincial trade union centre which linked many of these unions together, and to the All India Trade Union Congress, must also be noted.<sup>1</sup> These developments mark a significant change from events between late 1918 and early 1922, and so indicate the close of the post-First World War phase of activity.

#### Petitioning

Nearly two hundred reports of petitions have been found in reports from 1918 to 1922, excluding references to deputations, "representations", and other reports implying that petitions might have been presented, telegrams, and letters expressing the demands of a group of workers. Petition reports come from newspapers and accounts of strikes or other forms of agitation, and Government file lists. However, there is still no certainty that the sample of reports is representative, and that a statistical description of petition trends would indicate anything

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1) See pp.245-8.

other than the extent of research, or nature of records.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the reports consist of the statement that a petition containing strikers' demands was presented to the management during a strike; or an entry in Government department file lists that a petition was received from a particular group of workers. In some cases employees sent copies of petitions to the newspapers, which either summarized them or even printed some in full. In April 1918, for example, the Amrita Bazar Patrika reported that it had received a copy of a petition (called a "memorial") which clerks in the Calcutta Currency office had sent to the Viceroy four months earlier. They sought, among other things, a temporary financial allowance to relieve the effects of high prices.<sup>2</sup> Similar references occurred in the three main English language newspapers throughout this period. A number of copies of complete petitions have also been found, of which examples have been given in Appendix I.

The range of employees who engaged in petitioning between 1918 and 1922 is shown in Table 5.2, which lists the different employee and occupational groups for which evidence of petitioning has been found.

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- 1) Petition report totals are as follows: 1918, 30; 1919, 51; 1920, 85; 1921, 30; total: 196. The number from 1922 is negligible, but this may reflect changes in reporting practices as much as anything else. Sources: IO File JP 6306/20 (IOL&R: L/SG/7/453). Confidential, GoI Railways (Establishments), June 1919, Case No. 1827E-18/1-21. GoI Home (Political), July 1919, Deposit 47; GoI Railways (Establishments), February 1920, B 2287. Report of the Postal Committee, 1920, (Simla, 1920). GB Financial (Commercial), February 1920, B 75-7; October 1920, B 110-12; March 1921, B 61. GB Financial (Customs), August 1918, B 41-3; September 1920, B 52-3; April 1921, B 61-2. GB Financial (Finance), April 1918, B 241; May 1918, B 109-12, B 165-6; August 1918, B 165-6, B 240-3, B 251-65; October 1918, B 101; December 1918, B 158-9, B 258; February 1919, B 98-9, B 126-7; March 1919, B 191-3; May 1919, B 256-60; June 1919, B 107-8, B 135-7, B 320; July 1919, B 71, B 92-3; August 1919, B 5-6; September 1919, B 257-8; October 1919, B 18-19, B 82, B 106-7, B 113-9, B 143-5; November 1919, B 61-2; December 1919, B 12-13, B 101-2; February 1920, B 135-7; March 1920, B 118-9; April 1920, B 111; May 1920, B 6-7; July 1920, B 149; September 1920, B 67-8, B 165-7; September 1921, B 219-20; November 1921, B 19-20. GB Financial (Miscellaneous), March 1918, B 6; October 1918, B 43-4; December 1918, B 73; August 1921, B 11-16. GB Police, June 1918, B 200-21; September 1919, B 239-47; September 1920, B 74-5; November 1920, B 167-74\*; April 1921, B 65; September 1921, B 192. GB Political, September 1919, B 189-90\*. GB Revenue (Miscellaneous), December 1919, B 40-42. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", in Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 22 June 1921, pp.1194-1256 (hereafter: "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest"). ABP, E, S, January 1918 - April 1922, passim. The Collegian, XIV (12), No.140, December 1920, pp.323-4. \* - actual file seen (other B Proceedings - abstracts only).
- 2) ABP, 2/4/1918.

TABLE 5.2: List of employee and occupational groups for which evidence of petitioning has been found, 1918-1921

Supervisory group:

- Indian Police officers

Subordinate supervisory group:

- military and civil assistant surgeons
- excise and salt inspectors
- river surveyors
- assistants, Inspector-General of Police
- Intelligence Bureau clerks (Anglo-Indians)
- police officers
- veterinary assistants
- licensed measurers
- settlement kanungoes

Clerical group:

- sub-registrars
- Bengal Secretariat typists
- Government printers
- railway accountants
- compounders
- telegraphists (Indian)
- police head- and writer-constables
- telegraph traffic officers
- District Board sub-engineers
- teachers (Government)
- clerks: railways; Post and Telegraph; Public Works Department; currency office; Mint; Bengal Secretariat; Calcutta Port Trust; Ordnance; Police; accountant-generals office; telegraph check; Customs; mercantile offices; printing press; High Court; Calcutta Corporation

Factory group:

- dock workshops
- weighing scale mistris
- jute mills
- engineering factory
- motor car engineers
- gas company
- miners
- petrol depots
- Government ordnance factory
- jute press sorters
- Calcutta Corporation workshop
- cotton factory
- sugar factory
- coach builders
- dock cranemen
- edible oil factory mistris

Non-factory group:

- telegraph peons
- police syces (grooms)
- tram conductors and drivers
- carters
- sweepers
- dock labourers
- motor lorry drivers
- postmen
- durwans (doorkeepers)
- coachmen
- ghat (quay) labour
- boatmen
- taxi drivers
- general labourers
- Bengal Government office menials: record suppliers, chaprasis, messengers, book binders, night watchmen

Railways:

- workshop
- inspectors
- gas plant
- police
- drivers and guards
- (all grades together)

Table 5.2 shows that, as in the previous period, petitioning was undertaken by employees from all sectors of the labour market. The range of factory and non-factory groups represented in the period is particularly noticeable, although whether this was due to changes in their behaviour, or to better reporting of their activities, cannot be ascertained.

The implication that each of these occupational groups petitioned separately from each other is a reflection of the reports. Different groups of Government clerks, for example, voiced their grievances independently of the other, even after they had formed a union, through which collective representations were also being channelled.<sup>1</sup> The only significant example of joint petitioning by employees of different labour market groups or departments took place on the East Indian Railway in April-May 1919, when petitions signed by European, Anglo-Indian and Indian employees from all departments were presented to the manager.<sup>2</sup>

### Strikes

Newspapers and a variety of Government files provide evidence for strikes throughout the period, but are the only sources for the period January 1918 to June 1920. Thereafter a Labour Intelligence officer systematically collected data,<sup>3</sup> which was utilized by the Committee on Industrial Unrest to provide a detailed list of every strike that began between July 1920 and early April 1921. Quarterly and annual strike statistics published in an official journal form the basis of evidence for subsequent periods. While the statistics given in the following tables are thus as accurate as possible from July 1920 onwards, those for January 1918 to June 1920 probably understate the actual level of activity.

With the discovery of detailed information on strikes it becomes clear that the definition of a strike for statistical purposes is not as straightforward as might be thought. The Report of the Committee

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- 1) The All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association was established in April 1920, but Government clerks (ministerial officers) continued to send petitions from different departments - see Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference. Second Sessions 1920, 27th and 28th December 1920, (Calcutta, n.d.); GB Financial (Emigration), May 1920, B 6-7 (abstract); GB Financial (Finance), September 1920, B 165-7 (abstract); November 1920, B 250-54 (actual file).
  - 2) Pioneer, 7/5/1919; ABP, 10/5/1919. Indian railwaymen in different departments presented another petition, separately, at the same time - GoI Home (Political), July 1919, Deposit 47. See pp.151-2.
  - 3) GB Commerce (Commerce), August 1920, A 21-6 & KWs.

on Industrial Unrest generally distinguished between strikes according to whether different industrial units were involved. A series of strikes in adjacent jute factories in November 1920, all for a 25% pay rise, and all starting within a day or two of each other, were counted separately, according to the factory concerned. On the other hand, a tailors' strike in September 1920, common to some 1500 businesses, was counted as one strike.<sup>1</sup> The unit 'one strike' should correspond to that within which employees acted, and should therefore not be divided along factory or industrial lines when employees' activities clearly disregarded such boundaries. In the case of the November 1920 jute strikes however it has not been possible to determine whether they were 'one' or several strikes, and so the interpretation given by the official Report has been adopted. In other instances, for example the complex of strikes among railwaymen, seamen, shipping clerks, quay labourers and other groups in eastern Bengal between May and September 1921, only 'one' strike has been counted for the tables since all these activities were so closely related.<sup>2</sup> Evidently this problem can lead to differences in the number of strikes identified by different observers, and is one source of divergence between the statistics presented below, and those previously published.<sup>3</sup> Official statistics also gave the number of strikes in progress in any period, while the tables here only give the number starting, this being a more relevant indicator of changes in strike propensity.

The annual strike figures given in Table 5.1 have been expanded in Tables 5.3 and 5.4, which show the occurrence of strikes at three-monthly intervals.<sup>4</sup> The quarterly strike totals (Table 5.3) indicate

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1216-7, 1218-9, 1224-5, and 1200-1 respectively.
  - 2) See pp.208-15 for discussion of this strike.
  - 3) This difference has been masked by the inclusion of strikes at Bali engineering works (ABP, 20/11/1920), by Mercantile Bank gatekeepers (E, 19/11/1920), "bhuiyan coolies" at Midnapur (ABP, 1/12/1920), at Kharagpur railway station (S, 25/12/1920), and by municipal employees in Dacca (E, 13/12/1920), and Rajshahi (ABP, 24/12/1920), omitted from the "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest".
  - 4) Strike references: Confidential, GoI Railways (Establishments), June 1919, Case No. 1827E-18/1-21. GoI Home (Political), January 1920, Deposit 79; July 1920, Deposit 88, Deposit 94; June 1921, Deposit 64; April 1920, B 189 (actual file); File 18, 1921. Confidential, GB Political, File 395, 1924. GB Financial (Commercial), August 1921 B 157-60\*. GB Commerce (Commercial), November 1921, A 39-40. GB Police, February 1918, B 241-2\*; March 1918, B 154-7\*; B 160-3\*; April 1918, continued on p.1147.

**TABLE 5.3:** Quarterly classified table of strikes starting in Bengal, January 1918 to December 1922

year	quarter	employee groups						TOTAL	
		subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway		not known
1918	Jan-Mar			5	1		1		7
	Apr-June			6	1			1	8
	Jul-Sept	1		1	3				5
	Oct-Dec				2		2		4
1919	Jan-Mar			3	3		1		7
	Apr-June		1	1	4				6
	Jul-Sept		1	2	1		2		6
	Oct-Dec	2		6					8
1920 <sup>a</sup>	Jan-Mar		1	12	5				18
	Apr-June			6	2				8
	Jul-Sept		2	10	4		2		18
	Oct-Dec			71	25		4		100
1921	Jan-Mar		2	17	15		6		40
	Apr-June			14	18	2	3		37
	Jul-Sept			8	12		1		21
	Oct-Dec			8	7		3	21	39
1922 <sup>b</sup>	Jan-Mar								26
	Apr-June								23
	Jul-Sept								22
	Oct-Dec								18
TOTALS:									
1918		1		12	7		3	1	24
1919		2	2	12	8		3		27
1920			3	99	39 <sup>c</sup>		6		147 <sup>c</sup>
1921			2	47	52	2	13	21	137
1922									89

(a) excluding three non-factory strikes only reported as occurring before April 1920

(b) insufficient evidence to provide a labour market breakdown

(c) including three strikes known only as occurring before April 1920.

4) B 97\*, B 223-4\*, B 307\*, B 328\*; May 1918, B 41-2\*, B 122-3\*; September 1918, B 149-50\*; December 1918, B 190-91\*; August 1919, B 42\*; October 1919, B 8-9\*; November 1919, B 67-8\*; April 1920, B 13-14\*; November 1921, B 184-91\*; May 1921, B 254\*. GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 300-52. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest"; Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 1 (2), 1921, p.205; 1 (4), 1921, pp.501-4; 2 (1), 1922, p.104; 2 (2), 1922, p.249; 2 (3), 1922, p.380; 2 (4), 1922, p.516; 3 (1), 1923, p.64. ABP, E, S, 1918-22, passim. Indian Annual Register, 1922, (2nd edition, Calcutta, 1923), p.66; Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, p.4. These provide at least one reference to each strike.  
\* - file abstracts only.

that strike activity remained at a low though steady level during most of 1918 and 1919. If the three strikes only known to have taken place before April 1920<sup>1</sup> were attributed to the last quarter of 1919, then an increase would have been registered in that rather than the following quarter. However, more strikes would still have been reported from the first three months of 1920 than the last quarter of 1919. Strike activity seems therefore to have risen towards the end of 1919, and remained at a slightly higher level during the first nine months of 1920 before increasing dramatically at the end of the year. The high strike levels of 1920-21 were in fact concentrated in the last quarter of 1920 and the first half of 1921, after which quarterly strike levels fell throughout 1921-2, except in the last quarter of 1921.<sup>2</sup> The impression that quarterly strike levels during 1922 were higher than those of 1918-19 may simply be due to the improved quality of evidence, and no great significance should be attached to this difference.

A monthly breakdown of strike figures for the twelve month period August 1920 to July 1921, covering the three most prominent quarterly periods, is given in Table 5.4. This shows that the late 1920 strike peak largely occurred in November and December 1920, when 85 strikes began, and formed part of an October 1920 to February 1921 strike phase, during which 130 strikes began. Another 47 strikes began between March and June 1921, of which 17 started in May, thus constituting a second smaller strike wave. The extent of strike activity in May-June 1921 is considerably understated in this table since the two mixed group strikes were in fact general strikes, one confined to the Chittagong area, and one which spread throughout the whole of eastern Bengal. Monthly totals of strikes starting from July onwards remained in single figures, with the probable exception of the last quarter of 1921.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) GoI Home (Political), April 1920, B 189 (actual file) contained a list of strikes dated 19 April 1920, which had occurred "recently". The actual dates of occurrence of all but three of these strikes has been established from other sources.
  - 2) Quarterly figures for strikes starting in 1921 have been compiled from individual reports for January-September, and official figures for October-December (Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 2 (1), 1922, p.104). Six more individual strikes have been identified for the January-September period than in official statistics (Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 1 (2), 1921, p.205; 1 (4), 1921, pp. 501, 504), but only 18 individual strike reports for October-December 1921. Hence official figures have been accepted for the latter quarter, and 21 strikes classified as by unknown groups of workers.
  - 3) Monthly strike figures for this quarter are not known, but 39 strikes began in the three months - see Table 5.3.



**TABLE 5.4:** Monthly classified table of strikes starting in Bengal, August 1920 to July 1921

year	month	employee groups					TOTAL
		clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	
1920	August		2	2		1	5
	September		4	1			5
	October		9	3		3	15
	November		30	12			42
	December		32	10		1	43
1921	January	1	5	8			14
	February		8	4		4	16
	March	1	4	3		2	10
	April		7	1	1	1	10
	May		4	11	1	1	17
	June		3	6		1	10
	July		4	4		1	9

Turning to analysis of employee group involvement in strikes, the small number of mixed category strikes shows that few involved members of more than one employee or labour market group. This was true even when members of different labour market groups in the same industry or factory went on strike. In December 1919 a short jute mill assistants' strike took place at the Champdani mill, but they received no support from other workers at the factory, or assistants in other mills.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, practically all the other factory and non-factory employees' strikes only involved the shop-floor or equivalent grades of workers. That inter-group solidarity could occur in the factories was revealed by the support shop-floor workers gave to striking clerks at the Victoria jute mill in January 1922, but this example is unique.<sup>2</sup> Factory clerks certainly never gave similar support to shop-floor workers' strikes in this period. Even on the railways where there seems to have been more cooperation between different employee groups, united strike action was rarely achieved.<sup>3</sup>

Table 5.3 shows that members of all employee groups, except the supervisory grades, engaged in strikes at some time during 1918-22,

1) Pioneer, 4/12/1919.

2) ABP, 5/1/1922.

3) Only the short Bengal Nagpur Railway strike at Kharagpur in October 1920 united railwaymen of all races, and from all employee groups - S, 9/10/1920; E, 9/10/1920. Some reports however disputed the involvement of European drivers and guards.

although as might have been expected in view of previous patterns, employees in the factory and non-factory groups were responsible for the overwhelming majority of strikes. Besides the jute assistants' strike referred to, the other subordinate supervisory employees who went on strike were the Port Commission river surveyors (August 1918), and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce licensed measurers (October 1919).<sup>1</sup> All except one of the clerical group strikes (that of postmen in May 1920)<sup>2</sup> involved printers and compositors working in both private and Government printing presses.<sup>3</sup> It is noticeable that apart from the two printers' strikes in January and March 1921, all the 'white collar' strikes occurred before the main outbreak of activity. Another minor though increasingly important group was the railwaymen, among whom strikes were sporadic until the middle of 1920, after which they engaged in strikes at least on one occasion each quarter.

Factory and non-factory workers together accounted for practically all the strikes in the October 1920 to February 1921 period, and were only slightly less important throughout the rest of 1921. Distinguishing between them, it is apparent that on the whole factory employees engaged in more strikes than workers in non-factory occupations. However, in 1921, the propensity of factory workers to strike declined more rapidly than that of non-factory employees, since in 1921 the total number of strikes by the latter group slightly exceeded that of factory workers. Table 5.4 illustrates one aspect of this phenomenon insofar as non-factory employees struck as much or more than factory workers in four of the first seven months of 1921.

Details of factory and non-factory strike occurrence are shown in Tables 5.5. and 5.6.<sup>4</sup> The industrial breakdown of factory employees' strikes in Table 5.5 shows that jute factory workers contributed the greatest proportion (37.6%) followed by the four engineering groups (26.0%). The next largest group was the cotton factories (6.4%) while the remaining nineteen industrial groups only contributed a few strikes to the factory total. Jute factory employees appear to have engaged in

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- 1) E, 16,17/8/1918, 17/10/1919. The former surveyed the sandbanks in the river Hugli; the latter were employed to check weights and quantities of goods.
  - 2) ABP, 19,20,22,23/5/1919. Postmen's inclusion in the clerical group could be questioned, but is justified on the grounds that a degree of literacy was involved in their work.
  - 3) S, 28/8/1919; ABP, 16/3/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1194-7, 1242-3, 1264-5.
  - 4) See pp.118 and 120.

TABLE 5.5: Detailed quarterly analysis of factory strikes, 1918-1921

industrial groups	1918				1919				1920				1921				TOTAL
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	
<b>Manufacturing:</b>																	
jute	5	5			2	1	1		5	2	6	13	8	7	4	5	64
cotton		1									1	4	1	1	3		11
iron & steel								1				3				1	5
oil (edible)												2		1			3
paper												1	1			1	3
tobacco									1			2					3
pottery												2					2
bone crushing														1			1
brass									1								1
packaging													1				1
paint									1								1
shellac													1				1
sugar										1							1
tannery												1					1
water-proofing									1								1
<b>Engineering:</b>																	
general (a)							2		1	1	2	15	4	2			27
dock/ship						1			1			7		1			10
automobile												5					5
municipal									1	1		1					3
<b>Other:</b>																	
coal mines												7			1	1	9
jute press			1		1		3		1			3					9
Port Trust (b)											1	3					4
gas plant												1		1			2
electricity													1				1
petrol depot												1					1
<b>TOTAL</b>	5	6	1		3	1	2	6	12	6	10	71	17	14	8	8	170
<b>Number of groups</b>	1	2	1		2	1	2	3	8	5	4	17	7	7	3	4	25

Notes: (a) fitters, rivetters, turners, machine men engaged in a variety of metal-working and electrical engineering occupations, employed in various general engineering firms (as distinct from those in e.g. ship repair yards).  
 (b) other than the workshop employees (i.e., crane operators, pumping station staff).

strikes at one or more factories most of the time - the absence of any reports from the July-December 1918 and October-December 1919 periods probably reflects the inadequacies of existing records. Employees in engineering concerns do not seem to have begun striking until late in 1919, but then engaged in at least one strike each quarter until April-June 1921. Cotton factory workers also struck regularly between the July-September periods of 1920 and 1921, but other factory employees only struck at sporadic intervals, or once during the whole four year period.

The pattern of factory group strikes follows that already described for strikes as a whole - little activity occurred between early 1918 and late 1919; an increase in late 1919 to early 1920 was followed by slightly higher levels of activity prior to the October 1920-June 1921 peak, after which the number of strikes fell again. Table 5.5 reveals that the late 1919 to early 1920 and the October 1920 to June 1921 phases did not simply involve increased activity on the part of the dominant jute and engineering groups, but were characterised by the spread of strikes to other industries. In October 1919 to March 1920, for example, nine industrial groups engaged in strikes compared with only four in the previous 21 months. Similarly, in October 1920 to March 1921, strikes occurred in 20 different industries (17 of them in October-December 1920 alone).

One consequence of this feature was that the number of jute factory strikes, as a proportion of all factory strikes, fell to 18.3% in October-December 1920, and 23.9% in the six months October 1920 to March 1921, despite the increase in the number of strikes in the last quarter of 1920. Engineering employees in general contributed the largest number of strikes in the last quarter of 1920, while together the four engineering groups accounted for 39.4% of strikes starting in that quarter (and 36.4% of those starting in the October 1920 to March 1921 period). Other groups contributed 42.3% of the strikes beginning in the last quarter of 1920, and 39.8% of the October 1920 to March 1921 factory total, both figures being above the average for the four years (36.4%).

Employees in non-factory occupations, whose strikes have been analysed in Table 5.6, have been subdivided roughly into three groups - transport and allied occupations, manufacturing or artisanal trades, and a residual category. Most of the porters' and labourers' strikes

TABLE 5.6: Detailed quarterly analysis of non-factory group strikes, 1918-1921

occupational group	1918				1919				1920				1921				TOTAL
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sept	Oct-Dec	
transport & allied:																	
porters/labourers								1 <sup>a</sup>				8	4	2	4	2	21
docks				2	1	1					4		1		1	1	10
taxi/car drivers	1					1		1			1	2		1	1	1	8
trams		1 <sup>b</sup>									1		1	1	1	2	7
carriage drivers								3 <sup>c</sup>			1 <sup>d</sup>				1	1	6
seamen/boatmen						1							4	1			6
rickshaw			1					1									2
carters			1														1
manufacturing:																	
builders/masons								1				1	2				4
tailors										1		1					2
biri makers <sup>e</sup>											1						1
carpenters												1					1
umbrella sewers												1					1
other:																	
sweepers <sup>f</sup>			1		1	2		1	2	1	6	3	3	2			22
domestic											1		4				5
peons										1			1				2
tea plantation					1										1		2
currency office <sup>g</sup>															1		1
durwans (h)											1						1
law court touts										1							1
police constables												1					1
shop assistants											1						1
TOTAL	1	1	3	2	3	4	1	8	2	4	25	15	18	12	7		106
Number of groups	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	5	1	4	10	9	8	8	5		22

- Notes:
- (a) only reported as occurring before April 1920
  - (b) track maintenance only; others, running staff only
  - (c) including 2 only reported as occurring before April 1920
  - (d) combined with syces (grooms)
  - (e) biri - traditional cigarette
  - (f) including sweepers and associated "conservancy" workers - mehtars, "bhuiyan coolies", and hospital menials
  - (g) presumed to be office menials, though the report is unclear
  - (h) watchmen/doorkeepers

involved people working on quays or in goods depots, and so bear some affinity to dock workers, hence their inclusion in the transport group.<sup>1</sup> The largest number of strikes took place among workers in the transport and allied occupations group; even if the porters and dockers were omitted, the remaining occupations (taxi and car drivers, tram drivers and conductors, carriage drivers, seamen, rickshaw pullers, and carters) would still have accounted for 28.8% of all the non-factory strikes. No single occupation in this sector of the labour market dominated the strike figures, the most active groups being sweepers (21.8%) and porters and labourers (20.2%). Sweepers were also the most regular of the non-factory employees to engage in strikes, but even they did not strike often before April-June 1920. All the other groups tended to strike at irregular intervals, except for the porters and labourers, tram drivers, and taxi and car drivers, who struck regularly between October-December 1920 and the end of 1921.

The involvement of different non-factory occupations in part follows a similar pattern to that of factory employees. There was a slight increase in the number of occupations active in the first quarter of 1920, though the range of non-factory employees who had struck earlier was wider than for the factory group. The number of non-factory groups active also increased in the October 1920 to March 1921 period, but again unlike the factory group, did not decrease rapidly in the following and subsequent quarters of 1921. The late 1920 increase in strike activity was due both to more activity on the part of the most active groups, and involvement of a wider range of occupations, while the lower rate of decline in 1921 seems to have been partly due to the persistence of striking on the part of employees in a range of non-factory occupations. Even allowing for improved coverage of non-factory strikes in 1920-21 compared with earlier years, it appears that in this group, the post-war upsurge took the form of a general and more continuous tendency to strike from late in 1920, in contrast to the sudden outburst and then rapid decline of activity on the part of factory employees.

One further important feature of strike activity in 1920-21 remains to be discussed, but before this the processes of trade union formation and activity will be outlined.<sup>2</sup>

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1) The impossibility of rigidly distinguishing between these groups should be borne in mind - see pp.20, 62-4.

2) See pp.134-40.

Trade unions

Tables illustrating union formation, existence, and disappearance, are given below, but require prefacing with some methodological notes since compilation of such data has not been attempted before. Although the Government collected information on trade unions, none comparable in quality to that for strikes was ever published. Police files on trade unions have either been destroyed, or remain closed, and the intelligence branch lists of unions that have come to light do not seem to have covered the whole range of the workforce.<sup>1</sup> Evidence for union formation has consequently had to come from a wide variety of sources.

As in the previous chapter, a trade union has been identified as having been formed or in existence when at the very least there is evidence that employees established a named organization, or held a meeting in the name of such an organization. Where only the name of the organization is known then its classification or rejection as a union has to be inferred from the name, and the general context. The Howrah Jute Mill's Workmen's Association, for example, is only known from an official list of labour organizations published in September 1921.<sup>2</sup> Since this name indicates that it could be a union - it was a factory workers' organization, and many unions were called 'association' - and jute workers were known to have formed unions around this time, then it is reasonable to assume that this was a trade union. Some organizations which occur on similar lists, such as the Marwari Trades' Association, have been excluded since contemporary reports of its activities suggest that it was a counter-organization to the Marwari Association, and its main activity so far as labour was concerned was to supply blacklegs during a postmen's strike in May 1919.<sup>3</sup> Where the only evidence of

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- 1) The only intelligence branch list seen is the GB "List of Labour Unions". Extracts from other intelligence sources are contained in Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.218-29; and Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism, pp.84-97. Other official lists are: GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5; Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, XIII, 1923, pp.68-9. Bakhale, Directory of Trade unions, (1925) was the first attempt by trade unionists to compile a list.
  - 2) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5.
  - 3) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.5; Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism, p.86. On the MTA's activities, see E, 20/5/1919; ABP, 30/4/1920, 23/4/1921. Other organizations excluded here are the Madaripur Labour Association (GB, "List of Labour Unions", p.13), and the Barabazar Tenants' Association (Ray, ibid., p.87).

organizations occurs in the context of an employees' meeting to discuss their problems, or associated with a strike, for example, their classification as unions arouses no problems.

Altogether a total of 46 unions are only known from single references. Since classification of these organizations as unions could perhaps be most open to objection, it is necessary to examine this group more closely. Table 5.7 indicates the number of these organizations, and the context or source of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-three

TABLE 5.7: Context or source of 'single reference' unions in Bengal, 1918-22

year	strike	meeting	depu- tation	police list	other list	other	TOTAL
1918		1					1
1919							0
1920	1	5		4			10
1921	2	11	1	12		3	29
1922		1		2	3		6
TOTAL	3	18	1	18	3	3	46

of these organizations were reported in the context of some other form of trade unionism, principally a conference where a union was formed, or a meeting at which employees' grievances were discussed, and often references to a union were made. Typical of the former was the report of a settlement kanungoes' (officers) meeting in September 1921 which discussed their grievances and, among a host of resolutions, decided to establish the Bengal Settlement Kanungoes' Association.<sup>2</sup> Other examples of single references are to a meeting of the Calcutta Rajak Union (of washermen) to discuss low wages in Calcutta, in October 1921, or to the Calcutta Coachmen's and Syce's Union (1920), and the Goalundo Labour Union (1921), which made their first and only appearances during strikes.<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that the latter were simply strike committees, and the BSKA no different from the numerous untitled employees' meetings held during these years. However, the distinction made by the employees themselves was to give

1) For union references, see p.113; a list of the 'single reference' unions is given in Appendix II.  
 2) ABP, 10/9/1921 (Dak edition).  
 3) CRU - S, 15/10/1921; E, 15/10/1921; CC&SU - ABP, 12,14/11/1920; GLU - E, 3.8./6/1921. Though there is more than one reference to each of these unions, references are to the same context in each case.



these conferences and committees formal names of the same type used to designate trade unions, and it is this fact which justified calling these organizations unions.

Most of the remaining 'single reference' unions are only known from lists prepared by the police or intelligence branch officers. Sometimes these lists simply gave information such as, for example, that the Anjuman Mazduran was a "union of mill hands",<sup>1</sup> which for the present we have to accept as sufficient evidence of a union's existence. In other cases names of organizations on these lists can be connected with other trade union bodies which are more adequately documented. Thus the Kankinara, Kharda, and Rishra "Jute Mills Workmen's Association(s)", the Matiaburuz and Kasipur (Cossipur) "Jute Mills Labourers' Union(s)", and the Ramkristopur Flour Mills Labourers' Union, known only from a police report of August 1921, were all said to be members of the Bengal Central Labour Federation.<sup>2</sup> Since the BCLF is relatively well documented, and was known to have been organizing jute factory workers early in 1921, it is quite likely that the unions listed above were founded at that time.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the exceptions already noted, there seems little reason to exclude organizations only known from these records.

Information about the dates of union formation comes from contemporary records of foundation meetings, and lists giving the history of particular organizations. Wherever possible the latter source has been checked against the former as there seems to have been a tendency to exaggerate the age of certain unions on the part of their officers.<sup>4</sup> In a few cases neither type of information is available and the earliest reference found clearly implies that the union had been in existence for some time - the All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference, for example, was not known before reports of the second session, in September 1920.<sup>5</sup> Since unions sometimes held more than one general conference in a twelve month period, it would not be safe to presume that the ABPCC had been formed in September 1919, and so it can only

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1) Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism, p.67.

2) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs.

3) On the BCLF see pp.222-33.

4) Bakhale, Directory of Trade Unions, pp.54, 62, states that the Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association was founded in 1918, and the Calcutta Tramways Employees' Association in 1919. The CPTEA was actually formed on 15 October 1920 (S, 16/10/1920), and the CTEA (as the Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union), on 4 October 1920 (GB, "List of Labour Unions", p.8; the earliest meeting was reported in ABP, 26/10/1920).

5) S, 29/9/1920; ABP, 7/10/1920.

be attributed to 1920 in analyses of union formation. The same problem arises with organizations first recorded in the list of unions which the Government had noticed "during the last year", published in September 1921.<sup>1</sup> It is probable that most of these were founded in 1921, but problems arise when attempts are made to construct a more detailed chronology of union formation (see Table 5.9).<sup>2</sup> The number of unions formed has been minimised by excluding branch and district level organizations of provincial unions, even when these existed prior to the latter, and only counting provincial unions or union organizations, and branches of all-India organizations which operated at the provincial level.<sup>3</sup> For example, seven district teachers' organizations sent delegates to the founding conference of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Association in March 1921, and a number of district and school organizations are known to have existed even earlier, but only the ABHSTA has been counted in the tables.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the All India Provincial Medical Services Association, and the All India Postal Officers' Association, of which the Bengal unions were probably branches, have been counted separately.<sup>5</sup> The only exception has been to count the Calcutta Postal Club, founded in 1908, separately from the Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association of which the CPC became a founding constituent in 1920.<sup>6</sup>

Unions have been classed as existing when at least one reference has been found in a calendar year, and as having ended if no further reports have been found after December of the year concerned. Exceptions have been made only when sporadic references have been found to unions

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1) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5.

2) See p.130.

3) The All India Postal and Railway Mail Service Association, although based in Calcutta, is not counted because the Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association is. Other All India organizations for which no separate Bengal unit existed have however been counted.

4) The seven organizations were: Chittagong Teachers' Guild, Netrakona Teachers' Association, Gaibandha Teachers' Association, Dacca Teachers' Association, Brahmanbaria Teachers' Guild, Chandpur Teachers' Guild, and the Teachers' Union (Comilla) - Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference held on the 27th and 28th March 1921 at Gaibandha, (Calcutta, n.d.), pp.35-44. A separate Calcutta-based All Bengal Teachers' Association has been counted in addition to the ABHSTA.

5) AIPMSA - E, 27/1/1920; AIPOA - ABP, 11/3/1920.

6) "Report of the Provincial Postal R.M.S. Conference, Bengal & Assam Circle", Labour, 1 (2), March 1921, pp.4-11. The CPC has been counted as 'ended' (amalgamated) in 1920, although it continued to function as a constituent of the BPRMSA.

which there is no other reason to believe had collapsed and were later re-established. As with union formation, attempts have been made to minimise the number of organizations included in the tables, so where doubt about a union's continued existence arises, it has been classified as having ended. Further research will doubtless establish that some unions continued functioning for longer than has been assumed here, which will thus lead to modification of these figures, and those of the number of unions existing in January each year. The latter figure has been calculated by subtracting the number of demised unions from the number existing at the beginning of, and formed during each year, in order to give an indication of the minimum number of unions in existence at any one time.

Unions have been classed into different labour market groups in the following tables according to the implications of their names, supplemented by information about membership, or the type of employees whose interests the union claimed to represent, where this is available. Names like the Indian Amalgamated Society of Ships' Officers,<sup>1</sup> the Bengal Civil Service Association,<sup>2</sup> the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association,<sup>3</sup> the Jagatdal Jute Mill Workers' Union,<sup>4</sup> or the Goalundo Labour Union<sup>5</sup> are relatively easy to classify since they clearly indicate the character of the membership. Railwaymen's unions were nearly all named after the particular line, or contained the word railway in them, making them easy to identify.<sup>6</sup> General names such as Art Workers' Union,<sup>7</sup> Garden Reach Labour Union,<sup>8</sup> or the Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha<sup>9</sup> are harder to categorise however. In the case of the AWU it seems likely that it was a union of the Art Press employees in Calcutta, and so can be classed together with other clerical unions. The GRLU could have

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- 1) S, 28/2/1920, 2/3/1920; E, 5/3/1920.
  - 2) ABP, 29/12/1920 - i.e. a Bengal Civil Service (provincial grade) union.
  - 3) ABP, 20/2/1920. Ministerial officers were Government clerks.
  - 4) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5. Newspaper reports of a "Jagdal Labourers' Union" (ABP, 13/4/1921), and the "Labour Union" from Jagdal (ABP, 23/4/1921) have been presumed to refer to this union.
  - 5) E, 3/6/1921.
  - 6) The Railway Workmen's Association was the first established in this period (S, 25/9/1919). Other unions included the Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union (ABP, 19/11/1920) and the East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union (ABP, 4/5/1921). See Appendix III for details.
  - 7) Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111.
  - 8) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54- Kws. References to the "Labour Union" from Garden Reach (ABP, 23/4/1921) are assumed to be to the same union.
  - 9) ABP, 3/5/1921.

been a general labour union, but there were also a number of factories in the Garden Reach area. Since there is insufficient evidence to classify this or the SSS satisfactorily, they have been grouped together in a 'not known' category.

While so far as can be discovered most unions' membership was limited to employees belonging to the different labour market groups, as indicated in Table 5.8, a few which began as subordinate supervisory or clerical employees' unions grew to encompass a wider membership. The Bengal Police Association was initiated in January 1920 by policemen in the higher official grades, and intelligence department officers, but later included members from other ranks. Towards the end of 1921 the BPA was associated with another broad organization, the British Indian Police Association, whose conference at Howrah was attended by policemen from all ranks.<sup>1</sup> The Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association began as a clerical grades' union, and may have incorporated some subordinate supervisory grades also, but its meetings were occasionally attended by dockers' representatives, and the CPTEA undertook to represent their demands to the Port Trust authorities.<sup>2</sup> These and a handful of similar unions have been placed in a 'mixed' labour market category in the following tables. The railwaymen's unions were also mixed in the sense that many included members ranging from the elite European engine drivers and guards (subordinate supervisory group) to track maintenance staff, as well as clerical employees.<sup>3</sup> Only the railway officials, the supervisory administrative employees, organized themselves separately from other railwaymen in the All India Railways Locomotive Officers' Conference.<sup>4</sup>

The aggregate statistics of trade union formation and existence given in Table 5.1 have been broken down in Tables 5.8 and 5.9. Both

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- 1) GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2 (actual file); ABP, 5/11/1921, 11/11/1921; Proceedings of the British India Police Conference, Second Session. Held at Howrah on the 28th, 29th and 30th December 1921, (n.p., n.d.).
  - 2) Early CPTEA meetings suggest it was a supervisors' and clerks' union (S, 18/10/1920), but a later meeting was attended by a "coolly sirdar" (S, 31/10/1920 - i.e. sardar) and in November a petition containing manual workers' demands was displayed at a CPTEA meeting (E, 18/11/1920).
  - 3) The Railway Workmen's Association contained this range of members, but it split in 1920 and 1921, giving rise to the different 'Indian' unions, which encompassed all grades of Indian employees - see pp.204-8. and Appendix III.
  - 4) E, 11/5/1920. This may have been connected with a Railway Officers' Association, said to have been in the process of formation - E, 28/8/1919.

illustrate the pattern of activities among different labour market groups: Table 5.8 gives a 'balance sheet' of union formation and demise, while Table 5.9 amplifies the patterns of union formation.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 5.8: Trade unions existing in January, formed and ended (not recorded after December) each year, according to employee group, 1918-1922

year	status	employee groups								TOTAL
		supervisory	subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	not known	
1918:	existing	2	1	2	1					6
	formed	1		1		1				3
	ended			1						1
1919:	existing	3	1	2	1	1				8
	formed			2		1		1		4
	ended									0
1920:	existing	3	1	4	1	2		1		12
	formed	2	5	16	2	11	2	2		40
	ended*	2	1	6	1	4				14
1921:	existing	3	5	14	2	9	2	3		38
	formed		5	6	22	18	4	4	3	62
	ended**		4	8	21	17		1	3	54
1922:	existing	3	6	12	3	10	6	6		46
	formed	1		5		4			1	11
	ended**	1	2	6	2	4	1	3	1	20
TOTAL formed		4	10	30	24	35	6	7	4	120
TOTAL ended <sup>+</sup>		3	7	16	24	22	1	4	4	81

Key: \* including 3 clerical and 3 non-factory amalgamations  
 \*\* including 1 clerical amalgamation  
 + excluding amalgamations

This table shows that employees from all sectors of the labour market formed unions between 1918 and 1922, including the supervisory and subordinate supervisory grades, whose activity in this respect is

1) At least one reference to each union can be found in: IO File JP 6306/20 (IOL&R: L/SG/7/453). GoI Home (Political), 1921, Deposit No. 415 (1-5). Confidential, GB Political, File 333 (11-16) KWs, 1921. GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 & KWs. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1223; GB, "List of Labour Unions". Bakhale, Directory of Trade Unions. ABP, E, S, January 1918-April 1922, passim; The Century Review, VIII (9), 15 April 1922, p.7; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111; Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism, pp.85-8; Saha, History of the working class movement, p.225. For details, see Appendix III.

usually overlooked. Two of the new supervisory grades' unions, the IASSO and the AIRLOC have already been mentioned. The other two new unions in this group were the Foremen's Association, a civilian ordnance engineers' union, formed in December 1918, and the All India Association of European Government Servants, established in 1922 to coordinate the activities of the predominantly expatriate unions like the ICSEA and the IPA.<sup>1</sup> The new subordinate supervisory employees' unions included the Bengal Civil Service and the Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Associations, the All India Provincial Medical Services Association, and the Customs Preventive Service Association. One private sector employees' union, the Licensed Measurers' Association, has also been included in this group.<sup>2</sup> Government clerical grade employees were particularly active in forming unions, and their new organizations included the Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association, the Commercial Intelligence Offices' Union, the Customs Union, and the Writers Buildings Staff Association.<sup>3</sup> Private sector clerical employees were less prolific - the Clerks' Association founded in April 1918 does not seem to have functioned at all, though the Employees' Association, catering for clerks in mercantile offices in Calcutta, was comparatively successful.<sup>4</sup> Other private sector unions in the clerical category included the Calcutta Reporters' Union, the Law Clerks' Association, and the Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti (also known as the Dress and Cloth Employees' Association).<sup>5</sup> Most of the factory group unions were formed in different factories, for example at the Baj Baj, Jagatdal, Bali, Howrah and Kankinara jute mills. Other factory group unions were formed in edible oil and paper factories, and at a petroleum depot. Engineering factory employees do not seem to have formed unions in this manner but some participated in the Howrah Workers' Union.<sup>6</sup> Unions were also formed by tramway conductors and drivers, Indian seamen, carters and carriage drivers, rickshaw pullers, and masons, all of whom are grouped together

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- 1) AIAEGS - IO File JP 6306/20 (IOL&R: L/SG/7/453); FA - E, 24/12/1918.
  - 2) BCSA - ABP, 29/12/1920; BSCSA - ABP, 10/5/1921; AIPMSA - E, 27/1/1920; CPSA - S, 19/11/1920; LMA - E, 6/12/1920.
  - 3) IBIISA, which began as the Bengal Bank Clerks' Association - GB, "List of Labour Unions", p.8; CIOU - ABP, 21/7/1920; CU - E, 14/6/1920; WBSA - GB, "List of Labour Unions", p.8.
  - 4) CA - E, 12/4/1918; EA, which began as the Indian Employees' Association - Employees' Association, First Annual Report, 1919-20, (Calcutta, n.d.). ABP, 22/8/1919.
  - 5) CRU - GB, "List of Labour Unions", p.7; LCA - ABP, 15/12/1920; PBEKS - ABP, 13/4/1921.
  - 6) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 & Kws. HWU - ABP, 13/2/1921.

in the non-factory category.<sup>1</sup>

Table 5.8 also shows that there were considerable variations in the activities of different groups of employees, which have been detailed in Table 5.9. This attempts to illustrate the chronology of union formation, a task which is complicated by a group of ten factory unions known only from police reports compiled in August 1921. Five of these were specifically connected with the Bengal Central Labour Federation and another four had similar names to those five, and to others associated with the BCLF.<sup>2</sup> On these grounds, and since the BCLF was primarily

TABLE 5.9: Half-yearly trends in trade union formation among different labour market groups, 1918-1922

year	period	employee group								TOTAL
		supervisory	subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	not known	
1918	Jan-Jun			1		1				2
	Jul-Dec	1								1
1919	Jan-Jun					1				1
	Jul-Dec			2				1		3
1920 <sup>a</sup>	Jan-Jun	2	2	8		4	1			17
	Jul-Dec		3	6	1	7	1	2		20
1921 <sup>b</sup>	Jan-Jun		3	5	19	9 <sup>c</sup>	3	2	3	44
	Jul-Dec		2	1	2	8 <sup>c</sup>	1	2		16
1922	Jan-Jun	1		5		3			1	10
	Jul-Dec					1				1
TOTAL		4	10	28	22	34	6	7	4	115
Date not known				2	2	1				5
TOTAL FORMED		4	10	30	24	35	6	7	4	120

Key: (a) excluding three unions (2 clerical, 1 factory) only known as formed in 1920  
 (b) excluding 2 unions (1 factory, 1 non-factory) only known as formed in 1921  
 (c) including 6 unions first recorded in September 1921

1) CTEU - GB, "List of Labour Unions", pp.8-9; CC&SU - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1215; Rickshawallas Association - E, 10/11/1921; United Labour Association (masons and builders) - S, 29/1/1920.

2) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs; see p.124 above.

active among factory workers in the early part of 1921<sup>1</sup> these nine unions have been assigned to the first half of 1921 in Table 5.9. Unfortunately this problem renders it impossible to construct a more detailed chronology of union formation.

In 1918-19 trade union formation was still sporadic and primarily involved the three 'white collar' groups, which continued to dominate union formation until late in 1920. The number of unions formed by the clerical group in particular rose considerably in 1920 and although non-factory employees began forming unions towards the end of that year, factory workers appear to have been virtually inactive. Union formation reached a peak in the first half of 1921 when approximately 43 new organizations were established, over half of which were factory workers' unions. The number of new non-factory unions also continued to grow in 1921, but unionization among the supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical groups declined sharply, or ceased altogether. In 1922 the level and pattern of union formation reverted to that of 1918-19 - clerical and non-factory groups were the most active, while factory employees appear not to have formed any new unions. The railway and mixed groups fit with the general trend, unionization increasing towards the end of 1920, and continuing throughout 1921. Overall the non-factory employees were responsible for forming the largest number of unions, followed by the clerical and then the factory groups.

Before other features of union formation in this period are discussed, the possibility that at least another 14 unions were established should be noted. These have been omitted from the tables because there is no evidence that these organizations were distinguished by their members from other informal types of committee, or that they actually functioned as unions. These reports were of the formation of "unions" by bill collectors and peons employed by Indian businessmen,<sup>2</sup> and by quay terminal labourers<sup>3</sup> in Calcutta; by labourers at Chandpur,<sup>4</sup> and labourers and menials at Madaripur (seven unions),<sup>5</sup> and a Santal coal miners' union at Raniganj.<sup>6</sup> No other information than these references has been found concerning these organizations.

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1) See pp 222-5.

2) GoI Home (Political), July 1920, Deposit 97.

3) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1229.

4) S, 14/5/1921.

5) S, 14/5/1921.

6) ABP, 16/11/1921.



The category of unions ending each year, given in Table 5.8, and expanded in Table 5.10, is statistically one of the least satisfactory, but has to be included both to illustrate the well known phenomenon of union demise, and to indicate the minimum number of organizations existing each year. The use of the calendar year boundary to classify demised unions is very unsatisfactory as when, for example, a union which functioned between January one year and December the next, and another which only existed between December one year and January the next, are placed in the same category. However, the lack of clear evidence for the cessation of activity on the part of unions (except for the few which amalgamated with other unions) precludes classifying organizations according to the actual length of time for which they functioned. These figures therefore are very tentative.

Table 5.8 reveals that the rate of union demise was indeed very high, amounting to just over 70% of the number formed in 1918-22, the largest number disappearing in 1921. Among the different labour market groups the supervisory and factory employees lost the same number of unions as they formed, while union demise was only slightly below average among clerical and non-factory employees, at 65.6% and 62.9% of the number of new organizations, respectively. This table thus confirms the high level of union demise among 'manual' workers, particularly the factory and non-factory groups, about which many remarks have been made,<sup>1</sup> but also reveals that this phenomenon was common to all sectors of the labour force.

Table 5.10 categorises these demised unions in relation to the year in which they were formed, differentiating between unions which disappeared in the same calendar year that they were formed, or in the following year, or at a later date. Bearing in mind the limitations of evidence for union demise already discussed, the distinction between the first two categories should not be given too much prominence, but the two categories considered together. Even if the 'next year' group were omitted, however, Table 5.10 shows that most demised unions ceased functioning within a few months of their formation. Not surprisingly

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1) See for example, "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1188; Mukhtar, Trade unionism and labour disputes, p.84; C.A. Myers & S. Kanappan, Industrial relations in India, (2nd ed., London, 1970), p.138; K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, "Some thoughts on Indian Labour", Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 3 (1), February 1923, p.25. (Ray Chaudhuri participated in union organization in this period).

TABLE 5.10: Trade union demise 1918-1922 in relation to the year formed

year		employee group							TOTAL
		supervisory	subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	
formed	ended								
1918	same			1					1
	next								0
	later								0
1919									0
1920	same	2	1	6 <sup>a</sup>	1	2 <sup>b</sup>			12
	next					1 <sup>c</sup>			1
	later					1 <sup>c</sup>			1
1921	same		3	2 <sup>b</sup>	19	14		1	42
	next		1	6 <sup>b</sup>	1	3			11
	later				1				1
1922	same			2 <sup>b</sup>		2			5
	next		2	2 <sup>b</sup>	2	1	1	3	11
	later	1		2		1			4
TOTAL		3	7	21	24	25	1	4	89
amalgamations				5		3			8
TOTAL ENDED		3	7	16	24	22	1	4	81

Key: (a) including 3 amalgamations  
 (b) including 1 amalgamation  
 (c) amalgamation

the peak period of union collapse was 1921, during which the most prominent groups were the factory and non-factory employees. One hypothesis concerning short-lived unions was that many of them were little more than strike committees.<sup>1</sup> Even if this were so, Tables 5.9 and 5.10 would still raise new problems insofar as the three 'white collar' groups rarely went on strike during the peak period of union formation and collapse. Besides, as has already been shown only three unions were reported solely in the context of a strike.<sup>2</sup> Clearly the reason for union collapse on the scale indicated by these tables is far more complex than existing accounts suggest.

Turning to the figures in Table 5.8 showing the number of unions existing in January each year, it is evident that an important qualitative

1) See footnote, p.132.

2) See Table 5.7, p.123.

change occurred in this period. The small number of organizations in existence at the beginning of 1918 or 1919 was augmented considerably in 1920-21, and thereafter there were at least 30 unions in existence at any one time.<sup>1</sup> The three 'white collar' groups dominated the group of relatively permanent unions, an interesting contrast to developments elsewhere in the world,<sup>2</sup> while of the 'manual' groups, factory workers' organization was very weak, and only non-factory workers managed to maintain any unions. Factory workers were hardly represented either in the mixed and railway groups of unions, unless railway workshops were singled out for special consideration. This however would be rather an artificial distinction since the railway workshop employees did not apparently organize themselves separately from other railwaymen in this period. The existence of a relatively large number of stable unions paved the way for the development of inter-union links and organization, which was initiated in 1920-21.<sup>3</sup>

#### Geographical dispersal

The occurrence of a significant amount of activity away from Calcutta and the adjacent factories along the River Hugli (called for convenience the Calcutta-Hugli region) is another new development.<sup>4</sup> Petitions were submitted, for example, by railway clerks at Saidpur and Kharagpur, and by Government clerks at Dacca and Darjeeling, while the East Indian Railway employees' petitions of April and May 1919 were drawn up by men based at Allahabad, in Bihar, and taken along the line to Asansol and Bengal proper.<sup>5</sup> The usual uncertainties concerning petition evidence

- 1) See Table 5.1, p.109.
- 2) Kelman, Labour in India, pp.239-40, and Buchanan, Development of capitalistic enterprise in India, pp.433, 442, noted this contrast, but it has received no attention in recent literature.
- 3) For details, see pp.219ff.
- 4) Few strikes and little trade union activity had been reported earlier from other parts of Bengal. These include: strikes by barbers at Pabna (Bengal Times, 31/7/1895), carriage drivers, Dacca (Bengal Times, 7/7/1897), Kharagpur railway workshop, September 1906 (Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.223), on the East Indian and Eastern Bengal railways in 1906 and 1907 (ibid., pp.313-27), and jute drummers at Sirajganj (Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, Confidential File 458 (1-16), 1907). The Railwaymen's Union (1907) spread to western Bengal (Sarkar, ibid., pp.215-22), and the Postal League (1908) was formed at Dacca (S.C. Sen to A.C. Banerji, A.C. Banerji Papers, File 127, Serial 331).
- 5) GB Financial, (Finance), May 1918, B 165-6 abstract; December 1919, B 101-2 abstract. ABP, 1/5/1918; S, 4, 16/5/1919, 20/7/1919.

limit further analysis of the geographical distribution of this form of trade unionism, but regional variations in strike and union formation patterns can easily be demonstrated, and reveal an otherwise hidden aspect of post-First World War events.

Table 5.11 illustrates the distribution of strikes between the Calcutta-Hugli region and other parts of Bengal, and shows that the overwhelming majority of strikes each year, and in each labour market group, began in the former area. The fact that most railway strikes began in the other parts of Bengal is hardly surprising given the nature of railways, and the fact that many lines had important workshops outside the Calcutta-Hugli region. The distribution of strikes in 1921 however clearly differed from the general post-War pattern, as the proportion of strikes starting outside the Calcutta-Hugli region rose to about

TABLE 5.11: Distribution of strikes between the Calcutta-Hugli region, and other parts of Bengal, 1918-21.

year	a r e a	employee groups							TOTAL
		subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non- factory	mixed	railway	not known	
1918	Calcutta-Hugli	1		12	7				21
	other						3		3
1919	Calcutta-Hugli	2	2	11	6		3		24
	other			1	2				3
1920	Calcutta-Hugli		2	86	31		2		121
	other (a)		1	13	8		4		26
1921	Calcutta-Hugli		2	41	36		6		85
	other			6	16	2	7		31
	not known							21	21
TOTAL	Calcutta-Hugli	3	6	150	80		11	1	251
	other		1	20	26	2	14		63
	not known							21	21

(a) including three strikes only reported as occurring before April 1920.

22.6% of the total, compared with only 18.7% for the whole 1918-21 period. This change was due principally to the higher proportion of non-factory strikes which began in other parts of Bengal, together with the increase in railway and mixed group strikes. In fact, while the overall level of strike activity fell in 1921, there was an increase in the number starting outside the Calcutta-Hugli region, and particularly among these three groups of employees. This phenomenon is further examined in Table 5.12, which also details the late 1920 strike outbreak.

Despite the small number of strikes which took place outside the Calcutta-Hugli area, the increased contribution of these districts to

**TABLE 5.12:** Distribution of strikes between the Calcutta-Hugli area and other parts of Bengal, October 1920 to July 1921

month	area	employee groups					TOTAL
		clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	
1920							
Oct	Calcutta-Hugli		9	3		1	13
	- other					2	2
Nov	Calcutta-Hugli		28	11			39
	- other		2	1			3
Dec	Calcutta-Hugli		21	6			27
	- other		11	4		1	16
1921							
Jan	Calcutta-Hugli	1	4	7			12
	- other		1	1			2
Feb	Calcutta-Hugli		8	2		3	13
	- other			2		1	3
Mar	Calcutta-Hugli	1	4	1		1	7
	- other			2		1	3
Apr	Calcutta-Hugli		7	1 <sup>a</sup>			8
	- other				1	1	2
May	Calcutta-Hugli		3	9 <sup>b</sup>			12
	- other		1	2	1	1	5
Jun	Calcutta-Hugli		2 <sup>c</sup>	3		1	6
	- other		1	3			4
Jul	Calcutta-Hugli		3	3			6
	- other		1	1		1	3

Key: (a) attributed; actual place not known  
 (b) three attributed; actual place not known  
 (c) two attributed; actual place not known

Bengal's strike total in 1921 is evident from these figures. The Calcutta-Hugli area accounted for more than 81% of strikes starting each month in October and November 1920, and January 1921, but for less than this proportion in December 1920, and February-July 1921.<sup>1</sup> (In December 1920, February, June and July 1921, the Calcutta-Hugli proportion fell to less than 70%). As indicated in Table 5.11, the main reason for this change was the increased number of railwaymen's and mixed employee groups' strikes, and the steady level of non-factory strikes which began in 'other' parts of Bengal. Table 5.12 also reveals the complex distribution of strike activity during the November-December 1920 peak. In November 1920 the over whelming majority of strikes began in the Calcutta-Hugli area, but in December both the actual and proportionate contribution of this area fell. Factory employees continued to engage in the largest number of strikes, but those in the Calcutta-Hugli region were less active than in November, while those in other parts of Bengal suddenly became more active.

The distribution of strikes in the other parts of Bengal is indicated by Table 5.13 and Figure 5.1.<sup>2</sup> As has been shown, the number of strikes outside the Calcutta-Hugli area was negligible in 1918-19, but increased in 1920 and even more so in 1921. In 1920 most of these strikes occurred in western districts of Bengal, particularly at Raniganj where eleven factory workers' strikes began in December.<sup>3</sup> In contrast the increase in non-factory strike engagement in 1921 clearly took place mainly in eastern districts, where small numbers of strikes occurred at widely scattered places. The second of two 'mixed' group general strikes also took place in eastern Bengal at this time, and almost certainly provided the context in which the other relatively isolated groups of employees engaged in strikes.

Trade unions were also formed outside the Calcutta-Hugli area, but analysis of their distribution is complicated by the existence

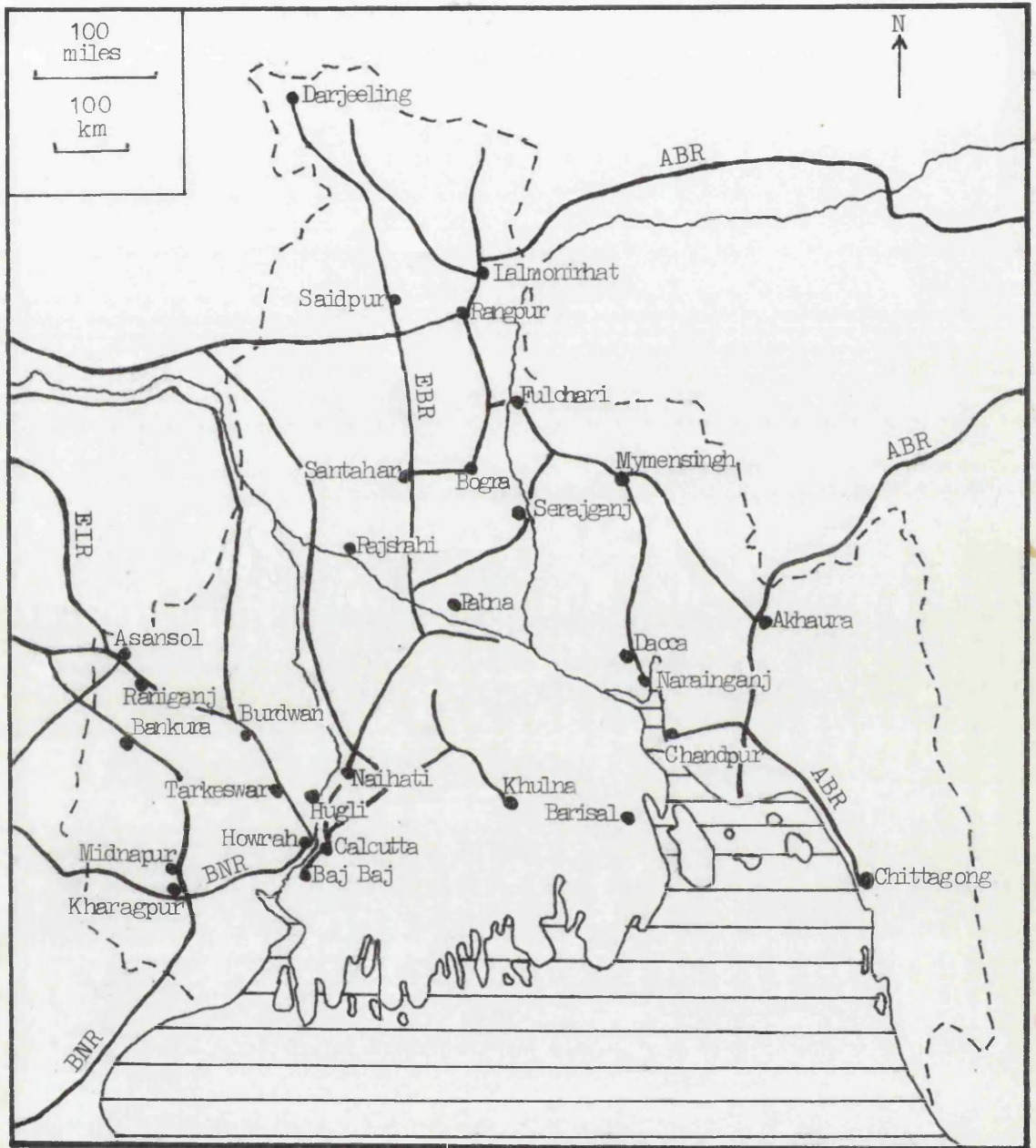
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- 1) If the 21 'area not known' strikes had occurred in the Calcutta-Hugli region, then an average of 81.3% of all strikes starting in 1918-21 would have begun there - see Table 5.11.
  - 2) See pp.138 and 139 respectively.
  - 3) One strike each in engineering, paper, and pottery factories, and in a tannery, and seven strikes in coal mines - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1236-9. (Coal mine strikes were simply reported as being in Burdwan, and have been presumed to have occurred in the vicinity of Raniganj, where most mines were situated). See also E, 15/3/1921.

**TABLE 5.13:** Detailed occurrence of strikes outside the Calcutta-Hugli area, 1918-1921

year	1918	1919	1920				1921				TOTAL	
employee groups	r	f nf	c	f	nf	r	f	nf	m	r	STRIKES	
a r e a												
EASTERN												
- general									1		1	
Akhaura							1				1	
Barisal		1	1	1			1				4	
Bogra							1				1	
Chandpur					1		1			1	3	
Chittagong								1			1	
Dacca					1					1	2	
Fulchari							1				1	
Khulna							3				3	
Mymensingh							1				1	
Narainganj										1	1	
Pabna					1						1	
Rajshahi					2						2	
Rakakibazar								1			1	
Rangpur							1				1	
Saidpur										1	1	
Santahar								1			1	
WESTERN												
Asansol								1		2	3	
Bankura						1					1	
Burdwan*							1				1	
Kharaipur	2					3	1			1	7	
Midnapur					1						1	
Raniganj		1		12	2		3	1			19	
Tarakeswar										1	1	
NORTHERN												
Darjeeling*	1		1					2			4	
TOTAL-Eastern			1	1	5		1	12	2	3	26	
-Western	2	1		12	3	4	5	2		4	33	
-Northern	1		1					2			4	
TOTAL	3	1	2	1	13	8	4	6	16	2	7	63

Key: \* - district report only  
c - clerical employees  
f - factory employees  
nf - non-factory employees  
m - mixed group employees  
r - railway employees

FIGURE 5.1: Sketch map of Bengal, c.1920, showing main railway lines, and places mentioned in the text



Key: ABR - Assam Bengal Railway  
BNR - Bengal Nagpur Railway  
EIR - East Indian Railway  
EBR - Eastern Bengal Railway

The Calcutta-Hugli industrial region extends from Naihati to Baj Baj, including Hugli and Howrah.



of organizations with branches in different parts of Bengal, and other unions which probably had members throughout the province, but only one formal body. The All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association and the Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association, for example were based in Calcutta, but had branches at district and often also at lower levels.<sup>1</sup> The Kanchrapara Labour Union may also have had branches in both the Kanchrapara and Saidpur railway workshops,<sup>2</sup> while the Calcutta based Inland Seamen's and Flat Employees' Union seems to have had some organization among ships' crews in eastern Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Unions of an all-India character, such as the Indian Civil Servants' Association, or the Indian Telegraph Association, presumably drew members from wherever they were employed throughout the province. In addition, however, there were several unions which appear to have functioned entirely outside the Calcutta-Hugli area. Their date of formation, area, and labour market group, is indicated in Table 5.14.<sup>4</sup>

There appears to be a close parallel between the patterns of union formation and strike activity in these areas, unlike in Bengal as a whole. Thus more unions were formed in 1921 than in 1920, and most of these were formed in eastern districts by non-factory employees. The extent of unionization among these groups would be even more noticeable if five eastern Bengal unions only known from a list published in August 1923 could be ascribed to either 1921 or 1922.<sup>5</sup> The number of railway unions is also comparatively high, even if organizations such as the Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union were to be excluded. In spite of the fact that all the other major railway lines had offices in Calcutta, unions on those lines tended to be based in other parts of Bengal. The Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association, for example, was

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- 1) The Calcutta Government School Teachers' Association was established as a branch of the ABGSTA - The Collegian, XV (9), May 1921, p.233 - for example, while Labour, vol.1, 1921, passim reported the activities of BPRMSA branches throughout Bengal.
  - 2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1261. GoI Home (Political), June 1921, Deposit 63, stated that the KLU leader had formed a union at Saidpur, but this was not confirmed by a detailed police report of a strike there - Confidential, GB Political, File 144, 1921.
  - 3) See for example, E, 20/1/1921, 2,10/6/1921. The Lascars' Association and the Serangs' Association, referred to in reports of the eastern Bengal steamer strikes in 1921 - GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 301-52 (actual file) - are presumed to be parts of the ISFEU since the same man was president of all three organizations - see Appendix III.
  - 4) See p.141.
  - 5) Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, XIII, August 1921, pp.67-9.

**TABLE 5.14:** Trade union formation outside the Calcutta-Hugli area (excluding branches of provincial unions, and federations), 1920-1921.

employee groups	1920			1921						
	factory	railway	TOTAL	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	not known	TOTAL
Western:										
Raniganj	1		1		3 <sup>a</sup>			1	1	5 <sup>a</sup>
other		1	1	1						1
Eastern										
Chittagong					1	1	1 <sup>b</sup>			3
other		1	1			4		1	1	7 <sup>c</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>

- Key: (a) excluding an anonymous coal miners' union formed in November 1921  
 (b) The Chittagong Labour Association, although this could have been the same as the Chittagong Central Labour Union, a federation - see Appendix III  
 (c) excluding 8 anonymous non-factory unions formed in May 1921.

based at Lalmonirhat in north-eastern Bengal, the Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union at Kharagpur, and the East Indian Railway Labour Association at Asansol.<sup>1</sup>

Results

Before concluding this chapter it is useful to provide an indication of the extent to which employees were able to achieve their immediate demands by engaging in trade unionism. Unfortunately this is limited by the fact that clear-cut results were only reported in the case of strike action, and then not for every strike. By contrast, the outcome of petitioning or other less militant forms of trade unionism was rarely reported, and sometimes occurred so long after the initiation of activity as to render extremely problematic the question of the relationship between results (or the anticipation of results) and engagement in trade unionism.<sup>2</sup>

1) ABREU - at Chittagong (E, 10/5/1921); ENRILU - at Kharagpur (ABP, 19/11/1920); EIRILA - E, 23/12/1921; EBRIEA - Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference. (Second Session - 1923) at Santahar, (Lalmonirhat, 1923).  
 2) See, for example, pp. 237, 241-2.

Strikes have been classed into a 'successful' category if any or all of the workers' demands were conceded; 'result deferred' when a strike ended on the promise that demands would be examined (but the eventual outcome was not reported); 'failure' if nothing at all was achieved; and 'not known' where no other type of outcome was recorded. Individual strike reports have been used except for 1921 when such a high percentage of them fell into the 'not known' category that it was felt more useful to reproduce official strike result data.

TABLE 5.15: Strike outcome in each quarter, 1918-1921<sup>1</sup>

period	success- ful	result deferred	failed	in- definite	not known	T O T A L	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.
1918							
Jan-Mar	-	-	28.6	-	71.4	100.0	7
Apr-June	-	-	12.5	-	87.5	100.0	8
Jul-Sept	80.0	-	-	-	20.0	100.0	5
Oct-Dec	25.0	25.0	-	-	50.0	100.0	4
1919							
Jan-Mar	-	-	28.6	-	71.4	100.0	7
Apr-June	33.3	-	16.7	-	50.0	100.0	6
Jul-Sept	16.7	-	16.7	-	66.7	100.0	6
Oct-Dec	12.5	12.5	25.0	-	50.0	100.0	8
1920							
Jan-Mar	50.0	16.7	11.1	-	22.2	100.0	18
Apr-June	25.0	-	12.5	-	62.5	100.0	8
Jul-Sept	50.0	5.6	16.7	-	27.8	100.0	18
Oct-Dec	54.0	7.0	26.0	-	13.0	100.0	100
1921							
Jan-Mar	60.9	-	34.8	-	4.3	100.0	46
Apr-June	53.3	-	26.7	20.0	-	100.0	15
Jul-Sept	43.3	-	36.7	20.0	-	100.0	30
Oct-Dec	14.3	-	80.0	5.7	-	100.0	35

- 1) Sources: 1918-20 - individual strike reports (see p.113, footnote 4); 1921 - Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 1, 1921, pp.205, 358, 501; vol.2, 1922, p.104. The quarterly figures given in these tables differ from those given on p.114, which are to be preferred. Analysis of individual reports for 1921 gave the following results:

	success- ful	deferred	failed	in- definite	not known	T O T A L	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	No.
Jan-Mar	27.5	15.0	35.0	-	22.5	100.0	40
Apr-June	16.2	10.8	16.2	2.7	54.1	100.0	37
Jul-Sept	9.5	-	19.0	4.8	66.7	100.0	21
Oct-Dec	2.6	2.6	15.4	-	79.5	100.0	39

(here 'indefinite' includes sympathy strikes only).

The official tables distinguished between 'successful' and 'partially successful' strikes, but these categories have been amalgamated in Table 5.15 to facilitate comparison with the classification of individual strike results. A category labelled 'indefinite' also figured in the official tables, which appears to contain some strikes which ended on the promise that grievances would be considered in future, and others for which no result was reported.

The small number of strikes in 1918 and 1919, and the high percentage of those for which no outcome was reported, means that little can be said about those two years, or trends over the whole period. In 1920 the success rate seems to have been fairly consistently high, a pattern which continued in the first half of 1921. However, it appears that the proportion of failures began to increase from the second half of 1921 until by the end of the year nearly all strikes were unsuccessful. This suggests that success rates were highest when the largest number of strikes took place, and fell in 1921 as the level of engagement in strike action declined.

### Conclusions

Four phases of activity can be detected in the post-First World War period. Between early 1918 and late 1919 there was some activity among employees in all sections of the labour market - petitioning and union formation among the supervisory grades, petitioning and strikes among subordinate supervisory and factory employees, and all three types of trade unionism among the clerical and railway groups. The number of strikes and new unions formed was low and activity sporadic, but was clearly distinguishable from the 1909-17 period. Factory workers were responsible for most of the strikes, followed by employees in non-factory occupations, while most unions were formed by different groups of 'white collar' employees.

Towards the end of 1919 strikes became more frequent, and continued to occur at a slightly higher level until October 1920. Factory employees were again responsible for most of the strikes, and as before they did not form any unions.<sup>1</sup> Many unions were established in the first half of 1920, and 'white collar' employees were

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1) The only factory union formed in 1920, the Barakar Labour Association, was not established until November - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1223.

responsible for 70% of these new organizations. Among 'white collar' workers, only printers engaged in strikes in this period. Non-factory employees were the only group to engage in strikes and unionization, in both fields of which they were more active than previously. These increases in strikes and unionization came about both by more activity on the part of groups which had previously been active, and the adoption (in addition to petitions) of these forms of trade unionism by new groups of employees.

The most remarkable developments did not occur until the third phase, between late October 1920 and May-June 1921, during which some 58 new unions were formed, and 162 strikes began.<sup>1</sup> Extremely complex developments occurred in this phase to understand which it is necessary to look at each group of employees in turn.

Factory employees were primarily responsible for the peak level of strikes which occurred in November and December 1920, contributing 62 of the 85 strikes which began in those two months. This was brought about not only by more activity on the part of previously active groups, and the adoption of strikes by new employees, but also by the spread of factory strikes throughout Bengal. Practically all the factory strikes (as well as those of other groups) which took place prior to December 1920 had been in the Calcutta-Hugli region, but in December 1920, factory workers there were less active than in the previous month while those at Raniganj suddenly engaged in a number of strikes.

Factory workers' strike propensity collapsed as suddenly as it had risen as from January 1921 it returned to the pre-October 1920 levels. However, the first half of 1921 saw the greatest number of unions formed within a short period, of which nearly half were among factory workers. Most of these unions were formed in the Calcutta-Hugli region, but some were established in other parts of Bengal. It would thus seem that factory workers suddenly took to striking on a large scale towards the end of 1920, and then with equal rapidity ceased striking, and formed a number of unions - which in turn collapsed after a few months.

The most active group after factory employees in the October 1920 to June 1921 period was that of non-factory workers. Their pattern of

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1) Strike and union formation figures for October 1920 to June 1921 inclusive.

activity followed a similar pattern to that of the factory workers, though at a reduced level - a peak of strike activity in November-December 1920 was followed by a slight decline early in 1921, during which the number of new non-factory unions rose. After this, however, non-factory workers' behaviour pattern differed from that of factory workers, as indicated by the resurgence of strikes in May 1921, and the fact that for the first time they engaged in more strikes than factory workers. Non-factory strike levels thus declined at a slower rate than those of factory workers, the reason apparently being that non-factory employees throughout many districts of eastern Bengal became active for the first time.

Another development which began in the third phase and continued into the next one, was of heightened and regular activity on the part of railwaymen. They formed several unions late in 1920 and early in 1921 (having previously formed one in 1919), and regularly engaged in strikes in 1921. In contrast the 'white collar' groups of employees seem to have been less active after October 1920, although members of the clerical and subordinate supervisory groups did continue to establish new unions. However, against this must be placed the fact of the continued functioning of many of the unions established early in 1920 - the 'white collar' groups accounted for nearly 60% of the unions which existed at the beginning of 1921.

The last phase, prior to the establishment of the Bengal Trade Unions Federation in April 1922, is less thoroughly documented, particularly as regards strike activity in the last quarter of 1921, and the labour market breakdown of strikes in 1922. Hence we can only note that strike levels on the whole continued to fall, apart from a brief respite in the last quarter of 1921. The evidence from union statistics suggests a return to pre-October 1920 forms and levels of activity on the part of factory workers, practically all of whose unions disappeared before the end of 1921. This 'retreat' was paralleled by a sharp fall in their propensity to strike, and strike success rate. Many other groups of workers also failed to consolidate their unions, but clerical workers were on the whole more successful at maintaining their unions' existence. They, together with railway employees, and those who participated in a number of 'mixed' group unions (which may often have been dominated by

clerical groups), and the non-factory employees, made up the bulk of the unions existing at the beginning of 1922. This development, as well as the formation of the BTUF, which began to assist other employees to organize, and linked unions in Bengal to those in other parts of India, marked a qualitative change compared with the situation prior to 1918. The following chapters will attempt to account for the major developments of this period, as well as giving more detailed descriptions of some strikes and union activities.

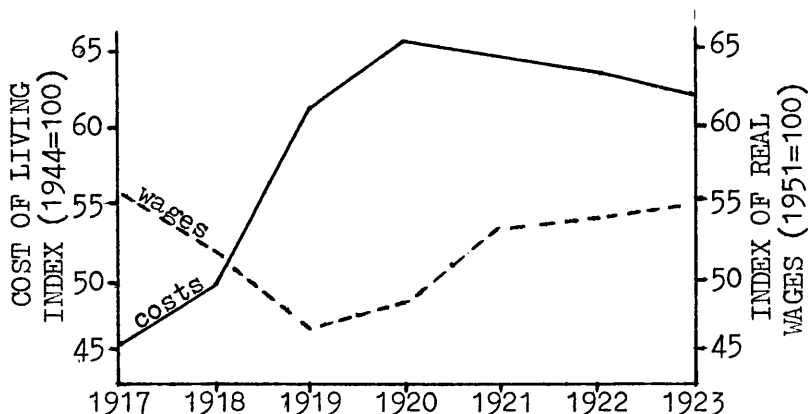
CHAPTER 6: Economic conditions and changing processes of agitation

Accounts of post-First World War trade unionism in Bengal consist primarily of a selective review of strikes and trade union data. Similarly, explanations of developments have largely been limited to lists of factors which it is asserted were responsible for the upsurge of activity, and no attempt has been made to examine how the different factors actually influenced developments. Most commentators have identified three interrelated groups of factors - the wartime and post-war economic situation, post-war political developments, and new or emerging forms of consciousness among employees - as having brought about the post-war upsurge of activity.<sup>1</sup> The first and third groups of factors will form the focus of this chapter, while the relationship between trade unionism and political events will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Economic hardships and changing consciousness

The main economic factor held to have caused the post-war upsurge of trade unionism was the sharp rise in prices which, combined with little or no increase in wages, entailed a decline in most employees' living standards during and immediately after the war. Mukherji's calculations clearly show that living costs rose sharply from 1918 to 1920, while the real wages of jute mill operatives, and probably factory workers as a whole, fell, at least until 1921.<sup>2</sup>

FIGURE 6.1: Calcutta working class cost of living index, and real wages of jute factory workers, 1917-1923



1) See for example, Karnik, Strikes in India, pp.60-61; Mathur & Mathur, Trade union movement in India, pp.15-16; Saha, History of the working class movement, pp.28-36; Singh, "Trade union movement", pp.571-2.

2) Mukherji, "Trends in real wages in the jute textile industry", pp.66-7.



No detailed analysis of cost of living fluctuations has been made, and for these we have to rely on contemporary accounts. References to the high prices of fire-wood, rice, cloth, kerosine and salt began appearing in newspapers between July and September 1918, suggesting that price rises only began to assume a serious proportion towards the latter half of 1918.<sup>1</sup> Rice prices rose steadily from August 1918 and had nearly doubled in the year to May 1919.<sup>2</sup> The first emergency rice price control measures were introduced in May 1919 at Darjeeling, and later that year in parts of the Calcutta-Hugli area, and some eastern districts of Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Prices appear to have steadied or even fallen slightly around the beginning of 1920, but then rose steeply towards the end of that year, before falling again early in 1921. Prices rose again in the winter of 1921-2, though not to the same extent as in 1918-20, and then fell more or less continuously until the late 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

Factory workers' real wages moved, on average, in a contrary direction to the cost of living, falling rapidly despite nominal increases totalling 40% on pre-war rates in 1918-20, and only rose after the end of 1920.<sup>5</sup> Some similar groups of employees, such as Government office menials, must have fared considerably worse than factory workers for although they received a grain price compensation allowance of Re 1 per month between October 1918 and June 1921, their basic pay scale remained unchanged until July 1921.<sup>6</sup> Other workers such as police constables also had to survive on the same wage rates for most of the period prices were rising, only receiving wage increases in October 1920.<sup>7</sup>

It should also be noted that sections of 'white collar' employees, particularly in the clerical group, must have suffered a considerable deterioration in their living standards between the closing months

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- 1) ABP, 20/7/1918; E, 21/9/1919.
  - 2) S, 30/5/1919.
  - 3) E, 16/5/1919, 24,26,29/7/1919, 25/8/1919, 3,12,13/9/1919; The Catholic Herald of India, 3/9/1919, pp.713-4 (courtesy Pauline Rule).
  - 4) "Industrial disputes in India 1921-1928", pp.2-8. The Calcutta working class cost of living index fell almost continuously from 1920 to 1940 - Mukherji, "Trends in real wages in the jute textile industry", pp.66-7.
  - 5) Mukherji, ibid.
  - 6) See consecutive monthly renewal notices, Calcutta Gazette, I, 30/10/1918, p.1518, to ibid., 20/7/1921, p.1205. Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 24/8/1921, pp.1709-24.
  - 7) S, 19/10/1920.

of the war, and 1921-2. The only general increase given during the war was the grant of 5% and 10% bonuses in 1917 and 1918 to employees in the Government of India, Calcutta Port Commission, and railway offices, but not to Bengal Government employees.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the war proposals for improving the imperial and provincial services' conditions were issued, following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Public Services, published in 1917. As a result, Indian Education Service officers received an interim pay award in June 1919, Public Works' Department and railway engineers and Indian Medical Service officers' pay was increased in August, and other announcements followed concerning the Indian Civil Service (February 1920), Indian Education Service (March 1920), and Imperial Police Service (April 1920).<sup>2</sup>

By the middle of 1920 most Government 'white collar' employees at the imperial (all India) and provincial levels had received either an interim or a permanent pay increase, together with significant improvements in promotion prospects and pay structure. Clerical employees in the railways and some Government of India offices, together with the Bengal Secretariat, had also received pay awards.<sup>3</sup> However, the only concession Bengal Government clerks had received was the extension in June 1919 of the Re.1 monthly grain compensation allowance.<sup>4</sup> As late as September 1919 it appears that the Bengal Government had no plans to revise the wages and conditions of its clerical employees, as a petition from Intelligence Bureau clerks for higher pay was rejected on the grounds that no exceptions could be made.<sup>5</sup> The question of improving their conditions was only taken up in June 1920, after which temporary allowances of between 15% and 30% were granted. An enquiry was set up to examine the issue of making permanent changes in pay and conditions shortly afterwards, which finally issued its report in January 1922.<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Calcutta Gazette IA, 4/8/1920, pp.679-80; ABP, 4/2/1918; E, 24/1/1918, 1/3/1918; S, 23/11/1918, 10/4/1919, 21/5/1919.
- 2) Calcutta Gazette I, 12/11/1919, p.1783; Calcutta Gazette IA, 13/8/1919, pp.615-7; 3/3/1920, pp.255-62; 12/5/1920, pp.397-408. Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 26/2/1919, pp.209-12; 12/3/1919, pp.279, 287-8. E, 30/10/1918, 20/11/1918, 20,28/2/1919, 14/5/1919, 6/8/1919, 23/6/1920. S, 1/4/1920. The Collegian, XIII (8), April 1920, p.272.
- 3) E.g., Post Office clerks - IO File PW 151/23 (IOL&R: L/PWD/6/1126); Bengal Secretariat - S, 1/4/1920; railways - ABP, 30/6/1919, 30/9/1919.
- 4) GoI Home (Establishments), June 1919, A 93-5.
- 5) GB Political, September 1919, B 189-90 (actual file).
- 6) S, 9/9/1920; ABP, 18/11/1920; S, 5/7/1921. GB Financial (Finance), January 1922, A 45.

Sub-assistant surgeons, and members of the subordinate civil services, received pay increases in July 1921,<sup>1</sup> but teachers had to wait until March 1922 before permanent improvements in their pay and conditions were announced, following another enquiry initiated in 1920.<sup>2</sup>

Clerks in the private sector appear to have fared slightly better than their Government colleagues since many firms granted war or victory bonuses, and pay awards were made in 1919 and 1920.<sup>3</sup> In July 1921 it was reported that these clerks had on average received increases of between 40% and 50% over pre-war rates, although this cannot have been much compensation in view of their calculation that living costs had risen by 125% in the two years to May 1920.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear therefore that practically all groups of employees suffered considerable economic hardship, particularly up to 1920-21, and for many 'white collar' employees, up to 1922. However, it is not immediately apparent how this had influenced workers' behaviour. Figure 6.1 shows that the working class cost of living began to rise from 1917-18, and to fall from 1920, but the major upsurge in trade unionism did not occur until 1920-21. Price rises in 1917-19 apparently produced little reaction from employees, and though some clerical workers did form unions early in 1920, the main outbreak of strikes and unionization only came after two-and-a-half years of rising prices, and took place at a time when living costs were actually falling. It is possible that there was a massive increase in petitioning in 1918-19 which has not been adequately measured, but even if this was so, the problem would merely require rephrasing - why was there a sudden change in the forms of trade unionism in 1920-21?

Some authors have suggested that the post-War economic hardships engendered the development of a new "labour" or "class" consciousness which resulted in the upsurge of agitation and organization. However, since the strikes and unions are themselves the principle evidence for

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1) S, 14/7/1921. Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 27/7/1921, pp. 1585-6.

2) GB Education (Education), December 1922, A 36-42.

3) ABP, 20/3/1918, 2/4/1918, 17/7/1919; E, 23/2/1918, 12/10/1918, 22/11/1918, 3/12/1918, 17/7/1919; S, 10/12/1919, 5/7/1921.

4) S, 5/7/1921. ABP, 25/5/1920 - the calculation was made by the Employees' Association, a private sector clerks' union.

such new forms of consciousness, these arguments are tautological.<sup>1</sup> Other authors and contemporary accounts have identified a more general change in outlook and behaviour, "an impulse to self-assertion" as the Bengalee expressed it, arising from the overall wartime and post-War changes, which contributed to the upsurge of trade unionism.<sup>2</sup> Among factors said to have stimulated this mood of self-assertion were ideas brought back to India by demobilised soldiers, news of strikes elsewhere in the world, the Russian revolution, and post-War labour shortages.<sup>3</sup> While each of these factors deserves some consideration, the central problem to which no account has been addressed is that of the way in which any or all of these factors actually influenced workers' behaviour. Rather therefore than discussing each of these factors in turn, it is preferable to examine the actual processes through which different groups of employees passed prior to striking or forming unions.

#### Railwaymen

Railway employees received some protection against increases in the cost of living insofar as all staff received a 5% bonus in 1917, "in consideration of the services for continuous heavy traffic under war conditions, and the high prices". In November 1918 the bonus was increased to 10% for people earning less than Rs.70 a month, and this was renewed as late as May 1919, shortly before being replaced by permanent salary increases.<sup>4</sup> However, despite these measures, railwaymen established a union, the Railway Workmen's Association, by the end of 1919.

In 1918 letters in the press show that the bonuses were regarded as unsatisfactory since they did not match the price rises, while petitions were submitted dealing with pay, appointments, promotions, and several

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- 1) See, for example, Mathur, Indian working class movement, p.19; C.E. Low, "India and the Washington Conference", International Labour Review, V (1), January 1922, p.10.
  - 2) Bengalee, 17/10/1920, quoted in Saha, History of the working class movement, p.28; Karnik, Strikes in India, p.61; Mukhtar, Trade unionism and labour disputes in India, p.89; Punekar, "Trade union movement in India", p.392.
  - 3) Mathur & Mathur, Trade union movement in India, p.16; Mukhtar, Trade unionism and labour disputes, p.89; Saha, History of the working class movement, p.34; Sen, Working class of India, pp.131-2; Singh, "Trade union movement", pp.571-2; M.L. Sircar, "Trade union movement in India", Sriharsha VII (1), June 1939, p.61.
  - 4) E, 24/1/1918, 10/3/1919 (Annual Financial Supplement); S, 23/11/1918, 4/5/1919.

other questions, but there seems to have been little or no other agitation in 1918.<sup>1</sup> Kharagpur railway workshop employees did strike over high prices in October and November 1918, but this action, and petitioning by clerks in January and February 1919,<sup>2</sup> seem to have been relatively isolated localised events compared to those surrounding the formation of the Railway Workmen's Association (RWA) in 1919.

This process appears to have originated with a series of meetings and other activity among East Indian Railway employees at Allahabad, in Bihar, and Asansol, in April and May 1919. Early in April intelligence officers intercepted unofficial telegraph messages which were being exchanged between major railway centres in northern and eastern India, which apparently indicated that an attempt would be made to hold a general strike on 14 April. This was to begin on receipt of the message "Rowlatt", but apart from a few small strikes in northern India, nothing came of this alleged plan.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the authorities in Bengal sent troops to Asansol at about this time, one journal subsequently reporting that this was to counter the threat of a strike by Anglo-Indian and Indian railwaymen.<sup>4</sup> Although it seems unlikely that Anglo-Indians would have participated in a strike which appears to have had nationalist overtones in its organization<sup>5</sup> all these reports together clearly indicate that a general state of agitation existed among all groups of railwaymen by early 1919.

The fortnightly intelligence reports on political events in Bengal for the second half of April 1919 made no mention of the general strike threat, but did report that European and Indian railwaymen on the East Indian Railway (EIR) were signing a petition seeking "substantial" wage rises and the establishment of a conciliation board to review their grievances. Indian railwaymen on the same line also submitted a petition

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- 1) ABP, 22/1/1918, 1/5/1918.
  - 2) Kharagpur strike - S, 8/11/1918-15/12/1918; E, 6/11/1918-23/12/1918; ABP, 6/11/1918-23/12/1918. Petitions - E, 31/1/1919, 20/12/1919.
  - 3) Confidential, GoI Home (Political), October 1919, B 398-420 & KWs (actual file).
  - 4) E, 16/4/1919. The Pioneer, 1/5/1919 (an Allahabad newspaper) reported that penalties under the Defence of India Act had been imposed on railwaymen if they disregarded their duties under a new rule promulgated at about this time. The Catholic Herald of India, 7/5/1919, p.358 (reference courtesy of Pauline Rule) reported that troops had been sent to Asansol.
  - 5) Nationalist opposition to the proposed Rowlatt Bills reached its peak in April 1919 (see e.g. the reports in IO File JP 2200/19, IOL&R: L/PJ/6/1583), and the use of the word "Rowlatt" implies nationalist involvement.

before the end of the month in which they sought a 40% pay rise to meet rising prices.<sup>1</sup> The first petition referred to appears to be the one submitted by some 6000 railwaymen<sup>2</sup> to the EIR Agent (manager) towards the end of April, which demanded the setting up of a conciliation board, 30% pay rises for employees earning more than Rs.50 a month, and 50% increases for those on lower salaries. The text of this petition provides useful information about railwaymen's attitudes and arguments at this stage.

The petitioners began by claiming that in bringing their grievances to the company's notice they were motivated by loyalty since the very existence of grievances militated against the company's interests. Nevertheless they also reminded the authorities of "the fact that they have worked faithfully and well for the Company, especially during the period of the war when work increased and the staff was depleted." Four "causes of discontent" were given - the "100 per cent" rise in the cost of living while wage rates had remained unchanged for many years; the need for a living wage; the fact that other services had received pay increases; and, the need for incomes sufficient to meet the costs of educating their children to enable them to be better qualified to hold railway jobs in future. The demand for higher pay was prefaced with the remark that they only sought such increases as to enable them "to live fairly and out of debt", and the petition concluded with a statement that since their claim was "sound and reasonable ... they expect that you will be pleased to consider it with that fairness to which they are entitled by reason of their past services." The petitioners also demanded that a conciliation board should be established, claiming that this has been promised long ago. They also noted, in apparent reference to strikes in Britain, that railwaymen there had gone to great length to secure better conditions, and they trusted that they "will not be constrained to any similar action and are prepared to exhaust every constitutional means to arrive at a peaceful settlement."<sup>3</sup>

The EIR manager seems to have taken up the question of revising

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- 1) GoI Home (Political), July 1919, Deposit 47. Towards the end of May 1919 the EIR Agent stated that 615 petitions, including the one discussed below, had been received - ABP, 23/5/1919.
  - 2) A figure claimed by one of the organizers - Pioneer, 19/5/1919.
  - 3) Pioneer, 10/4/1919; ABP, 10/5/1919. (Also see Appendix I).

wages immediately on receipt of this petition, going to discuss the issue with the Railway Board at Simla on 2 May. He returned a week later and issued a statement that he would soon be consulting with the employees. The Eastern Bengal Railway (EBR) management issued a similar notice at about the same time.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, employees on the EIR proceeded to organize a meeting at Allahabad to discuss further activity over their petition demands.

The meeting, held on 15 May, was attended by European, Anglo-Indian and Indian "delegates" from "nearly every district", and reports show that the men had appointed a secretary (C.D. Ross), and a legal advisor (R.K. Sorabji), although they do not appear to have formally established a union.<sup>2</sup> Sorabji's speech to the meeting disclaimed any connection with contemporary political activities - the meeting "was in no way an agitation meeting and the movement had nothing political about it." He continued by urging that in view of the war with Afghanistan it was their duty to avoid embarrassing the Government even though price rises, and the need to educate their children, were sound reasons why higher pay should be given. He also argued that better pay would ensure better performance at work, which could only be in the interests of both the railway company and the Government.

It was, therefore, their duty, not by agitation, not by hampering the public, but by every constitutional method to place their demands before the Company.

The resolutions passed at the meeting included a pledge of loyalty to the Crown, a reiteration of their demands, and a pledge affirming their desire to "exhaust every reasonable method of pressing their claims." They also decided that the Agent should consult men of their choosing, not people chosen by the Company's officers,<sup>3</sup>

The men's deputation travelled to Calcutta five days later and met the Agent amid rumours of an incipient strike. They reported back that the Agent had recommended pay increases of 10% (plus a 20% allowance) for men earning Rs.51 a month or more, and 50% increases for those on smaller wages, and that the authorities would open stores to sell basic foodstuffs at controlled prices to low paid employees.

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- 1) Pioneer, 7/5/1919, 18/5/1919; S, 11, 15/5/1919.
  - 2) C.D. Ross later welcomed the delegates to the RWA inaugural conference (Pioneer, 19/12/1919), and was active in the union's Howrah branch at the latest by May 1920 (ABP, 22/5/1920), indicating the involvement of railwaymen from Bengal at this early stage.
  - 3) E, 16/5/1919.

The question of the formation of a conciliation board was to be held pending for the present.<sup>1</sup>

In the event the actual pay rises granted were considerably less than these proposals - 35% for men earning less than Rs.30 a month; 30% for those earning Rs.31-100, 25% for those on Rs.101-200, and 20% for men earning up to Rs.300. The war bonuses were however to be withdrawn as these changes were implemented.<sup>2</sup> Despite the hollowness of their victory the next EIR men's meeting, held on 10 July, centred on making a presentation to Sorabji in recognition of his services, and not on planning further agitation. Nevertheless, Sorabji's speech sounded a note of warning. He drew attention to the extremely long hours many men worked, blaming these conditions for a recent spate of accidents, and suggested that money would be better spent on improving those conditions rather than repairing damage after accidents. He again stressed the men's moderation - "They simply wanted a fair wage to meet the increased cost of living" - contrasting their attitude to that of the English railwaymen. The fact that the recent changes had even led to a reduction in some grades' income was also noted - someone who had previously received Rs.11-8 only received Rs.10 a month when the allowances had been withdrawn, and the percentage increase added.<sup>3</sup>

Although no plans appear to have been made at this stage for further action, the inadequacy of the pay award, and the exclusion of temporary employees from any benefit at all, led to renewed agitation among different sections of railwaymen. In June 1919 the Kharagpur workshop employees petitioned for wage increases to meet the high cost of living, price controls in the local market, and restoration of pay lost during the 1918 strikes. The Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) authorities responded by sanctioning a grain compensation allowance of Re.1 per month and making slight improvements in daily employees' pay rates, but they refused to institute price controls, or give pay for the strike period.<sup>4</sup> BNR headquarters staff petitioned for 30% and 50% increases in basic pay, the same claim as their EIR colleagues had made, adding a demand for a 25% temporary allowance;<sup>5</sup> clerks at Kharagpur petitioned the Agent in

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1) ABP, 22/5/1919; E, 22/5/1919; Pioneer, 23/4/1919.

2) S, 27/5/1919. Similar changes were also made on other railway lines - ABP, 30/6/1919; S, 8,27/7/1919.

3) Pioneer, 13/7/1919.

4) E, 19,30/6/1919.

5) ABP, 20/6/1919.



July,<sup>1</sup> and European and Indian ticket staff at Santragachi station struck for one day to press their claim for higher pay.<sup>2</sup> Unrest on the BNR line continued throughout August, many petitions being submitted demanding improvements to meet the rise in living costs.<sup>3</sup> On the EIR temporary grade workmen at the Lilua workshop who had been excluded from the previous pay award demanded the same treatment as the permanent employees, and struck when their pay claim was rejected.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst all these activities were taking place the EIR employees who had been involved in the meetings in April and May 1919 began to consolidate the organizational structures they had developed at that time.<sup>5</sup> The first clear indication that developments of this kind were taking place dates from September 1919 when an advertisement, issued by H.J. Archer, "District Secretary" announced that a meeting organized by the "Asansol District Organiser" was to take place on 7 October, at Asansol.<sup>6</sup> The reports of this meeting refer to the RWA by name for the first time,<sup>7</sup> and speeches suggest that the union had already been formed, if only just.<sup>8</sup> The speech by P.T. Kelly, later described as one of the RWA's Travelling Secretaries,<sup>9</sup> gives an idea of some of the organizers' views at this stage.

Kelly began by referring to the fact that workers throughout the world were beginning to unite and organize themselves, claiming that a similar process was just starting on the Indian railways. He continued

The millions whose Labour makes the country's position and prosperity, are coming to the realisation of the tyrannous grip in which themselves and their earnings are held by the authorities - and with the usual sturdy common sense which lies at the core of their being

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- 1) S, 20/7/1919.
  - 2) S, 31/7/1919, 1/8/1919.
  - 3) S, 16/8/1919. See also the report of another petition from BNR head office staff, sent to the London office - E, 25/8/1919.
  - 4) E, 30/7-3/8/1919; S, 30/7-10/8/1919. Pay increases were obtained as a result of this strike.
  - 5) J.G. Fordham, General Secretary of the RWA, told a Howrah meeting in May 1920 that the union developed from the April 1919 initiative - E, 21/5/1920.
  - 6) S, 25/9/1919. H.J. Archer was later identified as the RWA Asansol district secretary - ABP, 5/4/1920. A Mr Archer also attended the 15 May 1919 Allahabad meeting - Pioneer, 19/5/1919.
  - 7) E, 9/10/1919; Pioneer, 10/10/1919.
  - 8) The S, 9/10/1919 reported that the meeting had been adjourned, but this was later denied in a letter reporting that several resolutions had been passed, and members enrolled - S, 10/10/1919.
  - 9) S, 12/12/1919 - Kelly chaired a branch formation meeting at Sealdah on the outskirts of Calcutta.

they are beginning to question why they in their toiling thousands should be doomed with their children for the benefit of a few capitalist. [sic]

He suggested that the war provided an example of how the biggest obstacles could be overcome by unity, and argued that the RWA's ability to obtain benefits for its members depended on their unity and cooperation. However, he also stressed that their organization had been formed in the mutual interest of both employees and employers - "Coercion should not be the part of either side [of industry] in view of faithful cooperation ... The objects for which we have formed the Association are faithful cooperation." A resolution expressing regret that Allahabad delegates had been prevented from attending claimed that the meeting had been organized "for the purpose of working out schemes for the benefit of both employee and employer ... ".<sup>1</sup>

Preparations took place over the following weeks leading to the formal inauguration of the RWA on 17 December.<sup>2</sup> Meetings were held at Asansol on 30 November and 6 December at which a series of detailed resolutions were passed containing demands about temporary employees' conditions, leave rules, travel passes, children's education, period of wage payments, promotions, retirement, pensions for Europeans and Indians, higher pay for Indians in superior grades, medical leave, Sunday working, resignation terms, night allowances, and transfer arrangements.<sup>3</sup> New members were enrolled at a meeting at Sealdah on 11 December when delegates were also chosen to attend the Allahabad meeting.<sup>4</sup> Further evidence of organizational activity was given by reports that pamphlets containing the aims and objects of the union, and propagandising in favour of establishing the RWA, were circulating towards the end of December 1919.<sup>5</sup>

The inaugural meeting itself was a rather subdued occasion with only three general resolutions being passed - support for the RWA, determination to avoid strikes, and criticism of earlier pay awards for not matching increases in living costs. The main speech reported in the press, again made by Sorabji, was primarily concerned with their conduct. He stressed that the formation of the RWA was in the

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1) E, 13/10/1919.

2) An advertisement was issued on 4 November, and appeared in E, 13,17,20,27/11/1919.

3) S, 5,10/12/1919.

4) S, 12/12/1919.

5) Ibid.

interests of the workers, the railway company, and the state, and that the union "is intended to and means to work on the side of all authority, law and order". Not surprisingly therefore the RWA was opposed to strikes in principle, and pinned its hopes of obtaining a conciliation board:

The Association we are inaugurating today is determined to avoid strikes. But the more determined you are to give strikes a wide berth the more it is essential that you should have some reasonable and satisfactory means of settling your grievances.

Sorabji cited the example of the 1907 conciliation board as precedent for their claim, and again emphasised that such an institution would promote the interests of everyone, not just the employees. The remainder of his speech was concerned with a relatively new theme - the need to develop unity among railwaymen, and he criticised those men who were prepared to accept whatever the management offered.<sup>1</sup> After this meeting the RWA began to expand its organization throughout Bengal, and by August 1920 branches had been established on the three major railway systems in the province.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of railwaymen's agitation in 1919 shows that shortly after the First World War had ended they began voicing demands for an increase in pay to meet rising living costs, a concession they felt was justified by their war service. The slowness of the authorities' response, and the urgency of their needs, led them to hold meetings, draw up mass petitions, and organize a deputation at the beginning of 1919, which apparently paid off with the grant of pay increases. Subsequently, as it became clear that these concessions were virtually meaningless, and prices continued to rise, railwaymen began agitating for real improvements, building on the organizational links developed earlier in the year. Although some men struck work, and others expressed themselves in militant terms, most leaders and men still thought in terms of bringing pressure to bear in a "constitutional" manner, for which a union was a suitable vehicle of expression. The RWA was formed not simply because workers felt a union was necessary in principle, but because experiences in 1919 convinced them that organized agitation was necessary to protect their rights, and because leading railwaymen were at that stage opposed to

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1) Pioneer, 19/12/1919. See also E, 18/12/1919; S, 20/12/1919.

2) S, 13/1/1920; ABP, E, S, April-August 1920, passim. In fact there seems to have been another organizational pause between January and April 1920, and branch formation took place amid renewed agitation and strike threats.

strikes in principle, leaving no alternative but to form a union.

### Government clerks

Some clerks made claims for improvements in pay and conditions before or during the First World War which were still outstanding in the post-War period.<sup>1</sup> However, on the whole it seems that there was little agitation before the latter half of 1918. From about the middle of 1918 petitioning began to occur around a series of demands, centring on that for a substantial pay rise. In 1918 this demand was put forward in the Bengal Secretariat, the currency office, Public Works' Department, and the Mint.<sup>2</sup> The following year these clerks were joined by others in the customs, Accountant-General's office, ordnance, police, and intelligence bureau, and new petitions were submitted by clerks in the Bengal Secretariat, Public Works' Department and the currency office.<sup>3</sup> Clerks in the executive and judicial offices (referred to as ministerial officers) also petitioned for higher pay in 1919 and 1920, and in 1920 many of the groups who had petitioned earlier submitted fresh petitions, or publicised their previous demands in letters to the press, or by getting Legislative Council members to take up their grievances.<sup>4</sup> In 1920 some groups of clerks received allowances in apparent response to their demands, but since these were inadequate compared to the rising living costs they simply occasioned fresh demands, particularly on the part of Bengal Secretariat clerks, and the ministerial officers.<sup>5</sup> Demands for improved pay and restructured working conditions disappeared in 1921 by which time many groups' conditions had been improved, or were under

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- 1) Bengal Secretariat clerks petitioned in 1913 and 1917 - ABP, 27/6/1919, and Calcutta currency office clerks in December 1917 - ABP, 5/11/1918.
  - 2) ABP, 24/1/1918, 22/3/1918, 2/4/1918, 10/6/1918, 26/7/1918, 13/9/1918, 5/11/1918, 12/12/1918. GB Financial (Customs), August 1918, B 41-3\*. GB Financial (Finance), April 1918, B 241\*; May 1918, B 109-12\*; August 1918, B 251-65\*; December 1918, B 258\*. GB Financial (Miscellaneous), October 1918, B 43-4\*; December 1918, B 73\*. GB Police, June 1918, B 220-21\*. \* - file abstract only.
  - 3) GB Financial (Finance), February 1919, B 98-9\*; June 1919, B 135-7\*; July 1919, B 92-3\*; September 1919, B 257-8\*; October 1919, B 18-19\*; B 106-7\*; December 1919, B 101-2\*. GB Police, September 1919, B 239-47\*. GB Political, September 1919, B 189-90 (actual file). GB Revenue, (Miscellaneous), December 1919, B 40-42\*. \* - file abstract only.  
ABP, 11/4/1919, 27/6/1919, 17/7/1919, 26/5/1920; E, 18/2/1919; S, 20/2/1919.
  - 4) GB Financial (Emigration), May 1920, B 6-7\*. GB Financial (Finance), February 1920, B 135-7\*; March 1920, B 118-9\*; September 1920, B 67-8\* B 165-7\*. ABP, 27/2/1920, 16,31/3/1920, 1/4/1920, 10,18,19,26/5/1920, 2,10,26/6/1920, 5,31/7/1920, 2,8,28/9/1920, 1,6,16/10/1920.
  - 5) GB Financial (Finance), November 1920, B 250-54 Kws (actual file); ABP, 12,27/10/1920, 3,20/11/1920; E, 4,7,13,21/10/1920.

discussion by an enquiry committee. Grievances over minor details, such as the implementation of leave rules, or cancellation of holidays, were voiced in 1919 and 1920<sup>1</sup> but on the whole clerks appear to have been concerned with obtaining pay and general reforms rather than with detailed issues, at least until 1921.

Clerks' claims for improvements were supported by a variety of arguments. The Bengal Secretariat lower division clerks, for example, drew attention to the higher rates of pay enjoyed by clerks in the Imperial Secretariat offices, and claimed that their limited promotion prospects created hardships.<sup>2</sup> Clerks at the Calcutta Mint justified their claim for improved pensions, promotion prospects and pay by reference to higher prices, and an increased workload, complaining at the same time about the appointment of European school-leavers over the heads of qualified Indian staff.<sup>3</sup> By far the most frequent reason mentioned in many letters and petitions starting from about the middle of 1918 was however the sharp rise in prices. In February 1919, for example, accounts clerks wrote of having been reduced to misery during the previous four years because of high prices,<sup>4</sup> and in July ordnance clerks declared that they were "starving and struggling for existence."<sup>5</sup> Bengal Government clerks perhaps felt this problem more acutely than other groups since they were never granted a war allowance, a fact about which they never ceased to complain.<sup>6</sup> Physical privations arising from increases in the cost of living must have been of primary concern to many lower paid clerks, but they were equally voiciferous about the damage to their social prestige. A letter in March 1920 pointed out that labourers were striking in pursuit of Rs.80 a month, while educated Government subordinates only received Rs.20 or Rs.30 a month.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein a speaker at the ministerial officers' conference in December 1920 referred to the

enormous difficulties they experiences in discharging their

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1) See e.g. ABP, 29/11/1919, 2/4/1920.

2) ABP, 24/1/1918, 10/6/1918, and repeated in ABP, 27/6/1919.

3) ABP, 26/7/1918.

4) E, 18/2/1919.

5) S, 20/7/1919.

6) See e.g. reports and letters in ABP, 28/2/1919, 19/5/1919, 3/6/1919, 21/6/1919, 18/5/1920, 2,10/6/1920, 5/7/1920, 6/8/1920.

7) ABP, 31/3/1920. See also an editorial on sub-registrar's problems, ABP, 27/8/1920; and a letter, E, 24/1/1920.

daily work in the office and [the] still greater difficulty [with which] they keep up appearances in society which in the majority of cases is on the same level with the Officers of the higher grade ... feed themselves, their parents, and dependents, and give decent education to their children and also marry their daughters ... (1)

all of which justified a substantial increase in wages.

Besides these problems new grievances began to emerge, particularly in 1919 and 1920, first about the way in which the clerks' petitions and other representations were received, and later about the inadequacies of the changes made. The arguments and discussion of these issues show how their 'economic' grievances led ultimately to the formation of unions.

A letter published as early as September 1918 argued that high prices had led workers everywhere to seek higher wages, but that when reforms were sought by "honest means", such as petitions, the Government took no notice, although it did react in response to strikes. The anonymous author concluded by noting that clerks in Calcutta Government offices were still waiting for an answer to their petitions.<sup>2</sup> Another letter, published in May 1919, said that clerks had suffered in silence for the past five years, and argued that the Government should now assist those on low pay. This letter stated that clerks had believed that the authorities would attend to their problems once the war had ended, but they were disappointed when no improvements had been made, and felt this indicated a lack of sympathy for their problems on the part of the Government.<sup>3</sup> Similar remarks were made in other letters, some of which pointedly noted that the Indian Civil Service and other higher grades had received new pay awards.<sup>4</sup>

By early 1920 the plaintive tone of some of the letters was beginning to give way to a more militant attitude. Letters to the Englishman in January that year suggested that if the Government had allowed prices to rise by 200%, then wages should be increased to compensate, and noted that the only Government departments to have

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1) Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference. Second Sessions 1920, p.8.

2) ABP, 13/9/1918. Nearly all the letters in the press were anonymous, so it is impossible to be certain just who wrote them. However, most consist of publicity for different groups' demands and grievances, and there seems no reason not to treat them as representative of clerks' views.

3) ABP, 9/5/1919. See also ABP, 3/6/1919, 21/6/1919.

4) ABP, 12/8/1919, 27/2/1920, 11/4/1920, 10/6/1920; E, 21/6/1920, 4/12/1920.

received improved pay and conditions were those which had agitated for them.<sup>1</sup> In March a new dimension was added to the discussion by a letter reviewing the dissatisfaction clerks felt at the lack of response to petitions. It was urged that political and financial reforms should go hand in hand, "so as to raise the country to a truly self-governing one", by eliminating poverty. This letter concluded with an appeal for the Bengal Government to follow the Madras Government's lead, and hold an enquiry into wage needs, claiming, "we still fervently believe that the Government will realise the importance of the question", and act.<sup>2</sup> Other letters criticised the plea that financial constraints prevented payment of increases by pointing to waste in different departments,<sup>3</sup> and claimed that the excuse of abnormal post-war economic conditions could no longer be used to delay making changes as prices still remained high despite the end of hostilities.<sup>4</sup> Appeals continued to be made in the press for the "benign" Government to improve clerks' pay and conditions,<sup>5</sup> and in August one letter proclaimed that the clerks, "Despite their sad plight ... are sober, gentle and free from all influence of strikers and sedition mongers."<sup>6</sup>

The indignation of clerks in the executive and judicial offices was given a boost in September 1920 when the Bengal Government finally announced that it was going to grant temporary allowances - of between 15% and 30%.<sup>7</sup> These were described as "paltry" in a letter which queried the exclusion of some grades from the allowance scheme, and asked whether the Bengal Government's finances were really in such a poor state that it could not match the level of allowances granted in other provinces.<sup>8</sup> "An unhappy sufferer" wondered whether such small allowances would make for a contented service, a point taken up in two editorials supporting the clerks' case in the Englishman.<sup>9</sup> In

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1) E, 13,27/1/1920.

2) From one Balai Chand Adhya, in ABP, 31/3/1920 and 1/4/1920.

3) E, 22/4/1920.

4) E, 28/5/1920.

5) ABP, 2/6/1920. The Government was often referred to as "benign" - e.g. ABP, 6/10/1920, and the Reception Committee chairman's speech in Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, Second Sessions, 1920, pp.3-10.

6) E, 6/8/1920.

7) S, 9/9/1920.

8) ABP, 12/10/1920.

9) E, 4,13/10/1920; editorials - E, 7,13/10/1920. The second editorial spoke of the need for a contented administration while the constitutional changes were being implemented, fearing that the "unsettling hysteria" of the non-cooperation movement would otherwise influence clerks.

November the Government moved to head off further criticism by appointing a committee of enquiry to examine and make recommendations for improving the salaries of its clerical and menial employees. Despite some opinions that this was simply a delaying tactic<sup>1</sup> clerks subsequently devoted most of their energies towards this enquiry, and then into getting its recommendations implemented.<sup>2</sup>

The ministerial officers' frustration and anger at the treatment they received drove them steadily in the direction of establishing a union, though it should be noted that such a step was not the immediate one that they took. The very publication of letters outlining their grievances, and the sending of copies of their petitions to the press were themselves unconventional acts, clearly taken to try and exert some pressure on the Government. Another way in which they stepped over the bounds of propriety was to submit petitions to higher authorities than those directly above them. In 1919 and 1920, for example, some clerks sent petitions to their appropriate minister, to the Governor, and even to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India, while others appealed to Legislative Council members, the Government in general, and British MPs to heed their plight.<sup>3</sup> It was only when such moves failed to produce any result, or were frustrated by office heads,<sup>4</sup> that other steps were taken.

Clerks in the Public Works' Department held a conference to discuss and publicise their grievances as early as March 1919, but although they resolved to "take all legitimate means to agitate in this matter" should the Government not respond to their petition, nothing further seems to have developed.<sup>5</sup> Currency office clerks organized a deputation to press their case some time in 1919, but this too does not seem to have led to any other form of organization being established.<sup>6</sup> This was not the case however with a ministerial officers' conference organized by clerks at Comilla to discuss and draw up plans for improving their pay and conditions, held in April 1920.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) E, 29/11/1920. This view seems to have been widespread for the Director of Information had to issue a statement denying any intent to delay resolving the problem - ABP, 20/11/1920.
  - 2) S, 10/4/1921; E, 2, 16/8/1921. GB Financial (Finance), November 1921, B 17-18 (actual file).
  - 3) ABP, 10/7/1919, 27/2/1920, 2/4/1920, 19/5/1920, 10/6/1920, 3/11/1920; E, 22/4/1920; S, 20/5/1920.
  - 4) ABP, 27/2/1920.
  - 5) ABP, 19/3/1919.
  - 6) ABP, 25/2/1920, reporting on previous agitation.
  - 7) ABP, 20/2/1920.



Contemporary accounts of this meeting, called the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, are somewhat confusing, but it is possible to piece together some details from the report of the subsequent conference.<sup>1</sup> The meeting was held in what was described as an atmosphere of "sorrow and despair",<sup>2</sup> in which some 20 resolutions were adopted, including the demand for a 40% pay rise for clerks earning less than Rs.50 a month, and a 25% rise for those on higher salaries. The demand for modification of civil service entry conditions in order to facilitate the promotion of ministerial officers to higher posts was also put forward. The idea of forming a union, and holding occasional conferences was apparently discussed, but the only organizational measure taken was the formation of a Conference Committee.<sup>3</sup> This meeting also appears to have been limited to ministerial officers in the narrow sense of the term, clerks in executive and judicial offices, excluding people from offices in the police, education and Public Works Departments.

The Conference Committee took on the function of organizing agitation throughout the rest of 1920, holding at least 18 formal meetings during the year.<sup>4</sup> Many local and district committees were also set up, although whether on local initiative or organized by the Conference Committee is not clear. The Conference Committee's president met Government officials to discuss clerks' claims, and corresponded with officials pressing for concessions to be made.<sup>5</sup> Had significant reforms been made soon after the Comilla meeting, it is probable that the clerks would not have undertaken any further agitation in this period. However, first the lack and then the inadequacy of concessions appears to have driven them to the conclusion that a properly organized union was necessary. In September and October 1920 meetings of ministerial officers in many parts of Bengal passed resolutions regretting the

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- 1) The ABP, 3/4/1920 reported that the Conference was to be held in Comilla, but the ABP, 9/4/1920 reported a claim that the meeting took place at Alipur. The Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference. Second Sessions 1920, p.1, states that the first session was at Comilla, on 4/4/1920. For reports of this conference, see ibid., pp. 11, 13, 25, 30-31, 33.
  - 2) Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, p.4.
  - 3) This is implied by references to the Conference Committee as the only formal institution, and measures taken in December 1920 to determine basic elements such as subscriptions, officers, and recruitment procedure - see ibid., pp.42-7.
  - 4) Ibid., p.30.
  - 5) Ibid.; GB Financial (Finance), November 1920, B 250-54 (actual file).

smallness of the temporary allowances, and lack of permanent improvement, and calling on the Conference Committee president to continue pressing the Government.<sup>1</sup> Pressure also began to mount for another conference, and the opinion that clerks needed an organization to agitate for their claims was canvassed.<sup>2</sup>

The outcome of these moves was the second session of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, held on 27-28 December, and attended by 205 delegates from all parts of Bengal, representing a wide range of Government departments. The importance of the allowance issue for mobilising clerks' opinions was indicated by the opening remarks of the conference report that the second meeting was made necessary by the inadequacy of the interim pay award. The same arguments in favour of their claim as had been rehearsed in the press over the previous two years were reiterated at length at the conference, alongside pledges of loyalty, and the claim that education should be the sole criterion for promotion "under all enlightened Governments among whom our own Government stands foremost". A total of 34 resolutions were passed, most of which detailed their claims, and several of which included measures for organizing the union on a sound basis. The Conference Committee had apparently circulated district committees with a constitution before this conference, and resolutions were passed setting up a Central Committee empowered to manage the union's finances, laying down subscription rates, requiring members to sign a declaration that they had read and accepted the union's rules, and setting out the formal structure of the Central Committee. The All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association had begun to take on a permanent form.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime clerical employees in other departments also began to form unions. In April 1920 the first and only session of the Provincial Conference of District Board Subordinate Engineering Staff was

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- 1) GB Financial (Finance), November 1920, B 250-54 KWs contained copies of resolutions sent to the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference president from local committees and meetings at Darjeeling, Comilla, Malda, Munshiganj, Jessore, Murshidabad, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh.
  - 2) Resolution from the Mymensingh ministerial officers' district conference, 11 September 1920, in GB Financial (Finance), November 1920, B 250-54 KWs; Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference. Second Sessions, p.1; ABP, 12/10/1920.
  - 3) Ibid., passim. This union was still referred to as a Conference in December 1920, but by the middle of 1921 was being called the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association (ABMOA) - E, 2/8/1921.

held at Mymensingh.<sup>1</sup> In May, custom house clerical and subordinate supervisory employees met to protest at new conditions about to be introduced and sent a telegram to the Viceroy.<sup>2</sup> A month later 200 customs employees met again, this time to inaugurate the Customs Union, "to represent their grievances constitutionally to Government".<sup>3</sup> Two more unions were established in July, the Writers' Buildings Staff Association, representing Bengal Secretariat clerks, and the Commercial Intelligence Office Union.<sup>4</sup> The All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference must also have been formed during this period since its second conference took place in September. This union appears to have dissolved itself into the AEMOA in December 1920.<sup>5</sup> Accounts office clerks also established at union - the Accounts Offices' Association - some time in 1920.<sup>6</sup> The only other Government clerks' union formed in the post-war period, the Currency Office Association, was not set up until February 1922.<sup>7</sup>

Clerks clearly went through several stages of activity in their attempts to obtain higher wages in response to rising living costs. Their initial reaction to economic hardship was to petition for protection in the form of allowances, but later they demanded overall improvements in wages. When petitioning failed to achieve an adequate response, or indeed any positive response at all in most cases, only then did they begin to adopt other forms of activity, of which the April 1920 conference was the most important. While with hindsight the AEMOA was inaugurated at this conference, it is evident that this development was not the organizers' intention. Indeed, another six months of conventional agitation

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1) ABP, E, 6/4/1920; E, 20/4/1920; ABP, 28/4/1920.

2) S, 20/5/1920.

3) E, 14/6/1920. The subordinate supervisory grade preventive officers joined the Customs Union in July - E, 28/7/1920 - but later formed a separate union, the Customs Preventive Service Association - S, 19/11/1920, E, 26/11/1920. Nothing of the Customs Union was reported after July 1920.

4) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.8; GB Financial (Finance), November 1920, B 250-54 KWs; the Commercial Intelligence department was under the Government of India, but based in Calcutta.

5) ABP, S, 29/9/1920. Police clerks were represented at the December session of the AEMOA, and the ABPCC president was among the delegates to the December meeting, while ABPCC documents were reproduced in the Appendix to the Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, Second Sessions 1920.

6) Ray, Urban roots, p.86; a social gathering of the Accounts' Offices' Association in September 1921 is the earliest reference found - E, 10/9/1921.

7) Bakhale, Directory of Trade Unions, p.20. A Calcutta Currency Club apparently preceded the formation of the union - ABP, 7/9/1921.

supplemented by the Conference Committee president's efforts, took place before clerks were spurred into holding another conference, and so consolidating their union.

### Factory and non-factory employees

Analysis of the processes whereby these employees engaged in trade unionism is hampered by the lack of evidence from which accounts on the lines given above can be reconstructed. Few petition texts have been found, factory workers were not in the habit of writing to the English language press, and practically no reports were made of any speeches made by these employees. The account given here is also limited insofar as consideration of the influence of the nationalist movement is excluded.<sup>1</sup>

The largest body of evidence for trade unionism on the part of factory and non-factory employees consists of strike reports, which therefore form the basis for examination of their objectives and their behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Table 6.1 gives the breakdown of different types of demand, tabulated to provide an indication of the relative frequency of different objectives.<sup>3</sup> Three categories of demand require some explanation. 'Other work conditions' concerns demands over hours, leave, pensions, medical allowances, and shift arrangements; 'labour relations', issues such as the dismissal of a sardar, or reinstatement of sacked colleagues; and 'miscellaneous', demands which appear to have little or no connection with labour market relationships.<sup>4</sup>

This table clearly shows that the most frequent demand was for higher pay; less than a quarter of demands concerned working conditions, while labour relations, or miscellaneous issues were raised even more rarely. While this analysis applies to the total demands of both groups

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- 1) Speeches reported from these employees' strike or union meetings were often made by non-employees. For discussion of their role, and of nationalist influence, see Chapter 7.
  - 2) Petition and strike reports are practically identical, rendering separate analysis of the former superfluous. Trade union formation is closely linked with the problems of non-employees' roles and nationalist influence, discussed in Chapter 7.
  - 3) Thus avoiding the distortion of arbitrarily identifying 'main' objectives, and ingoring others, characteristic of official strike analyses - see Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 1921-23, passim.
  - 4) For example, the demand for a Muslim burial ground made by jute factory workers - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1264-5.

**TABLE 6.1:** Frequency of factory and non-factory employees' strike demands, 1918-1921. (1)

		strike numbers		demands (percentage)						
		total	objective known	higher pay	bonus or temporary allowance	holiday/leave	against pay reduction	other work conditions	labour relations	miscellaneous
Factory	1918	12	7	71.4	14.3				28.6	
	1919	12	4	50.0			25.0		25.0	
	1920	99	94	83.0	5.3		2.1	20.2	10.6	7.4
	1921	47	34	32.4	8.8	11.8	8.8	35.3	20.6	20.6
	TOTAL	170	139	69.1	6.5	2.9	4.3	22.3	14.4	10.1
Non-factory	1918	7	7	71.4				14.3		14.3
	1919	8	8	62.5	24.0			25.0		12.5
	1920	39	31	90.3	3.2		3.2	25.8	3.2	3.2
	1921	52	39	46.2			2.6	15.4	28.2	25.6
	TOTAL	106	85	65.9	3.5		2.4	20.0	14.1	15.3

of employees, and to the demand pattern for 1918-20, there seems to have been a distinct change in 1921. The frequency of demands for higher pay declined sharply, while non-factory workers suddenly began making demands involving labour relations and miscellaneous issues; the proportion of factory workers' miscellaneous demands also rose.<sup>2</sup> Closer examination of these two categories gives some indication of the reasons for this change.

A clear distinction can be made between miscellaneous demands made in 1918-20, and those made in 1921. In 1918-20 this category included protests at the arrest of colleagues, and about the quality of raw materials, and the demand for immediate payment of wages due to workers.<sup>3</sup> Similar issues were also raised in 1921 - two jute factory and one jute labourers' strikes sought the release of arrested workers, and carriage drivers struck in protest at police harassment.<sup>4</sup> In January 1921 paper factory employees included the demand for recognition of their

- 1) Sources - see Chapter 5, p.113. Demands are expressed as a percentage of the number of strikes for which evidence is available.
- 2) Other changes, like factory workers' apparently new concern with 'other working conditions' in 1920 probably reflects the improved quality of evidence compared with 1918-1919.
- 3) ABP, 20/5/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1198-99, 1214-17, 1230-2.
- 4) ABP, 8/10/1921; E, 15/8/1921; S, 3/4/1921, 2/6/1921.

union in their strike objectives, while in March, Muslim jute factory workers demanded that a burial ground should be established for them.<sup>1</sup> However, nine of the seventeen miscellaneous demands raised can be attributed directly to the influence of the non-cooperation movement. Several strikes included the demand that the Government should finance the repatriation of tea estate labourers stranded at Chandpur in eastern Bengal.<sup>2</sup> Related issues which caused strikes were opposition to the use of foreign goods or to working for Europeans, and to attempts to prohibit the wearing of Gandhi caps.<sup>3</sup> Three jute factory strikes occurred demanding the dismissal of a sardar and his associates who had opposed temperance pledges made by the workers under the inspiration of non-cooperation leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Comparison of labour relations issues raised in 1918-20 with those of 1921 reveals no such differences however. The most frequent demand in both periods was for the reinstatement of dismissed colleagues.<sup>5</sup> In 1918-20 the demand for the dismissal of particular supervisory employees was the next most frequent issue, followed by protests at the behaviour of supervisory towards subordinate employees,<sup>6</sup> while in 1921 these two issues were raised with equal frequency.<sup>7</sup> Other demands made in 1918-20 included protests at a newly appointed European assistant's attempt to modify shop-floor work practices, and at certain disciplinary measures, while in 1921, protests were made at the withholding of wages by an intermediary, and ill-treatment of workers following their attendance at a

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1244-5, 1264-5; the strikers also demanded higher wages.
  - 2) A demand first raised by nationalists. See e.g. the quay labourers' strike, Khulna - E, 10/6/1921. Simultaneous strikes by railwaymen, inland steamer crews, workshop and office employees, and domestics, starting in May 1921 (classed together as one 'mixed' group strike) also raised this demand. For references and further discussion, see Chapter 7.
  - 3) Salt wharf labourers stopped unloading foreign salt - ABP, 1,8/4/1921; domestic servants boycotted Europeans - E, 10/6/1921; cloth porters struck in protest at trade in foreign cloth - E, S, 7/9/1921; dockers struck when a European policeman removed one man's Gandhi cap - Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 39 (129-37), 1921, ABP, 16/12/1921.
  - 4) Strikes - ABP, E, 5/4/1921. For non-cooperators' temperance meetings, see E, 18,25/1/1921, 4/2/1921; ABP, 22/1/1921; E, 4/2/1921.
  - 5) ABP, 20/10/1921, 26/12/1921; E, 26/3/1918, 4/11/1921; S, 6/9/1921. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1196-7, 1200-1, 1212-3, 1234-5, 1244-5, 1256-9.
  - 6) S, E, 11/1/1919. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1198-9, 1200-2, 1223.
  - 7) Dismissals - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1256-7, 1262-3; S, 14/5/1921. Protests at behaviour - ABP, 11/3/1921, 8/5/1921, 14/5/1921.

union meeting.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern of objectives indicates that factory and non-factory employees were almost wholly concerned with obtaining improvements in pay in 1918-20, but less interested in this issue in 1921. This correlates directly with trends in the cost of living index, implying that much of the post-war upsurge of activity was simply a response to increasing economic hardships. Employees' claims that high prices necessitated wage increases, expressed by jute factory workers in April and May 1919, and January 1920, by sweepers in July 1918, May 1919, and March 1920, for example, support this inference.<sup>2</sup> The increasing frequency with which miscellaneous demands were voiced in 1921 could similarly be explained as due to the influence of the non-cooperation movement, which took on mass form in that year. However, while trade unionism in response to economic hardship was a well established phenomenon, the adoption of politically inspired objectives would seem to indicate a new departure, requiring further examination. The greater incidence of labour market issues in 1921 poses another problem from this perspective since this cannot be related clearly to any new contingent factors.

Before proceeding, the findings from this analysis of objectives require restating in order to clarify their implications, and the problems raised. Since workers' objectives have only been identified from strike reports, the analysis relates strictly to those objectives over which they were prepared to strike. Thus, in 1921, workers were less willing or concerned to strike in pursuit of wage claims than in 1918-20, and more willing to strike over miscellaneous issues, and problems arising from labour relations. Further analysis of this change, however, depends on examination of another problem noted earlier concerning the relationship between strikes, and rising living costs. Even if employees' demands indicate they were primarily motivated to engage in trade unionism by economic hardships in 1918-20, why did the main outbreak of strikes not take place until the end of 1920?

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- 1) 1918-20 - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1194-5, 1232-3. 1921 - S, 11/6/1921; GoI Home (Political), Deposit 415 (1-5), 1921.
  - 2) ABP, 9/1/1920; E, 13/4/1918, 3/7/1918; S, 14/4/1918, 27/4/1919. See also the demands by masons - S, 13/1/1920 - hospital menials - E, 10/3/1920, Calcutta Corporation workshop employees - S, 14/3/1920, engineering workers - ABP, 10/4/1920, and Port Trust railwaymen - E, 19/7/1920.

One reason for the delay in resorting to strikes was that factory and non-factory employees went through a process of pre-strike activity comparable to that of railwaymen and clerks prior to the formation of unions. Many groups of non-factory employees, such as telegraph peons, police grooms and constables, motor lorry drivers, and Government office menials, for example, petitioned their employer, but did not go on strike.<sup>1</sup> The police groom's threat to strike if their demands were not met in full, as was the case, was not carried out.<sup>2</sup> However, many other groups of workers followed up petitioning by going on strike.

In April 1918 it was reported that workers at the Kankinara jute factory had been dissatisfied with their wages for some time, and had petitioned the manager for increases to cope with the rising cost of living. As the manager put off making a decision, the men eventually decided to strike.<sup>3</sup> Baranagar jute factory workers also struck when similar pleas had been ignored, in May 1918.<sup>4</sup> Workers at the Belvedere jute mill went on strike at the same time, and one man later explained that they had asked for a 10% rise, and struck for two weeks as the manager would not concede their demand.<sup>5</sup> Employees at the Angus engineering works who struck in April 1920 described how they first asked their manager for higher pay in January, and after two months, when it seemed that they would get no response, they had petitioned the directors. Failing to receive any reply to this they went in a deputation to see the manager again, but he refused to meet them, and so they struck work.<sup>6</sup> Calcutta tramwaymen submitted six petitions for higher wages and other demands between July and October 1920. During September they held several meetings, and at the end of the month finally resolved to strike within 24 hours if their demands were not attended to, informing the

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- 1) GB Financial (Commercial), February 1920, B 75-7\*. GB Financial (Finance), August 1918, B 240-3\*; October 1918, B 101\*; February 1919, B 126-7\*; March 1919, B 191-3\*; May 1919, B 256-60\*; June 1919, B 107-8\*, B 320\*; July 1919, B 71\*; August 1919, A 5-6; October 1919, B 82\*, B 113-9\*, B 143-5\*; November 1919, B 61-2\*; December 1919, B 12-13\*; April 1920, B 111\*; July 1920, B 149\*; November 1921, B 19-20\*. GB Political (Police), November 1920, B 167-74 (actual file). \* - file abstract only. E, 22/5/1919, 4/5/1920, 17/3/1921; S, 22/2/1918.
  - 2) GB Political (Police), November 1920, B 167-74, actual file).
  - 3) E, 13/4/1918.
  - 4) E, 8/5/1918.
  - 5) E, 31/5/1918; ABP, 12/6/1918; E, 9/8/1918.
  - 6) ABP, 10/4/1920.



manager of their decision with another petition.<sup>1</sup> Other groups of factory and non-factory employees struck claiming that petitions had been ignored, and that need drove them to strike.<sup>2</sup> As a spokesman for the Calcutta Coachmen's and Syces' Union explained of their threat to strike if their petition went unheeded, they were "only forced to take the step for their belly's sake."<sup>3</sup>

It therefore seems likely that a considerable proportion of strikes at the end of 1920 and beginning of 1921 were the consequence of relatively long pre-strike processes having developed among different groups of employees. Thus, as living costs began to rise, so employees in different occupations would independently have begun to agitate for compensatory measures, particularly higher wages. Assuming that pre-strike agitation processes developed at similar rates, varying according to local factors such as whether wages in one factory were increased, bazaar prices controlled, or factory leaders more militant, then the adoption of strike action would have occurred more or less simultaneously in many factories and units of employment, as happened in 1920.

This is not to suggest that pre-strike agitation began in 1918, but did not mature until 1920. To do so would be to postulate an extremely long process, while the examples cited above indicate that pre-strike agitation probably lasted no more than three or four months at the outside.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the process of pre-strike agitation in response to rising prices began several times in 1918-20, but only matured simultaneously across the whole spectrum of factory and non-factory occupations once, late in 1920. This possibility is illustrated by the pattern of agitation among jute factory workers between 1918 and 1920.

The first phase of petitioning and strikes over wage claims took place early in 1918. These strikes, particularly those at the

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1200-1; E, 2/10/1920; S, 2/10/1920. During the strike men claimed to have submitted six petitions - ABP, 3/10/1920 - though only records of two petitions have been found.
  - 2) See e.g., E, 22/1/1919 (sweepers); S, 12/3/1920 (Corporation workshop); ABP, 22/5/1920 (waterproofing factory), and "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1196-7 (Port Trust railwaymen), pp.1198-9 (jute factory).
  - 3) ABP, 12/11/1920. Syce = groom. Gasworks strikers claimed similarly that they had struck for "Petkawaste" - to feed themselves - as pay was inadequate and the manager had ignored their petitions - ABP, 8/10/1920.
  - 4) There is insufficient evidence to measure pre-strike periods accurately, but the Angus workers' agitation apparently lasted from January to April.

Kankinara, Belvedere and Baranagar factories<sup>1</sup> all appear to have ended without gaining anything, or at best on the promise that their demands would be looked into. The wages of employees in all jute factories were eventually raised by 10% later in the year,<sup>2</sup> and the lack of further agitation in 1918 suggests that inflationary pressures were perhaps not a serious problem at this stage.<sup>3</sup> Mukherji's analysis of wages and living costs shows that monthly average nominal earnings remained unchanged between 1917 and 1918. Since the cost of living rose slightly, this implies that jute workers' real wages declined to a similar degree.<sup>4</sup> However, since jute mills worked for a five day week in 1917, and Mukherji's calculations are based on the assumption of a six day week, then actual monthly average earnings were probably slightly lower in 1917 than he calculated.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the longer working week of 1918 enabled workers to earn more than in the previous year, and so perhaps mitigate the effects of inflation, and the need to strike.

In 1919, however, the working week was reduced first to five and then to four days (April to December), while the cost of living rose by 11.7% over the previous year.<sup>6</sup> Yet, although there may have been many petitions seeking higher wages, there were only four jute mill strikes during the year, two of which were concerned with labour

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- 1) See p.171. At least seven other jute strikes took place in the first five months of 1918. One was for the reinstatement of a sardar (E, S, 26/3/1918, S, 29/3/1918) and one for higher wages (E, S, 9/3/1918) but no objectives of the other strikes were reported (GB Police, February 1918, B 241-4; March 1918, B 154-7, B 160-3; April 1918, B 97, B 224, B 328; May 1918, B 41-2, B 122-3 - all file abstracts).
  - 2) IJMA, Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1918, (Calcutta, 1919), p.87. A circular, dated 7 November 1918, stated that "A 10% rise had been given recently ...".
  - 3) No other jute factory strikes were reported in 1918. The September riots involving stoppages in some factories were entirely over Muslim community issues, and have not been counted as strikes. See McPherson, The Muslim Microcosm, pp.45-6; IO File JP 3810/18 (IOL&R: L/PJ/6/1544).
  - 4) Mukherji, "Trends in real wages in the jute textile industry", p.66.
  - 5) Ibid., p.58. Mukherji assumed a six day working week in order to convert daily into monthly wage statistics. The factories worked a five day week from April 1917 to January 1918, and then a six day week until November 1918, when five day working was resumed - IJMA, Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1917, (Calcutta, 1918), pp.174-5, 183-4; ibid., 1918, pp.76-9, 84, 96.
  - 6) IJMA Report ... 1918, pp.84, 96; ibid., 1919, pp.11, 153-4; Mukherji, "Trends in real wages in the jute textile industry", p.66. Mukherji's index probably underestimates the decline in real wages in 1919 since, being based on the financial year, his wage data includes increases obtained in January 1920 - see p.175.

relations.<sup>1</sup> Instead of engaging in trade unionism, (or at least in strikes), factory workers throughout the Calcutta-Hugli region reacted to price rises by looting bazaars and rioting early in September. This outbreak was controlled by a combination of force, and the introduction of price controls by local Government officers, while some jute factories granted a 20% bonus to their workers - the only pay rise given in 1919.<sup>2</sup>

Two factors appear to account for jute workers' behaviour in 1919. Firstly, all daily and weekly paid workers were given an allowance, graduated according to their average earnings, throughout the four day week period, in respect of one day's enforced idleness. This concession had been volunteered by the Indian Jute Mills' Association since employers feared that workers would not be able to live from the earnings of four days work, and so would cause "complications".<sup>3</sup> It is conceivable therefore that these allowances prevented incomes from falling too dramatically, at least for a time. When the effect of this concession was overtaken by inflation the workers' resort to looting rather than trade unionism appears to reflect the weakness of their industrial muscle in the short-time working period. Employers who were intent on reducing overall output would have little compunction to settle any strike, as witnessed by a six week strike in April 1919,<sup>4</sup> and so there was probably no possibility of obtaining concessions through striking. While there is no way of knowing whether such considerations entered into jute workers' decision making, it is noticeable that within a week of the resumption of five day working in January 1920, a series of strikes for higher wages took place.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that in 1919

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- 1) E, S, 11/1/1919; GB Police, October 1919, B 8-9 abstract. The objectives of strikes in March and April were not reported - E, 7, 8/3/1919; S, 14/6/1919. It is likely that other strikes were not reported (the April strike was not recorded until June), but unlikely that any major strike outbreak was not reported in some form.
  - 2) On the riots, see ABP, 10,12,19/9/1919; E, 9/9/1919; S, 9,16,18/9/1919. The ABP, 19/9/1919 reported that bonuses had been given at the Gauripur and Champdani mills; the IJMA Report of the Committee for the year ended 31st December 1920, (Calcutta, 1921), p.16 implies that rises totalling 20% on pre-war rates had been given by January 1920.
  - 3) IJMA Report ... 1919, pp.87, 91-5.
  - 4) In June 1919 the Delta jute factory board reported that a strike lasting six weeks had taken place in the half-year ending May 1919 - S, 14/6/1919. This is the only report of this strike.
  - 5) The four-day week was due to be replaced by a five day week on 1 January 1920 (IJMA, Report ... 1919, p.154) and newspaper reports show that many factories made this change (e.g. S, 17,19/12/1919, 24/1/1920). See p.175 for these strikes.

jute workers were faced with the alternatives of suffering further reductions in living standards, or of helping themselves to food, but not with the option of pressuring their employers to grant higher wages.

In January 1920 the largest strike wave for many years occurred, involving some 30,000 workers from four jute factories.<sup>1</sup> Initially some workers demanded that the allowance given during the four day week should be calculated on the basis of the higher earnings obtained when working for five days. Some concession on these lines was given in one factory by which time a concerted demand for a 50% wage rise had been made. Rises of 20% on pre-war rates were eventually conceded bringing an end to the strikes after nearly two weeks, and were extended to all jute factory employees later in January.<sup>2</sup> Higher pay was achieved just as the working week had been extended from four to five days, and shortly before six day working resumed.<sup>3</sup> Prices also stabilised temporarily at the beginning of 1920, and so with little inflation and an improved earnings potential, it is not surprising that virtually no more demands for improved wages were made for a few months.<sup>4</sup>

A fresh round of wage demands were made in August and September 1920. Workers at the Hugli jute mill asked for a 10% rise on pre-war rates, claiming that this had been granted in other jute factories, and struck early in September with their request was rejected. The manager gave way after two days, and within a week the same demand was made in another factory, and conceded after a short strike.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of October the jute employers announced that a further 10% rise would be given to all their employees in order to forestall more strikes, implying that if they had not done this, there would have been widespread strikes in the jute industry in October 1920.<sup>6</sup> It would appear that the fourth round of pay demands was sparked off by the renewal of price inflation in mid-1920, which either directly affected living standards, or was perhaps viewed as a potential threat

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- 1) ABP, 9.10,15,16/1/1920; E, 8,10,15,16,21/1/1920; S, 7-10, 15,16/1/1920. An official source claimed that 37,000 workers from five factories were involved - GoI Home (Political), April 1920, B 189 (actual file).
  - 2) IJMA, Report... 1920, p.16; E, 21/1/1920.
  - 3) Six day working began on 1 April and ended on 31 December - IJMA, Report ... 1920, p.16.
  - 4) Kharda mill workers struck demanding higher wages late in February - ABP, 28/1/1920 - but there are no other details of this strike.
  - 5) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1198-9.
  - 6) Ibid., pp.1198-9; ABP, S, 2/11/1920.

in view of the experiences of the previous two years, necessitating protective action.

The apparent lack of a similar pattern of demands for higher wages on the part of other groups of factory and non-factory employees is not easy to account for, mainly because there is less evidence available concerning wage rates and changes in working conditions. So far as engineering was concerned however it could be argued that the post-war conditions of this industry afforded some protection against inflation to its employees. Towards the end of the war engineering firms complained that skilled labour was in short supply, and wage rates were rising, due partly to military demands, and their own expansion. Unlike the jute industry, engineering continued to flourish and even to expand when the war ended, and firms worked at a high capacity throughout 1919 and 1920.<sup>1</sup> The need for labour would probably have made employers more responsive to petitions, and keen to avoid strikes, and indeed wages had been increased by 40% or 50% if not more by the end of 1919.<sup>2</sup> While some large firms continued expanding until 1921-2, the general boom in engineering collapsed in 1920,<sup>3</sup> thus weakening employees' bargaining position just as prices began to rise again. Employers would not have felt any need then to respond to petitions, thus facing employees with the need to strike in order to press their claims - hence the strike outbreak involving many engineering firms late in 1920.

While this discussion lends support to the argument that many strikes began at the end of 1920 as a result of the maturation of relatively long pre-strike processes, other reports indicate that such processes could have been very short, or even virtually non-existent.

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- 1) Burns' Magazine, 13 (1), October 1918, pp.2, 10-11; 13 (2), November 1918, p.9; 13 (3), December 1918, p.11; 14 (1), October 1919, pp.14-5. Indian Engineering, LXIV (9), 31/8/1918, p.118; LXVI (11), 14/9/1918 p.147; LXVIII (1), 3/7/1920, p.7. Indian Railways Gazette, 13 (9), September 1919, p.167. Englishman (Annual Financial Review), 10/3/1919. These engineering journals and reviews contain many miscellaneous items concerning post-war production.
  - 2) In April 1920 Angus engineering workers claimed that other firms had granted 40-50% bonuses (ABP, 10/4/1920). In October 1920 one firm claimed its employees had received increases totalling 200-300% over 1915 rates, exclusive of bonuses (E, 18/10/1920), and another that their employees had been given rises of 150% in the previous two years (S, 26/10/1920).
  - 3) Burns' Engineering Magazine, 15 (12), September 1921, pp.327-8; Indian Industries and Power, 20 (3 & 4), November & December 1922, pp.96-7; Bagchi, Private investment in India, pp.335, 338, 347.

For example, in November 1920 Calcutta coachmen and grooms drew up a petition giving three days notice of their intention to strike,<sup>1</sup> and other reports imply that strikes began within a few hours of grievances being communicated to employers.<sup>2</sup> Although in many cases it is difficult to be certain that earlier intimations of grievances had not been made<sup>3</sup> there are also clear examples of strikes as a 'spontaneous' response to problems. In February 1918 taxi drivers struck after an altercation with a policeman over taxi regulations in which a driver was arrested,<sup>4</sup> and in January 1919 railway yard workmen struck when one of them was arrested by railway police.<sup>5</sup> Factory workers sometimes engaged in spontaneous strikes - in September 1920 women at the Hugli mill working in the preparing department struck demanding that a European assistant should be dismissed for "improper conduct".<sup>6</sup> Another taxi strike, in January 1921, was also sparked off by the arrest of a driver (who also happened to be a union leader), although on this occasion a strike threat had already been made in connection with grievances then under discussion.<sup>7</sup> While there is not sufficient evidence to classify strikes into categories of long or short pre-strike agitation, these examples do suggest that an increased propensity to strike 'spontaneously' may also have contributed towards the late 1920 strike upsurge.

From the perspective of October 1920 strikes could have seemed a relatively successful form of trade unionism since nearly two-thirds of those begun since January had achieved some concessions.<sup>8</sup> The lesson that strikes achieved results while petitions were often ignored<sup>9</sup> could hardly have been lost on factory and non-factory employees. Although there is no documentary evidence to show that they did draw this conclusion, the fact that they compared conditions between factories indicates awareness of other workers' conditions and achievements, and by

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- 1) ABP, 12/11/1920.
  - 2) See for example, S, 26/3/1918, 18/12/1918, 5/6/1919; E, 15/1/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1196-7, 1198-9, and passim.
  - 3) References to pre-strike petitions were often omitted from reports - tramwaymen claimed that they submitted six petitions before striking in October 1920, but the official report only mentions two petitions - ABP, 3/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1200-1.
  - 4) S, 6/2/1918.
  - 5) E, 27/1/1919.
  - 6) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1200-1.
  - 7) Ibid., pp.1240-1.
  - 8) Only 13% of strikes failed entirely, a percentage which is probably inflated by inadequate reporting from the first six months of 1920.
  - 9) An opinion expressed in an anonymous letter about Government clerks' grievances - ABP, 13/9/1918.

implication, their methods. In August 1920 police grooms asked that they should be paid the same rate as other Government grooms.<sup>1</sup> In October, workers at the Standard jute mill struck demanding a shift system comparable with that of a neighbouring factory.<sup>2</sup> Port Commission workshop and pumping station employees struck in November seeking the same percentage wage rise that clerical staff has received earlier, and in February 1921 workers at the Government ordnance factory struck demanding pay increases at the same rate as those given to railwaymen.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of successive strikes from late 1920 also indicate that one group's initiative probably stimulated others to strike, so increasing the proportion of 'spontaneous' strikes. On 12 October, men at Breakwells' motor works struck following the rejection of demands for a half-day holiday, and increased pay.<sup>4</sup> They resumed work three days later having obtained some concessions, and the following day a strike began at the Russa motor engineering works.<sup>5</sup> A petition seeking improved wages had been submitted earlier in the month, but failing to get any response the men presented a second petition giving 24 hours' notice of their intention to strike. The actual strike was precipitated by the management's refusal to discuss their claims, and the sacking of the petition organizer. A week later, while the Russa strike was still in progress, men at Stuart & Company's motor works also struck over a claim for higher wages and holidays, following the rejection of their petition.<sup>6</sup>

The most striking example of both a succession of strikes, and the pursuit of the same objective was provided by nine jute factory strikes which began in November 1920. All of these strikes were for a further pay rise; in all but one case the demand was for a 25% increase. The first strike began at the Hugli mill on 20 November; three days later the Fort William workers came out, and on 25 November strikes began at the Ganges and Howrah factories. Workers at the New Central jute mills joined in on 29 November, and they were followed by men at the South Union, Gauripur, Baranagar and Reliance factories at the beginning of December.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) GB Political (Police), November 1920, B 167-74 (actual file).
  - 2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1204-5.
  - 3) Ibid., pp.1212-5, 1250.
  - 4) Ibid., pp.1204-5.
  - 5) Ibid., pp.1206-7; E, 18/10/1920; S, 17,19,20/10/1920.
  - 6) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1208-9; S, 26/10/1920.
  - 7) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1216-9, 1224-5, 1228-31. The percentage sought by workers at the Gauripur factory was not recorded.

These strikes, however, coming so soon after all jute factory employees had received a 10% increase, pose further problems of interpretation. The arguments concerning long and short term pre-strike agitation and the timing of the 1920-21 strike upsurge rest on the assumption that economic hardship (or the lack of it) was the primary determinant of strike propensity, within limits imposed by the prospects of particular industries. However, since it hardly seems likely that jute workers' earnings had fallen significantly since October,<sup>1</sup> the new phase of jute factory strikes implies that other as yet unidentified factors also contributed to the late 1920 strike wave.

A remarkable contemporary analysis of the reasons for the strike outbreak, made in April 1921 by the secretary of the Bengal Central Labour Federation, provides useful insights into the influence and identity of these other factors.<sup>2</sup> He said that in the past there had been few factories, and that the managers had been "kind and sympathetic towards the labour [sic]", but that recently this attitude had changed, and with it the whole context of industrial relations.

The capitalist[s] tighten the grip on the labourers and squeeze all of their labours for their gratification in profits. The Sardars exercised the influence of a benefactor within the mills and outside they were the defacto Judges arbiters of the destinies of the poor labourers [sic]. For disputes, troubles and grievances, the Panchayat are quite unable to meet the exigencies of the time, to solve the present labour problems, far less to tackle the terrible conditions arising in the hour of strikes. The Sardars exercise almost no influence with the labourers who have found them to be instruments of their capitalistic masters. Thus the whole society of labour is in a most chaotic condition now and the confusion is worst confounded in any of their attempts to combine and to strike for the adjustments of their grievances. And we see palpably before our eyes the spirit of the new consciousness in labour which forms a part of the present national awakening. In this we find, hitherto unthought of, on the part of the labourers unflinching determination to shake off the shackles of years [of] exploitation, to establish the dignity of labour and not to submit any longer to insults and humiliation.

Besides economic hardships arising from employers' policies, and "the exigencies of the times", this analysis points to two other processes - the disintegration of social institutions which had exerted

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- 1) Factories worked a six day week until the end of December - IJMA, Report ... 1920, p.16.
  - 2) Speech by Mahsin Khan, BCLF secretary, on 17 April 1921 - ABP, 23/4/1921. Khan first became involved with workers in November 1920, and maintained his associations at least until 1925 - ABP, 30/11/1920; Bakhale, Directory of Trade Unions, p.24.



a degree of restraint on employees, and the parallel development of a "new consciousness".<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which institutions other than those of trade unionism - panchayats and the sardari system - had been able both to protect workers' interests and restrain them from striking cannot unfortunately be assessed. However, there is evidence to suggest that sardars or other established workers' community leaders faced competition or were even replaced in late 1920 and early 1921. Turning first to the November 1920 jute strikes, it appears that the demand for higher wages could not succeed since even before the strikes began the employers had decided not to grant further increases.<sup>2</sup> As the strikes progressed it must have become clear to the workers that concessions would be difficult if not impossible to obtain. By 2 December it seems that many men at the Fort William, Howrah and Ganges factories wanted to abandon the strike, but were persuaded by "Calcutta Maulvis", and against their own sardars' advice, to continue with the strike. Some workers at the Howrah and Ganges factories did resume for a short while on 3 December before being persuaded by Fort William workers to rejoin the strike. However, one of the Ganges' plants started up again the next day, and finally on 5 December, "local Maulvis" recommended that work should start again, advice that was accepted by the strikers.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that the workforces of these factories, supported (or at least not opposed) by their sardars decided to seek higher wages, and to strike if necessary. When it became apparent that concessions would not be forthcoming, the sardars tried to get the men to return to work, but the lead given by "Calcutta Maulvis" proved more acceptable. An intelligence report inferred that the "Calcutta Maulvis" were leaders of the Khilafat Committee, an important component of the nationalist movement, but unfortunately did not give any details.<sup>4</sup> Accepting that this was the case, it is clear even from this sketchy report that the sardars leadership was being rejected in favour of a more militant one,

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- 1) The speech also throws some light on connections between trade unionism and the nationalist movement - see Chapter 7.
  - 2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1216-7. This decision was taken after the Hugli jute mill weavers had asked for higher pay, two days before they went on strike.
  - 3) Ibid., pp.1218-9.
  - 4) GoI Home (Political), February 1921, Deposit 35.

provided by nationalists.<sup>1</sup>

Other reports from early in 1921 show how established factory sardars and community leaders were sometimes displaced when they failed to live up to the workers' changing expectations. Jaher Ali was the head sardar at the Wellington jute mill, a member of the local panchayat, and had been a trustee of the local mosque for 42 years. At the beginning of 1921 his position as a community leader was challenged at a Khilafat meeting, but he was not displaced. In February he unsuccessfully attempted to dissuade workers from leaving the factory to attend a meeting at which Gandhi was to speak, and as a consequence was formally expelled from the community, only to be reinstated a week later at another Khilafat meeting. Shortly after this, a European assistant at the factory was assaulted, following which five men were dismissed. The rest of the workforce blamed Jaher Ali for the men's dismissal, and struck demanding that he and another sardar should be sacked, and eventually the two men left the area.<sup>2</sup> A similar incident, to which reference has already been made, was the strike at the Howrah, Ganges and Fort William factories in April 1921 for the dismissal of a sardar and his associates for opposing the workers' temperance pledges.<sup>3</sup>

While these reports support the inference in the BCLF secretary's speech that workers were no longer heeding traditional workplace leaders, and so engaging in strikes, the question of the "new consciousness" to which he also referred is more difficult to discuss because of the paucity of evidence. One aspect of workers' behaviour other than that of engagement in strike itself which appears to support the inference of a 'new consciousness' is changes in strike duration, analysed in Table 6.2.<sup>4</sup> Although analysis of trends in the second half of 1921 is hampered by the lack of evidence, two points are clear. Firstly, the majority of strikes lasted for less than five days, but the proportion of short strikes seems to have declined after October 1920. Secondly, the proportion of longer strikes, particularly those lasting for two weeks or more, suddenly increased late in 1920, and remained a noticeable feature through-

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- 1) Other strike reports also suggest 'outsiders' acted to prolong strikes - see pp.208-14 for further discussion.
  - 2) Jaher Ali's account of events, made at the trial of workers from the factory, charged with rioting - S, 9/6/1921. For reports of the strike, see "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1256-7, ABP, 25/2/1921, 3,9,10,12,16/3/1921.
  - 3) See p.169.
  - 4) See p.182.

TABLE 6.2: Duration of factory and non-factory employees' strikes, grouped according to main strike phases, 1918-21 (1)

length (days)	n o m i n a l				p e r c e n t a g e			
	January 1918 to September 1920	October to December 1920	January to June 1921	July to December 1921	January 1918 to September 1920	October to December 1920	January to June 1921	July to December 1921
unknown	24	3	12	17	29.6	3.1	18.8	48.6
1-2	26	21	10	6	32.1	21.9	15.6	17.1
3-5	15	20	15	4	18.5	20.8	23.4	11.4
6-8	7	13	11	0	8.6	13.5	17.2	0.0
9-13	7	17	4	3	8.6	17.7	6.3	8.6
14-21	1	13	6	3	1.2	13.5	9.4	8.6
25-69	1	9	6	2	1.2	9.4	9.4	5.7
TOTAL	81	96	64	35	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

out 1921. The 1920-21 strike upsurge, reports of a "new consciousness", and an increasing proportion of long strikes, all coincided.

Some strikes were short because workers' demands were conceded, or a compromise was reached. In July 1920 cotton factory workers struck over a 12½% pay claim, and settled for a 6½% rise after two days; in September, tailors resumed work after five days on strike when wage increases were granted, and in December, workers at Jessops' engineering concern ended their strike after four days on the promise that their grievances would be investigated.<sup>2</sup> Not all short strikes achieved concessions. In July 1920 a jute factory strike following the dismissal of a sardar was abandoned after one day, while in October another jute strike over shift arrangements collapsed after two days.<sup>3</sup>

The longest factory workers' strike, lasting for 69 days, took place at the Russa engineering works in Calcutta, between 16 October and 24 December 1920.<sup>4</sup> The strike began when the manager rejected demands for higher pay, the dismissal of a supervisory employee, reinstatement of a workman (dismissed for organising a petition), and a promise that no one else would be sacked. Negotiations immediately

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- 1) Strike duration is measured in calendar days, not "working days", the unit used in official statistics (see Journal of Indian Industries and Labour, 1921-23 passim). For sources, see p.113.
  - 2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1194-5, 1200-1, 1226-7.
  - 3) Ibid., pp.1196-7, 1204-5.
  - 4) Ibid., pp.1206-7; E, 18,19/10/1920; S, 17,19,20/10/1920, 3,4/12/1920.

after the strike began showed that the manager was not prepared to dismiss the supervisor, or grant all round pay rises, but he did agree to reinstate the sacked employee, and not to sack anyone for striking. The workers were not prepared to settle on these terms, and decided to continue with their strike. A second round of negotiations began nearly two weeks later when a pleader retained by the workers interviewed the manager, but neither side was prepared to make concessions, and so the conflict remained deadlocked. The situation continued unchanged until at the beginning of December the strikers won the support of workers in the one remaining department not on strike. On 2 December the whole factory came to a standstill for the first time, and pickets ensured that no work was carried out for the next two weeks. The manager then offered a Rs.5 increase for selected workers, including all members of the last department to join the strike, provided that all employees resumed work. Four days later the first breach of solidarity occurred when lorry loads of workers, escorted by police, entered the factory, and a few days later the strike collapsed.

Tramwaymen's agitation between October 1920 and May 1921 shows how their attitudes hardened during this period. In October 1920 tramway employees struck for the first time in 15 years when a petition setting out their demands was rejected.<sup>1</sup> This strike ended three days later amid shouts of "Kali Ma ki jai!", "Allen Sahib ki jai!",<sup>2</sup> having resulted in the concession of higher pay, free uniforms, the reinstatement of sacked colleagues, and a promise that no one would be dismissed for having joined the strike. Other outstanding issues, such as paid leave, legal aid for men involved in accidents, and medical assistance, were to be discussed later.

There were no further reports of agitation on the tramway until late in January 1921 when a new petition, restating some of the outstanding claims, and adding some new ones, was presented to the manager. The petition concluded by asking for a decision by 25 January, "failing which we shall have no other alternative but to regretfully suspend work - a course which we are extremely reluctant to adopt."<sup>3</sup> This petition

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1200-1; "Resolution on the Report of the Calcutta Tramways Strike Committee", Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 13/4/1921, pp.694-5; ABP, 1-3, 5,6/10/1920, E, 2,5/10/1920; S, 2,3,5/10/1920.
  - 2) 'Hail Goddess Kali', 'Hail Mr Allen' - the tramway manager - ABP, 5,15/10/1920; S, 5/10/1920.
  - 3) "Resolution on the Report of the Calcutta Tramways Strike Committee", p.695.

seems to have been drawn up by the workers independently of their union, the Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, the leaders of which promptly convened a meeting to dissuade them from striking.<sup>1</sup> The strike was postponed for a few days, but another meeting on 26 January revealed how adamant the men were. In response to a plea that the strike should be delayed for another day to allow negotiations to begin, the men retorted that the company was well aware of their grievances, and instead of negotiating had put police guards on all the tram depots. Some conductors said that it was preferable to starve than continue working without redress of their grievances, and so the union officials reluctantly agreed to support the strike, which began the next day.<sup>2</sup>

Two days later the union officials obtained the strikers' consent to a peace formula - it was agreed at a meeting that they would return to work at once if a non-official committee consisting largely of Europeans would arbitrate. However, the manager rejected these terms and refused to discuss anything until the men resumed work. Consequently the strikers decided to remain on strike until an independent committee was established, a decision reaffirmed on 16 February, the day after an ultimatum to sack all the strikers had expired. The men's determination even after three weeks on strike was reinforced by their rejection, on 17 February, of another compromise whereby they would resume work, the manager would be given time to examine their grievances, and if they were still dissatisfied, then an independent committee would be formed. Events took a new turn following a riot at Kalighat tram depot the next day which seems to have provoked the Government to intervene. After discussions with the union leader, it was announced that the strike would end on 24 February on terms similar to those advanced on 17 February. This time the men accepted the compromise, and returned to work. The tram company's prevarication nearly provoked further strikes in the following weeks of negotiation, but union leaders were able to contain the pressure. The problems raised in October 1920 and January 1921 were finally settled in May 1921.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1344-5; ABP, 27,28,30/1/1921; GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.8-9.
  - 2) ABP, 28/1/1921; S, 27/1/1921. For accounts of this strike, see "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1244-5; ABP, E, S, 28/1/1921 to 24/2/1921, passim.
  - 3) For subsequent events see "Resolution on the Report of the Calcutta Tramways Strike Committee"; GB Commerce (Commerce), June 1921, A 15-21 & KWs; ABP, 4,8/3/1921, 10/4/1921, 3/5/1921; E, 19,20/4/1921, 10/5/1921; S, 6/3/1921, 22,24/4/1921, 6/5/1921.

These examples show that while long strikes were complex phenomena, the workers' determination to obtain acceptable terms for settling the conflict at the cost of remaining on strike, was a key element. Insofar as employees had previously given way to pressure from employers, and many continued to do so, this determination was clearly a new departure, perhaps the 'new consciousness'. The tramwaymen's agitation also shows the nature of this development since in October 1920 they were prepared to settle for a smaller wage increase than demanded, and to allow the manager further time to consider other issues, and ended the strike praising the manager. In 1921, faced with the manager's refusal to negotiate, they displayed equal intransigence, and remained on strike for 28 days before accepting a compromise urged on them by their union, and backed by the Government.

The tramwaymen's assertion that they would rather starve than put up with their grievances any longer implies that something more than just the specific demands was at stake - the principle that their problems deserved attention and resolution. This attitude was also apparent from a taxi driver's speech during their agitation, following the rejection of a petition, in which he urged drivers to pledge willingness to go to jail rather than continue to suffer "the pinpricks of the parawalla" (meaning the beat policeman's provocation and graft), or pay fines.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in December 1921, workers defended their decision to strike over a European policeman's removing a man's Gandhi cap saying that this had been an insult to all of them, and if they had not struck, it would have been impossible to wear whatever clothes they chose.<sup>2</sup> This element of the 'new consciousness' was given its clearest characterisation in speeches at Barakar, in western Bengal, in January 1921, by Swami Biswananda, a strike and union leader.<sup>3</sup> He spoke to a meeting of engineering works' strikers, and argued that while material gains were important, so was honour - and "If there was no honour in service then the bread of jail was better."<sup>4</sup> Given such an outlook, the increased adoption of strikes to resolve labour relations disputes,

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- 1) E, 10/1/1921; S, 11/1/1921. Taxi drivers' main grievances centred on taxi regulations, and the opportunities they provided for police graft.
  - 2) E, 5/12/1921. The men were criticised for striking precipitately by the BCLF secretary, and justified their action to him.
  - 3) See Appendix IV, p. 316.
  - 4) GoI Home (Political), February 1921, Deposit 5. The speeches were reported verbatim.

chiefly involving opposition to dismissals, and to humiliating treatment at the hands of supervisors, becomes more understandable.

One further point about factory and non-factory workers' consciousness that needs to be made is that this new-found militancy seems to have been similar to that of railwaymen and clerks insofar as it stemmed from a view that employers' and employees' mutual interests justified militancy on the part of the latter when employers failed to carry out what were conceived of as their duties. The taxi drivers' union, for example, was formed early in 1920, and had the following objectives:

the chief aim of the Association is deep loyalty to the Government and the police and to make its members abide by police rules. (1)

Proposals put forward by the union in an attempt to resolve their dispute over taxi regulations, rejected by the authorities in January 1921, were described by the union's legal advisor as an attempt on their part "to promote mutual confidence and concord between the authorities and the members".<sup>2</sup> Speakers at an early meeting of the Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union also stressed that the union had not been formed to foster antagonism between employees and the company, "but to look after its [sic] welfare of the employees as well as the company".<sup>3</sup>

There are also indications of a development of ideas within this framework. In August 1920 the police grooms' petition had concluded:

You are our Master so you are like our father and mother  
be kind upon us and oblige. God will help you and give  
your long life with good prosperity [sic]. (4)

However, in January 1921, one of the speakers at the Barakar meeting said that "the old idea of "ma bap raj" should disappear", and employers should respect their workforce. Swami Biswananda said that employers should realise that "it was the labourers who maintained the works, it was due to the labourers that trade and industry could prosper." However, this was not the prelude to an argument outlining the labour theory of value, but to the view that both sides of industry should cooperate with each other. He said,

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1) E, 3/7/1920.

2) E, 10/1/1921.

3) E, 25/11/1920.

4) GB Political (Police), November 1920, B 167-74 (actual file). See Appendix I, p.281, for the full text.

Capitalists and labourers should work smoothly and harmoniously ... The capitalists should understand that the wealth they are accumulating was due to the labour of the labourers and the capitalists should therefore see that the labourers had no cause for dissatisfaction and discontent. (1)

Rising prices posed a threat to factory and non-factory workers living standards, and were a continuous pressure for trade unionism, throughout 1918 to 1920. Until the middle of 1920, this pressure was generally mitigated by a combination of minor wage concessions, bonuses, price controls, and boom conditions which facilitated higher earnings. The most important exception was the jute industry which entered a slump with the ending of hostilities in 1918, and did not recover until early 1920. However, in this case the virtual absence of collective agitation seems related to the weakness of the workers' bargaining position during the slump. As prices continued to rise until the end of 1920, so the pressure on living standards was probably renewed as the effects of earlier wage increments and increased earnings were nullified. However the employers' room to manoeuvre was simultaneously restricted by the end of the boom conditions towards the end of 1920. Wage demands made at this time were consequently not met with any form of concession, thus making for the late 1920 strike upsurge.

The possibility that employees would strike over their demands at the end of 1920 was increased by changes in their behaviour and attitudes. There is evidence to suggest that factory and non-factory employees engaged in strikes more willingly by the end of 1920, while they also became more determined to obtain redress of their grievances. This determination seems to have taken the form of a militant interpretation of a corporatist view of labour market relations, similar to that held by railwaymen and clerks.

### Conclusions

In 1918-19 all employees sought allowances or higher wages to cope with rising living costs, indicating that inflation was the most important single cause of post-war trade unionism. Nearly all groups initiated their demands by petitioning, or engaging in similarly non-confrontational forms of activity, apparently in the belief that employers, or the author-

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1) GoI Home (Political), February 1921, Deposit 5.



ities in general, had a duty to protect them from the effects of inflation. Among some groups this idea was supported by their views about their role in the war effort, their social standing, the fact that other employees had received higher pay or allowances, and that current political reforms justified improvements in working conditions. When employers responded positively to petitions, or acted to mitigate the impact of inflation in other ways, thus confirming employees' expectations and meeting their needs, then pressures for the development of new forms of trade unionism were nullified. However, when petitions were ignored, or reforms exacerbated their problems, employees were faced with the problem of what further action to take.

Subordinate supervisory and clerical employees seem to have been bewildered by their employers' intransigence, and their adoption of other forms of trade unionism was a lengthy process. They generally attributed the absence of concessions to a problem of communication, and renewed their efforts at petitioning, reinforcing this with open collective activity such as deputations and meetings. In the course of this they developed coordination committees, which were increasingly recognised as necessary forms of organization, and transformed into unions. Once this trend had been established, other groups moved more rapidly from the initiation of activity to formation of a union, thus leading to the inauguration of a large number of unions in 1920. With very few exceptions none of these employees went on strike, a feature characteristic of earlier phases of unionization. One reason for their restraint which emerges from their arguments in 1918-20 was their commitment to "constitutional" action, and opposition to strikes in principle.

Factory and non-factory employees, while sharing a similar conception of the relationship between employers and employees, responded to employers' intransigence by striking - as they explained on several occasions, they could see no alternative, faced as they were with deterioration in their living standards. In this respect their behaviour in 1918-21 marked no departure from what had already become well established. What was new was the range of factory and non-factory employees who simultaneously resorted to strikes, and the militant interpretation of employers' and employees' roles and duties. (The formation of trade unions by these employees was largely the outcome of another process influencing post-war trade unionism, discussed in Chapters 7 and 8).

The fact that decisions to engage in one or other form of trade unionism was influenced by so many factors indicates that no simple correlation between levels of achievement and of activity, such as might have been suggested by Table 5.15<sup>1</sup> existed. It is quite possible that perceptions of the potential for success or failure of a particular form of activity entered into workers' calculations about whether to engage in collective activity, and what forms of trade unionism to use. However, there is no evidence to show that this was the case, while accounts of the process of engagement in trade unionism show behaviour to have been motivated largely by questions of need, the justice of demands, employers' behaviour, and judgements about the legitimacy of particular forms of activity.

It has not been possible to avoid some references to the influence of contemporary political activities in this chapter. These appear to have acted as a constraint on the behaviour of railwaymen and clerks, who contrasted their behaviour with the activities of nationalists to the extent of describing their actions as "constitutional". Factory and non-factory workers on the other hand appear to have received some assistance from nationalists, and to have adopted some nationalist-inspired demands. This aspect of trade unionism in the post-First World period will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

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1) See p.142.

CHAPTER 7: Trade unionism and politics.

Insofar as post-war trade unionism developed almost simultaneously with mass nationalist activity, particularly agitation against the Rowlatt Bills in 1919, and the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements in 1919-22,<sup>1</sup> a close relationship between trade unionism and political events could clearly be inferred. Contemporary opinions exhibited a wide range of views on the nature of this relationship, however. Some reports suggested that the two movements were relatively autonomous, or that although some strikes and unions were led by political figures, the nationalists' overall impact was marginal.<sup>2</sup> At the opposite extreme were claims that the unions were largely the creation of nationalists, who also fomented strikes as part of their campaign against the British.<sup>3</sup> The same range of opinions is represented in later studies, and the thesis that unions in Bengal were created largely by nationalists as a political weapon has recently been restated.<sup>4</sup>

Some studies of post-independence Indian trade unions, where the phenomenon of politician-trade-union leaders is also found, reveal that the relationship between workers and politicians is a complex one, neither marginal, nor reducible to one of the manipulation of workers by politicians.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this chapter is first to establish the extent to which nationalists and other political figures were involved in trade unionism, and then to examine the nature of that relationship. An attempt will also be made to indicate other aspects of

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- 1) See e.g. P.C. Bamford, Histories of the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements, (Delhi, 1925, 1974), passim; J.H. Broomfield, Elite conflict in a plural society, (Cambridge, 1968), Chapters 4-6; McPherson, The Muslim Microcosm, Chapters 3 and 4; R.K. Ray, "Masses in politics: the non-cooperation movement in Bengal, 1920-22", Indian Economic and Social History Review, XI (4), 1974, pp.343-410.
  - 2) GoI Home (Political), December 1920, Deposit 59; February 1921, Deposit 34, 77. Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 39 (1-2), 1921; GB Commerce, July 1921, A 40-42 KWs; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1185-88; ABP, 20/3/1920; Bamford, ibid., p.59; Sen, Working class of India, p.131.
  - 3) GoI Home (Political), March 1920, Deposit 89; July 1920, Deposit 13, 104; August 1920, Deposit 110; October 1920, Deposit 81; December 1920, Deposit 84, 87; February 1921, Deposit 77; June 1921, Deposit 51, 55; file: Deposit 415 (1-5), 1921. E, 13/2/1920, 16/11/1920; S, 19/11/1920.
  - 4) Ray, Urban roots of Indian nationalism, pp.83-98, restates this view. For other studies, see e.g. p.9, footnotes 1-3.
  - 5) Ramaswamy, "The role of the trade union leader in India", pp.163-72; Sengupta, "Trade unions politics and the state", pp.45-67.

the impact of political events on trade unionism.

### Leadership

The first problem can be approached by examining the participation of nationalists in strike and union leadership. Leadership can be defined as comprising the people who organised petitions and meetings, proposed resolutions, and organised other forms of activity, such as strikes or union formation, and who staffed the formal union posts. However, as will be apparent from the following discussion, these 'leaders' were not always able to exercise leadership, but were subject to considerable pressures from the rank and file. This implies that the present analysis is in fact restricted to one 'level' of leadership, but the lack of detailed information prevents assessment of its significance, or its relationship to the other 'levels'. An additional problem is that evidence for strike leadership appears to be biased in favour of public figures, whose names were reported whenever they intervened, while the identity of workers leaders was rarely given. Lists of trade union officers, however, included all types of people, and provide an indication of their status through the name of the office they held.

Strike reports generally gave no information about leadership or organization, referring if at all simply to 'the men', or the men's 'representatives', as if leaders and strikers were indistinguishable. Other reports were more specific, and from them several classes of leaders can be identified - employees, non-employees (outsiders), and different groups of outsiders.

Employee strike leaders often seem to have been sardars, or mistris (skilled workmen). Strikes at the Hugli jute mill (March 1918), on the Tukvar tea plantation (March 1919), and at the Bali jute mill (July 1920) were all initiated by sardars.<sup>1</sup> Other reports refer to sardars in the role of negotiators as distinct from strike initiators. In September 1918 for example jute press strikers forced their sardars to negotiate with the employers, and ultimately reached a settlement through them. Jute press sardars also conducted negotiations to resolve another strike in 1919.<sup>2</sup> The Lilua railway workshop strike of July 1919 and the stevedore's labourers' and jute factory strikes of November 1920

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1) E, S, 9/3/1918; E, 4/4/1919; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1196-7.

2) S, 2/10/1918, 28/10/1919.

were also settled after negotiations between sardars and the employers.<sup>1</sup> Mistris played a similar role in the Russa and Steuart engineering strikes of October 1920, while in February 1921 the manager of Saxby and Farmer's engineering works had to send for the "leading mistris" to discover the cause of a strike there.<sup>2</sup> The head mistris of different departments were responsible for presenting Lilua railway workshop employees' demands to the authorities in February 1921, and for leading a strike when the management refused to make any concessions. Later in this strike the head mistris collectively sought assistance from an outsider to conduct negotiations on their behalf.<sup>3</sup>

While sardars or mistris probably exercised leadership in many other strikes, and so were an important component of the anonymous 'level' of workers leaders, they did not always act in this way. In the November 1918 Kharagpur railway workshop strike, for example, mistris tried to return to work several times, but were prevented from doing so by other strikers.<sup>4</sup> Mistris remained at work in November 1919 when the Jessop's engineering workforce struck, and during a strike at the Calcutta Corporation workshop in December 1920.<sup>5</sup> In August 1920, sardars attempted to persuade sweepers to end their strike before a satisfactory settlement had been achieved; foremen and sardars at the Calcutta gasworks remained at work during a strike in October, and the following month, three jute factory strikes began regardless of the sardars' opposition.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately there is nothing to suggest why sardars and mistris should behave differently in conflicts with employers.

In seeking to identify politician strike leaders, it immediately becomes apparent that politicians were not the only outsiders who participated in strikes. It is therefore necessary to identify the presence of outsiders in general, and then to distinguish between classes of outsiders. Strike reports indicate that outsiders were associated with at least 65 strikes between January 1918 and the end of 1921. Their

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- 1) S, 3/8/1919; ABP, 4/8/1919; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1210-11; 1216-7.
  - 2) S, 26/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1206-7, 1246-7.
  - 3) ABP, 30,31/3/1921; S, 29/3/1921. The outsider approached by the mistris was C.F. Andrews.
  - 4) ABP, 23/11/1918; E, 25/11/1918.
  - 5) E, 7/11/1919; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1234-5.
  - 6) ABP, 24/8/1920; E, 8/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1216-7.

presence varied considerably according to the year and the employee group, as Table 7.1 indicates.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 7.1: Percentage of strikes in which outsiders were present, 1918-1921

year	employee groups							TOTAL
	subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	railway	mixed	not known	
1918	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	8.3
1919	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	7.4
1920	0.0	100.0	18.2	27.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.5
1921	0.0	0.0	19.1	25.0	46.2	100.0	0.0	21.9
TOTAL	0.0	57.1	16.5	22.3	32.0	100.0	0.0	19.6

Outsiders appear only to have been present in about one-fifth of all these strikes; they were active in a slightly higher proportion of non-factory strikes, and a slightly lower proportion of factory strikes. (The high levels of outsider presence in clerical and railway strikes reflects the smallness of the samples, and so should be overlooked). The table also shows a sudden increase in the general proportion of strikes in which outsiders were present in 1920 and 1921 compared with 1918 and 1919.

Since our concern is with political outsiders, it would be convenient to divide outsiders into political and non-political groups, and then to examine the former in more detail. However, such a procedure is virtually impossible to implement since in some cases only the fact that a leading figure was an outsider is known; in other cases one other attribute of individual outsiders is known (for example, that the person was a lawyer), and in only a very small number of cases are several attributes, including political affiliation, known. In view of these limitations, and the paucity of evidence concerning strike leadership, it is only feasible to give a general description of the classes of outsiders involved with strikes.

People with some form of legal qualification or status - pleader vakil, barrister, counsel, solicitor, or lawyer - were involved in a number of strikes, in jute mills, and railway workshops, and by postmen,

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1) See pp.113-4 (Table 5.3) for statistics and sources.

taxi drivers, printers, engineers, boatmen and dockers.<sup>1</sup> Businessmen assisted in petroleum depot and conservancy workers' strikes, while religious and social leaders participated in jute mill, iron foundry, coal mine, paper factory, railway, inland steamer and sweepers' strikes.<sup>2</sup> Officials from unions other than those engaged in a strike sometimes gave support and advice, as did some individuals who do not fit clearly into any of these categories.<sup>3</sup>

The category of outsiders with clearly identifiable political attributes is equally complex since outsiders belonged to several different political groups. 'Non-cooperators' (meaning those nationalists who accepted the non-cooperation programme), were active in jute mill, printing press, gasworks, tram, engineering, taxi, railway, and inland steamer strikes, among others.<sup>4</sup> 'Nationalists' (meaning people who neither accepted the non-cooperation programme, nor supported the liberals), were equally active.<sup>5</sup> Indian liberals (who generally supported the existing political structure) also assisted in some strikes, notably those by printers, tramwaymen, taxi drivers, and railwaymen.<sup>6</sup> Discussion of the involvement of politicians in strikes must therefore take cognisance of the range of political opinions represented, and the fact that politicians were part of the larger group of outsiders.

The evidence for trade union leadership is more suitable for analysis of the relative proportions of different types of leaders, and their distribution between different labour market groups. For this purpose, trade union leadership has been defined in purely formal terms, to comprise the officers who filled the posts of president, vice-president, secretary (and joint secretary), assistant secretary (and specific variants such as travelling, or foreign, secretary), treasurer, and auditor or accountant. Each post in the founding committee of different

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- 1) See e.g., ABP, 11/11/1918, 22/5/1919, 6/2/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1194-5, 1206-7.
  - 2) See e.g. ABP, 20/10/1920, 9/12/1920, 13/2/1921; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp. 1221-3, 1236-7, 1244-5.
  - 3) See e.g., ABP, 30/3/1921; E, 7/3/1921; S, 15/5/1921, 26/10/1921. "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1246-7. For such individuals, see C.F. Andrews, or H.W.B. Moreno, in Appendix IV.
  - 4) See e.g., ABP, 19/9/1920, 12/1/1921, 1/4/1921, 26/5/1921; E, 9/2/1921; S, 5,12/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp. 1258-9.
  - 5) See e.g., ABP, 20,24/11/1920; E, 5/8/1920, 13/5/1921; S, 5/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1261; Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 144 (1-16), 1921.
  - 6) E, 5/8/1921, 3/1/1922; S, 5/10/1920.

unions has been classified according to the incumbents' attributes - subsequent changes of personnel, and branch committees, have not been analysed.<sup>1</sup> The attributes have been simplified into mutually exclusive categories, that of employee (or ex-employee in the same occupation) taking precedence, while among outsiders, political characteristics have been given preference over 'non-political' ones, such as lawyer, businessman, or religious leader. The categories into which outsiders have been classed is the same as that outlined above for strikes, except that religious or social leaders, and other minor non-political groups have been collected together under the heading 'miscellaneous', and the political groups 'Anglo-Indian' and 'municipal' have been added.<sup>2</sup> This analysis is presented in Table 7.2.<sup>3</sup>

The sample of unions and officers analysed is distributed very unevenly between union groups, and categories of officers. In addition, while there was only one president, treasurer, and auditor or accountant and generally only one secretary in each organization, there was considerable variation in the numbers of vice-presidents and assistant secretaries. The data for these two classes of officer is thus weighted by being drawn from a disproportionately small group of unions. These limitations mean that Table 7.2 only provides an approximate indication of the distribution of different classes of leader.

Starting with union leadership in general, it appears that approximately half were employees, and half were outsiders. Only one-third of union officers had a definite political affiliation; non-cooperators formed the largest single group, while liberals and nationalists occupied second place. The largest category of non-political outsiders was the miscellaneous group, comprising religious and social leaders, and otherwise unclassifiable individuals. The classification of different union posts, and of all officers in union groups, differs considerably from this general picture.

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- 1) The contemporary significance of the different posts cannot be ascertained, and it has to be assumed that posts with the same designation were comparable. Such formal designations of union officers appears to have been the norm - among unions whose officers are known, only the Barbers' Association, and the Lohars' Association, did not have this structure, and all their officers were employees - see GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.5, 10. Travelling secretaries were found in railway unions, while the Indian Seamen's Union had a foreign secretary - see Appendix III.
  - 2) See Appendix IV for leaders' names and classifications.
  - 3) See p.196.





The ratio of employees to outsiders varied considerably according to the formal status of the post. Outsiders predominated at the level of president and vice-president, but more secretaries were employees than outsiders, indicating that the proportion of outsiders decreased the nearer the post was to the union rank and file. Unfortunately the sample of treasurers, assistant secretaries and accountants or auditors was very small, and so does not provide strong evidence to support this conclusion. However, it should be noted that executive committee members who did not hold any specific post, and branch committee members (including officers), all appear to have been actual employees.<sup>1</sup> The high proportion of outsider treasurers is thus either an exception, or a statistical quirk, while the high proportion of employees holding the other two posts reflects the general pattern of a diminishing proportion of outsiders.

Two-thirds of union presidents were outsiders; nearly half of them had political characteristics, while less than a quarter of them were non-political outsiders. However, people with liberal, nationalist, or non-cooperator political affiliation, and those in the 'miscellaneous' group of non-political outsiders, all held approximately equal numbers of union presidencies. Even if nationalists and non-cooperators were grouped together, they made up less than one quarter of the union presidents. The characteristics of vice-presidents were almost the same as those of presidents, the small proportion of non-political outsiders probably being a reflection of the bias in the sample. Among union secretaries, however, political outsiders were in a clear minority, accounting for less than 20% of the total (with non-cooperators filling slightly more than 10% of the posts). Non-political outsiders held more than a quarter of the secretaries' posts, the largest number falling into the miscellaneous group.

The ratio of employees to non-employees also varies sharply according to the labour market group into which unions fell, with subordinate supervisory unions having the smallest, and non-factory unions the greatest proportion of outsiders. Unfortunately there

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1) See e.g., GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.4-6, 8; Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, pp.29-32; Employees' Association, First Annual Report, p.1; Labour, vol.1, 1921, passim (on BPRMSA branches); E, 26/6/1920; S, 4,20/7/1920 (RWA); ABP, 19/10/1920 (EBRIFA), S, 31/10/1920 (CPTEA); ABP, 19/11/1920 (BNRILU).

is very little information concerning factory union officers. Insofar as no rigid distinction can be made between factory and non-factory workers, and the railway and mixed group unions (in which the proportion of outsiders was also high) contained large factory-type elements, then the high proportion of outsider factory union officers indicated in the table is probably correct.<sup>1</sup> There thus appears to have been a trend from smaller to larger proportions of outsider officers according to the hierarchy of labour market groups.

Confining our attention to the clerical and non-factory groups, for which reasonable numbers of officers have been identified, it is clear that in both groups, political outsiders were the largest group of non-employee officers. Just under a quarter of clerical unions' officers had an identifiable political affiliation, and among them, nationalists and non-cooperators were of equal significance. However, the number of miscellaneous non-political outsiders was almost as great as that of nationalists and non-cooperators. Political outsiders held 50% of non-factory union posts, the non-cooperators forming the largest group (21%) followed by liberals (16%) and then nationalists (11%). Less than a quarter of non-factory outsiders fell into the non-political category, and among them, businessmen and miscellaneous outsiders were present in almost equal proportions.

It might be objected that this method of analysis conceals concentrations of outsiders, and this evidence for the domination of particular unions by one group. However, of the unions with more than one outsider officer, only two had officers belonging to one political group. These were the Central Oriya Labour Union, whose president and secretary were non-cooperators, and the Jamadars' Association, whose vice-president and secretary were also non-cooperators.<sup>2</sup> In contrast there were seven unions with between five and nine outsider officers, who came from different political and non-political groups. The Indian Seamen's Union, for example, had three liberals, two miscellaneous non-political outsiders, and one nationalist, one non-cooperator, one lawyer, and one businessman among its officers.<sup>3</sup>

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1) However, many factory unions may have been established by sardars under the general aegis of the BCLF - see Chapter 8, pp.222-4.

2) COLU - E, 29/10/1921; JA - GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.6-7.

3) GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.1-2. For details, see Appendix III.

This analysis shows that employees probably formed the most important group of leaders, particularly at levels of organization close to the workforce, while outsiders were mainly found at the formal levels of unions, and public aspects of strikes. Political outsiders, besides belonging to different political groups, also shared the characteristic of outsider with other non-political people, indicating that they must first be considered as part of the general category of outsiders before their specific contribution to trade unionism can be identified. It is also interesting to note that outsiders were present in all types of unions, not just those of factory and non-factory workers, as some commentators have suggested.<sup>1</sup>

#### Outsiders and trade unionism

Many reports of the involvement of outsiders clearly state that their presence was due to workers seeking their assistance. Lawyers were sometimes engaged to present petitions, for example by stevedores' labourers, and spice warehouse porters, in November 1920,<sup>2</sup> but were more usually engaged after a strike had begun. Railway workshop employees at Kharagpur struck work on 5 November 1918 in protest at high prices, and the lack of a response to a previous strike and petition. The next day the management asked for the workers' representatives to come and discuss their problems, but it appears that despite assurances to the contrary, workers feared that if their leaders were identified, they would be victimised, and so no one came forward to negotiate. Instead workers approached a lawyer at Midnapur, a few miles away, on 8 November, asking him to come to Kharagpur and represent them in negotiations, a role he fulfilled throughout the strike until it ended on 16 December.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, postmen who went on strike in May 1919 hired a lawyer to represent their case a few days after starting the strike, as did engineers from the Russa works in 1920.<sup>4</sup>

Workers also approached other types of outsiders in a similar way. The Kharagpur railway workshop employees, for example, also sought help from the Bengal Civil Rights Committee towards the end of November

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- 1) Mathur & Mathur, Trade union movement in India, p.229; Punekar, "Trade union movement in India", p.398.
  - 2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1210-11, 1226-7.
  - 3) Confidential, GoI Railway (Establishments), June 1919, Case No. 1827E-18/1-21; ABP, 11,14/11/1918, 2/12/1918.
  - 4) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1206-7; ABP, 22/5/1919.

1918. As a result, the provincial nationalist leader, C.R. Das, and a local nationalist, B.N. Sasmal, went to Kharagpur, and were ultimately instrumental in persuading the men to return to work.<sup>1</sup> Government printers and compositors went on strike in July 1920, and about ten days later it was reported that two lawyers had chaired strike meetings - the first references to outsider involvement in this strike. Shortly afterwards another strike meeting set up a committee consisting of two nationalists, two non-cooperators, and one liberal, to conduct negotiations with the authorities. Other lawyers, and members of different political groups, also assisted the printers at later stages of their strike, acting as negotiators and strike organizers.<sup>2</sup> The unsuccessful attempts of tramway strikers, and taxi drivers, to enlist the aid of the Calcutta police commissioner, and by jute factory workers to persuade a district magistrate to intervene on their behalf, should also be noted.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that workers approached outsiders to seek their assistance implies that the relationship between the two groups was determined by the workers' needs, and not that the latter were in any way manipulated by the outsiders. Examples of what happened when outsiders and workers differed tend to support this view. Gasworks' employees went on strike early in October 1920, and hired a lawyer to present their demands to the management. However, after opening the negotiations, the lawyer declared that the workers had been wrong to demand higher wages, and urged the men to return to work. Instead of accepting this advice, the strikers ignored this lawyer, and sought assistance from other outsiders. A few days later a strike meeting was held, presided over by a non-cooperator, and a negotiating committee was formed consisting of three non-cooperators, one nationalist, and one merchant. These people, together with other outsiders, including the assistant secretary of "the local Seva Samity", helped to organise the strike by providing food, and

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1) S, 8, 18/12/1918.

2) ABP, 29/7/1920, 4/8/1920, 22/9/1920; E, 5/8/1920; S, 6, 13, 22/8/1920, 1/9/1920. Byomkes Chakrabarty, Lalit Mohan Ghose, S.N. Haldar, B.K. Lahiri, and I.B. Sen made up the negotiating committee. For further details of these individuals, see Appendix IV.

3) S, 3, 5/10/1920; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1230-1; S, 5/3/1921, respectively. For other strike reports showing that workers sought outsiders' aid, see: Confidential GB Political (Political), File 144 (1-16), 1921; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1194-5 - 1253, *passim*; ABP, 12/6/1918, 6/2/1920, 10/10/1920, 20/11/1920, 9/12/1920, 13/2/1921; E, 6/8/1919, 30/10/1920, 31/12/1920; S, 7/11/1920, 30/3/1921; 6/4/1921.

funds, and made several attempts to negotiate a settlement.<sup>1</sup> However, the strike collapsed when some men began to drift back to work, and others returned, fearing that they would lose their jobs altogether if they did not.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between tramwaymen and outsiders over the year following the formation of the Calcutta Tramways' Employees Union (CTEU) in October 1920 is particularly interesting in this respect. Outsiders began assisting tramwaymen during the October 1920 strike, when the same assistant secretary of "the Seva Samity" involved in the gasworks' strike<sup>3</sup> negotiated on behalf of the men. The resulting settlement was accepted by one group of workers, but men from another depot refused to return to work as they had not been consulted. This group invited three other outsiders to a strike meeting where these and two other outsiders were appointed to represent the strikers' case.<sup>4</sup> Agreement to end the strike was finally reached on the fourth day of the strike after negotiations between the management, and this committee of outsiders.<sup>5</sup>

While outsiders' involvement usually seems to have ended at this point, the people who negotiated during the strike also helped to found and run the CTEU. At a meeting on 24 October, presided over by D.D. Sethia, all the outsiders who participated in the strike, together with 17 other anonymous people, presumably workers, formed a union committee.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the year, after further changes, the CTEU committee appears to have consisted of N.C. Sen (president), Nirmal Chandra Chandra (treasurer), G.P. Chaubey (secretary), an anonymous employee as assistant secretary, and two drivers and two conductors from each tramway section.<sup>7</sup> This committee, or at least the outsiders, seems to have been caught unawares by the threat of another strike

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- 1) N.C. Chandra, N.C. Sen, D.B. Sethia, A.P. Bajpai, and M.M. Barman formed the negotiating committee; other outsiders were G.P. Chaubey, H.D. Bose, and A.C. Ukil - see Appendix IV for details.
  - 2) ABP, 12,17,19/10/1920; E, 11/10/1920; S, 9,10,12,17,20/10/1920.
  - 3) G.P. Chaubey - S, 3/10/1920.
  - 4) N.C. Sen, J.M. Sen Gupta, and A.P. Bajpai were invited to the meeting, and were joined by D.D. Sethia, and P.K. Ghosh as negotiators - S, 5/10/1920.
  - 5) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1200-1; ABP, 1-3, 5,6/10/1920; E, 2,5/10/1920; S, 2,3,5/10/1920.
  - 6) ABP, 26/10/1920. Although the CTEU was said to have been formed on 4/10/1920 (GB "List of Labour Unions", pp.8-9), this is the first contemporary reference.
  - 7) ABP, 10/12/1920. An earlier meeting was reported in E, 25/11/1920.

which developed towards the end of January 1921.

Some tramway employees apparently issued a strike threat around the third week of January, for on 21 January, CTEU officials called a meeting and urged their members to negotiate rather than to strike.<sup>1</sup> This appeal only had limited success. A petition was drawn up and submitted to the management the following day, but it was drafted independently of the union, and threatened to strike from 25 January failing receipt of a satisfactory response.<sup>2</sup> Union officials then decided to convene another meeting to tell the men they must work through the union otherwise the officers would resign.<sup>3</sup> At this meeting, held on 26 January, the drivers and conductors told the union officials about the petition, and of their plan to strike the next day. The president and secretary both opposed the strike call, but eventually conceded that it was too late to abandon the strike when told, in the words of one man, "'Sir, instead of giving us any reply the Company has already made Police arrangements from Thursday morning'."<sup>4</sup> The union officials then resumed their role of negotiators and organizers, both during the strike, and in the following months.<sup>5</sup>

Another crisis in the relationship between tramwaymen and their union officers developed in September 1921. On 28 August tramwaymen held a meeting at which they drew up a list of grievances, asked the union officials to discuss them with the management, and threatened to strike on 5 September if they were not satisfied with the result.<sup>6</sup> At least one and perhaps two deputations, composed of the union secretary, a new outsider, and several tramway employees, met the manager over the next few days, but to no avail.<sup>7</sup> The intransigence of the manager was reported to a meeting on 4 September, chaired by Chaubey and attended by other new outsiders, including the secretaries of the Indian Seamen's Union, and the Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association.

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1244-5. The union president later said that the meeting took place on 22 January - ABP, 30/1/1921.
  - 2) "Resolution on the Report of the Calcutta Tramways Strike Committee", pp.694-5; ABP, 25,27/1/1921. See Appendix I, pp.281-3.
  - 3) ABP, 27/1/1921.
  - 4) ABP, 28/1/1921. See also E, 28/1/1921, and S, 27/1/1921.
  - 5) ABP, E, S, 28/1/1921-24/2/1921, passim; ABP 8/3/1921; E, 11,19, 20/4/1921; S, 4.6/3/1921, 22/4/1921.
  - 6) E, 29/8/1921; S, 20/8/1921.
  - 7) Accounts of events between 28 August and 4 September vary slightly - see ABP, 6/9/1921, and E, 6/9/1921; S, 6/9/1921.

N.C. Sen, the CTEU president, could not attend, and sent a message asking that the strike should be postponed for two days. His request seems to have been rejected, however, as the meeting resolved to strike as planned.<sup>1</sup>

N.C. Sen convened another meeting, on 6 September, and strongly chastised the men for striking while he was in the midst of negotiations. He argued that some of their grievances were simply misunderstandings, and opposed the demand for the reinstatement of several European tramwaymen on the grounds that they were not even union members. Sen was supported by Chaubey, the Indian Seamen's Union secretary Muhammed Daud, and Mahsin Khan of the BCLF. Some workers supported Sen, while others wanted to continue the strike, but eventually, amidst uproar and confusion, the strike was called off.<sup>2</sup>

Some workers at the 4 September meeting had apparently accused Sen and Chaubey of misleading them into thinking that most of their problems had been resolved after the previous strike.<sup>3</sup> Opposition to Sen and Chaubey began crystallising soon after the September strike had been abandoned, and on 16 September a meeting chaired by H.W.B. Moreno questioned Sen and Chaubey about their reasons for calling off the strike.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards Chaubey, as union secretary, was asked to convene another meeting within a week, but he failed to do this, and so the executive committee decided to hold the annual general meeting, on 25 September.<sup>5</sup> A conductor presided at this meeting, and he spoke of the need to strengthen the union with "more men of influence and experience in conducting big labour federations", while other employees accused Sen of having tried to dominate the union. Chaubey lost his position entirely; Sen was retained as a vice-president, and several new outsiders were elected to fill the posts of president, vice-president, and secretary. The new committee was composed of two nationalists, two non-cooperators, one liberal, and two miscellaneous non-political out-

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1) ABP, E, 6/9/1921.

2) Ibid.

3) Such criticism was not reported at the time, but was referred to by Chaubey in a letter refuting the charge - E, 9/9/1921.

4) E, S, 17/9/1921. The Englishman also reported that Moreno, Mahsin and three others went to interview Sen about his decision to call the strike off.

5) E, 26/9/1921.



siders among others.<sup>1</sup> This change was confirmed at another union meeting a few days later,<sup>2</sup> and the new leaders subsequently engaged in negotiations, and led the ensuing strike, in October and November 1921.<sup>3</sup> However, a section of employees at the Kalighat and Taliganj depots continued to support Sen and Chaubey, and formed a separate union.<sup>4</sup> The two unions were finally reunited, after several weeks of discussions, in January 1922.<sup>5</sup>

These two examples suggest that outsiders, whatever their political complexion, played an essentially subordinate role, servicing and subject to employees' needs.<sup>6</sup> Other reports do indicate that nationalist and non-cooperator outsiders in particular may have played a far more decisive role. In this connection two other developments may be analysed - the break-up of the Railway Workmen's Association (RWA) and formation of several Indian railway unions, and the Assam-Bengal Railway and inland steamer strike complex of 1921.

Many RWA branches were opened at stations on the East Indian, Eastern Bengal and Bengal Nagpur lines between March and August 1920. European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen dominated the union committees, but Indians provided the bulk of the membership, and served on committees and deputations.<sup>7</sup> The first separate Indian union was established in October 1920 when the Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association (EBRIEA) was founded at Lalmonirhat in northern Bengal.<sup>8</sup> The Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union (BNRILU) was set up at Kharagpur a month later,<sup>9</sup> and in May 1921 the East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union (EIRILU), and the Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union (ABREU)

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- 1) ABP, 27/9/1921; E, 26/9/1921; S, 27/9/1921. The new committee was composed of - president: Syed Erfan Ali; vice-presidents: N.C. Sen, H.W.B. Moreno, Muhammed Mahsin, Sundar Lal Misra, Syed M. Hanif, and Syed Abdul Hussein; secretary: Bholanath Barman; treasurer: Nirmal Chandra Chandra; auditor: E.C. Stanmore.
  - 2) ABP, 2/10/1921; S, 1/10/1921.
  - 3) E, 7, 13/10/1921; S, 4/10/1921. Strike - E, S, 26/10/1921-22/11/1921, passim; ABP, 25/10/1921-18/11/1921, passim.
  - 4) E, 14/11/1921.
  - 5) ABP, S, 10/1/1922.
  - 6) For this reason no discussion of outsiders' views on or motives for assisting unions has been included in this chapter.
  - 7) Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 189 (1-3), 1920; ABP, 5/4/1920, 22/5/1920; E, 22/5/1920, 16/6/1920, 26/6/1920, 9/8/1920, 10/8/1920; S, 4, 14, 20/7/1920, 3/8/1920.
  - 8) ABP, 19/10/1920; Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference (Second Session -1923), pp.2, 33.
  - 9) ABP, 19/11/1920.

were formed.<sup>1</sup> Outsiders, particularly nationalists and non-cooperators were prominent at foundation meetings, and participated in the new union committees.

Events surrounding the formation of the BNRILU could be made into a case for the union having been established at the behest of political (non-cooperator) outsiders. In September 1920 it was reported that Gandhi, while on his way to attend the special Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, advised a Kharagpur railwaymen's representative to organise a separate union.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the Congress session ended, one N.S. Marathe, "deputed by Mr Gandhi", spoke to a non-cooperation meeting at Kharagpur, and advised Indians to form their own union "as the relationship between the Europeans or Anglo-Indians and the Indians is not the same as it is desired".<sup>3</sup> Railwaymen's representatives subsequently asked nationalists and non-cooperators to assist them, and on 14 November, B.C. Pal, Srish Chandra Chatterji, S.N. Haldar, and N.C. Sen went to Kharagpur, where they were the main speakers at a huge meeting. Most of the speakers endorsed the idea of forming an Indian railwaymen's union, and it was resolved to form the All Indian Railway Labour Union, of which the Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur (also known as the Kharagpur Indian Railway Labour Union) was to be the first branch. An Advisory Board was formed with C.R. Das as chairman, and S.N. Haldar, I.B. Sen, B.N. Sasmal, B.C. Pal, and Abdul Jabbar as members. Of these people only Abdul Jabbar was a railway employee, and he was also a local Khilafat movement activist. N.C. Sen was elected president of the Kharagpur AIRLU branch, which later became known as the BNRILU, and all the other members of this committee were railwaymen.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that this meeting was convened by Indian railwaymen who had been active in the RWA,<sup>5</sup> but nevertheless, it seems that Indian railwaymen had accepted nationalist propaganda in favour

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- 1) EIRILU - ABP, 4/5/1921; ABREU - E, 10/5/1921. Another East Indian Railway Labour Association was formed in December 1921 - E, 23/12/1921.
  - 2) GoI Home (Political), December 1920, Deposit 59. The 'representative' was Ajodhya Prosad - for details see Appendix IV.
  - 3) E, 17/9/1920. See also S, 17/9/1920.
  - 4) ABP, 11, 14/11/1920 (announcement); ABP, 18, 19/11/1920 (reports). See also S, 18/11/1920. The AIRLU never developed, and in April 1921 the BNRILU as such was formally established, with the same officers - ABP, E, S, 7/4/1921. The other committee members were Ajodhya Prosad, Kashi Nath Mutu, and 'one member from each department' - ABP, 19/11/1920.
  - 5) D.P. Godbole spoke on behalf of the organizers, and Majahar Ali was elected to chair the 14 November meeting - ABP, 18/11/1920.

of a separate union, asked for their assistance to set it up, and then acquiesced in the formation of a nationalist and non-cooperator dominated organization. However, the reason why such a proposal arose in the first place, and this part of the reason for railwaymen accepting nationalists' advice, was that they had experienced considerable problems in persuading the RWA to take up certain demands - as indeed the portion of N.S. Marathe's speech quoted indicates.

The first indication of serious differences between Europeans and Anglo-Indians on the one hand, and Indians on the other, surfaced in August 1920, when a passing reference to the need for cooperation between different racial groups of railwaymen in the RWA was made at a meeting.<sup>1</sup> This might have passed unnoticed but for letters published a few days later arguing that it was absurd to suggest that Indians could ever be paid the same wages as European railwaymen.<sup>2</sup> One of these letters was probably from an outsider, but the other was from the Asansol district secretary of the RWA. Anti-Indian sentiment in the RWA reached a peak in October when at a meeting to discuss a short strike that had taken place at Kharagpur, it was argued that Indians were swamping the union, and that Europeans and Anglo-Indians should organize separately to safeguard their interests.<sup>3</sup> These views were supported shortly afterwards by a letter from a leading Anglo-Indian politician.<sup>4</sup> RWA officials, while publicly stressing that the union was concerned with the interests of all railwaymen, did little to counter these arguments.<sup>5</sup>

It is not known when the demand for equal pay for equal work was revived<sup>6</sup> but by implication it was being discussed in August 1920. The importance of this issue for Indian railwaymen's decision to form the BNRILU was highlighted by speeches at the 14 November meeting, condemning racially discriminatory wage policies, and the declaration that the new union would aim to achieve "equal remuneration and status

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1) E, S, 17/8/1920.

2) E, 20/8/1920, 23/8/1920.

3) S, 12/10/1920.

4) E, 18/10/1920. Speeches at the October meeting, and other letters supporting this view, were by outsiders - see E, 13,21/10/1920; S, 12/10/1920.

5) S, 19/9/1920; E, 16/10/1920.

6) The issue may have been raised late in 1919 - see S, 5/12/1919; E, 8/12/1919; GoI Railway (Establishments), December 1919, B 2076 abstract (Appendix, January 1920 proceedings' index).

for the same work of office irrespective of colour or race'.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the refusal of the RWA to accept this principle, and the racialist hostility of some European and Anglo-Indian members, Indians continued to play a part in the RWA both before and even after the formation of Indian unions. On the Bengal Nagpur railway, for example, Indian railwaymen organized a strike in October 1920 to protest at the proposal to transfer the European president of the local RWA branch to another station.<sup>2</sup> This strike is all the more remarkable since the reason for making the transfer was that the man had been found guilty of assaulting an Indian stationmaster not long before.<sup>3</sup> By May 1921 it appears that an Indian section of the RWA had been established, though it is not clear whether this was a separate union, or part of the RWA, and several representatives from this organization attended a trade union conference early in 1922.<sup>4</sup> The RWA proper had an Indian assistant general secretary as late as November 1921, and an Indian travelling secretary in January 1922.<sup>5</sup> However, by that time it was also clear that the Indian unions were well established, and the RWA was ceasing to be of importance.

On the Bengal Nagpur line, while steps were taken to consolidate the new Indian union in January and February 1921, an offer of cooperation was made to the RWA which could have led to the re-formation of a single railway union, at least on the BNR. The RWA had been agitating for significant improvements in conditions throughout 1920, and early in 1921 changed ground to demand an independent committee of enquiry, which they believed would vindicate their claim. In February this agitation reached a critical stage with the decision to call a strike, despite the union's opposition to strikes in principle.<sup>6</sup> On 26 February a meeting of the AIRLU at Kharagpur, presided over by N.C. Sen, resolved to support the RWA's strike, provided that the RWA would amend its rules so as to place Indians on the same level as other employees as regards pay and prospects, and pledge to work for the abolition of racial distinctions on the railways, and to obtain justice and equality of opportunity

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1) ABP, 19/11/1920.

2) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1202-3; ABP, 9,10/10/1920; E, 9/10/1920; S, 9,10,13,15,22/10/1920.

3) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1202-3; see also ABP, 6,17/9/1920 (reporting the court case).

4) GB Confidential, Political (Political), File 144 (1-16), 1921; Century Review, VIII (13), 13/5/1922, p.5; Karmi, I (11), July 1922, p.125.

5) S, 2/11/1921; ABP, 5/1/1922.

6) In August 1920 a 75% pay rise was demanded (S, 10/8/1920), supplemented by the demand for a committee in November (S, 16/11/1920). Strike call - E, S, 24/3/1921. (See p.215).

for Indian railwaymen.<sup>1</sup> On 27 February, however, the RWA called off its strike just as it was about to start.<sup>2</sup> The Kharagpur RWA branch met at the same time, and decided that they could not accept the Indian union's conditions for cooperation, and that they should consider setting up a separate union for Europeans and Anglo-Indians.<sup>3</sup> Only at this stage did the Kharagpur Indian union raise the issue of formally severing links with the RWA, a decision finally taken a few days later at a mass meeting.<sup>4</sup>

The combined strike of Assam-Bengal railwaymen and inland steamer crews, together with other smaller groups of employees, which took place in eastern Bengal from May 1921, has often been referred to as a political strike, and a sympathetic strike, inspired in both aspects by the non-cooperation movement.<sup>5</sup> The Assam-Bengal railway strike began on 24 May; some steamer crews at Chandpur struck at the same time, but most did not join in until three or four days later. Quay labourers at various river ports, shipping clerks and steamer workshop employees also joined the strike by the end of May. During June, ferry-men working for the Eastern Bengal Railway, and labourers in Khulna town, also went on strike, while in July a one day general strike took place in Chittagong. Most of the strikes, including that of the steamer crews, ended at the beginning of July, but many railwaymen, together with the steamer clerks and workshop employees, remained on strike until the second week of September.<sup>6</sup>

The railway, steamer employees', quay labourers' and Khulna strikes all began in protest at the treatment of tea plantation workers at Chandpur on 20 May, while the other strikes can be considered as part of the general upsurge of protest throughout eastern Bengal following incidents at Chandpur. The tea plantation workers were part of a large

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- 1) ABP, 5/3/1921; see also E, 28/2/1921.
  - 2) E, 28/2/1921. For the background to this decision see pp.215-6.
  - 3) S, 1/3/1921.
  - 4) ABP, 5,9/3/1921; E, 7/3/1921; S, 8/3/1921.
  - 5) Indian Annual Register, 1922 (1st edition, Calcutta, 1922), pp.28-9; Bamford, Histories of the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements, pp.61-2; S. Choudhary, Peasants' and Workers' movements in India, 1905-1929, (New Delhi, 1971), p.122; R. Chatterji, "C.R. Das and the Chandpur Strikes of 1921", Bengal Past and Present, XCIII, 1974, pp.181-96. These strikes have been counted as one 'mixed' group strike.
  - 6) Main sources: GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 300-352, (actual file); ABP, E, S, 24/5/1921-12/11/1921, passim; Indian Annual Register, 1922, vol.II, (2nd edition, Calcutta, 1923), pp.760-70.

group of indentured labourers who decided to leave the tea estates in Assam, and march to their homes to the west of Bengal, early in 1921.<sup>1</sup> Those at Chandpur were stranded when the authorities stopped issuing concessionary tickets, partly in order to stop the exodus. The labourers at Chandpur were sleeping on the railway station platform when orders were given to clear them out. Troops, including Gurkhas and with fixed bayonets, were employed for this purpose, and not surprisingly several labourers were injured in the process. Local leaders reacted angrily to this incident, and called a hartal the following day, which rapidly spread to other towns in eastern Bengal.<sup>2</sup> When the railway strike began, the ABREU president announced that the strike was to protest at the treatment of the tea labourers, and to demand that the Government should assist their passage home. The steamer crews at Chandpur also struck at the same time, apparently for the same reasons.<sup>3</sup> Non-cooperators and other public figures had been concerned with the labourers' plight for some time, and so not unnaturally were in the forefront of organizing the protest hartals, and in supporting the strikes when they began. Thus the strikes have been called sympathetic, political strikes.

Although the main strikes were initiated in protest at the Chandpur incidents, it is noticeable that they did not begin until several days after troops had been used to clear Chandpur station. Railwaymen from Chandpur apparently sent two deputations to the union headquarters in Chittagong, on 21 and 23 May, to press for a general strike, but this was opposed by the executive on the grounds that the question had nothing to do with relations with the railway company, but was "political".<sup>4</sup> The union president, J.M. Sen Gupta, also a leading non-cooperator, finally agreed to visit Chandpur, and after holding meetings there, at last issued the call for a strike.<sup>5</sup> The ABREU executive at Chittagong was far from happy with this decision, and only accepted it after considerable discussion. The pressure to endorse the strike call was strengthened

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- 1) GoI Home Political, June 1921, Deposit 51, 63; E, 16-21/5/1921; S.K. Bose, "Strikes in Assam tea gardens in 1921", New Age, II (8), August 1953, pp.41-51; Anon, Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, (Calcutta, n.d.), pp.10-12.
  - 2) GB Political (Political, September 1921, B 300 (actual file); October 1921, A 11-53 KWs; ABP, 28/5/1921; E, 27/5/1921; S, 29/5/1921; Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, pp.12-15.
  - 3) GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 300 (actual file); E, 26/5/1921; ABP, 15/9/1921.
  - 4) ABP, 15/9/1921; 26/9/1921 (retrospective accounts of events).
  - 5) ABP, 15/9/1921.

by news that railway employees had also been assaulted, and one man killed, by the Gurkhas, and because local non-cooperators persuaded most of the workshop employees to press for a strike. Accordingly, on 25 May, the executive endorsed the strike call, and sent a letter to the manager announcing that the strike had begun to mourn the rumoured assault and murder of railwaymen at Chandpur - no mention was apparently made of the tea plantation labourers.<sup>1</sup> Similar details about the steamer crews' strike have not been found, but they too only struck several days after the Chandpur incidents, and only after the local Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Union (ISFEU) leader had been arrested, on 25 May, and deported to Chittagong.<sup>2</sup> Sympathy for the tea labourers was only expressed in the form of a strike after reports that railwaymen and steamer employees had been treated in a similar manner began to circulate.

Whatever the initial cause, both major strikes soon focussed on other issues, concerning wages and working conditions. On 26 May, only two days after the railway strike began, railwaymen at Gauhati resolved in a meeting to continue striking not only until the Chandpur demands had been met, but also until unspecified other grievances were remedied.<sup>3</sup> These grievances and demands were detailed in a letter from J.M. Sen Gupta, the union president, to the railway manager, released to the press at the beginning of June. The main grievances included low pay, racially discriminatory wage rates and leave rules, unfair dismissals, and inadequate housing for Indian employees. It was argued in the letter that these demands showed that the strike "is due to bonafide grievances [sic] of the employees who are in no way connected with political matters". They had intended to notify the management about their problems when the Chandpur incidents intervened, precipitating the strike, and raising additional issues - the treatment of the labourers, the stationing of Gurkhas on railway property, harassment of rail-

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- 1) ABP, 1/6/1921; E, 21/9/1921. S, 25/6/1921 contains an account quoting the ABREU secretary's letter. This report's semi-official tone and status could imply that portions of the letter were omitted, but interestingly no union version or correction was published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika (unlike after the collapse of the strike in September). For a railwayman's account of Gurkha harassment, see E, 6/6/1921.
  - 2) S, 29/5/1921; E, 10,22/6/1921. See also Indian Annual Register 1922, (1st edition), p.205; Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, p.16. Abdul Majid was the man arrested - for details, see Appendix IV.
  - 3) ABP, 28/5/1921.

waymen by the Gurkhas, the suppression of facts concerning events at Chandpur, and the loss of one day's pay for a strike earlier in May.<sup>1</sup> The steamer crews' grievances, when they were published, also combined protests at the treatment of the tea labourers, and of crew members, with other issues - the non-implementation of an agreement made between the ISFEU and the steamer company managers in January 1921, and ill-treatment of some union representatives by company officials.<sup>2</sup>

Negotiations to end the steamer strike became deadlocked early in June, and although they were resumed on several occasions, they never progressed. Initially the crews were under no pressure to end the strike because of assistance from local non-cooperators who, at Barisal for example, fed and housed the crews throughout the strike.<sup>3</sup> By the middle of June however individual ship's crews began returning to work, and the strike slowly crumbled. Calls from C.R. Das and the ISFEU president to stand firm had a temporary effect, but at the end of June the fear of losing their jobs altogether forced the men to return to work. The only concession given by the steamer companies was that there would be no victimization.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts to end the railway strike began on 3 June, but the management refused to recognise the union, give pay for the strike period, or condone the break in service caused by the strike, and were only willing to pledge that there would be no victimization or loss of promotion prospects, provided that the strike ended at once.<sup>5</sup> C.F. Andrews, who opened these negotiations for the workers, attempted to persuade them to return on these terms, but was defeated by non-cooperators, who promised to obtain funds to support the continuation

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- 1) S, 5/6/1921; E, 6/6/1921. It was later reported that the ABREU secretary sent details of other demands to the manager on 28 May - ABP, 17/6/1921.
  - 2) E, 10/6/1921. Unspecified "departmental" grievances were raised when negotiations between the ISFEU president and the steamer management began on 31/5/1921 - GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 309 (actual file).
  - 3) Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 209 (1-9), (10-12), (13-16), (17-37), 1921; GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 310, B 323, B 330 (actual files).
  - 4) Ibid.; GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 302, B 309, B 317, B 337, B 338, B 344, B 352 (actual files); ABP, 2,4,19,22,28/6/1921, 2,5/7/1921; E, 24,27/6/1921, 11/7/1921; S, 17,24,28-30/6/1921.
  - 5) ABP, 7/6/1921; E, 6/6/1921; S, 5,25/6/1921. The refusal to condone the break in service meant that strikers forfeited a variety of bonuses.



of the strike.<sup>1</sup> On 7 June the railway company issued an ultimatum to return to work by 14 June, stating that they were not prepared to concede strike pay, or condone the break in service, but would consider recognising a "suitably constituted" union, after the strike ended.<sup>2</sup> The ABREU responded with a circular to all members emphasising the need for reinstatement of all employees without the loss of gratuities, and for the manager to guarantee sympathetic consideration of other grievances.<sup>3</sup> It was claimed that C.R. Das supported these objectives, and would soon call the Eastern Bengal Railway workers out to support the Assam-Bengal strike. At the same time, Das instructed local Congress Committees to assist the strikers, claiming that "the railway ~~companies~~ <sup>employees</sup> are truly non-cooperating, and their cessation of work cannot properly be called a strike", since it had begun over the Chandpur issue.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the union's initial reaction to the manager's position, they accepted suggestions from Chittagong leaders for a compromise solution, and published their new terms for ending the strike on 13 June. The union proposed to end the strike, provided the manager promised to enquire into the men's grievances, punish those guilty of assaults on railwaymen at Chandpur, that there would be no victimization, and that the question of reorganizing the union would be discussed by the president and the management after the strike ended. They conceded that some pay would be forfeited from the strike period, the exact amount of which would be determined after work had resumed, and asked the manager to recommend to his Board that the break in service should be condoned.<sup>5</sup> These terms were probably put to the manager by a deputation of three railwaymen and three local leaders at Chittagong, on 15 June.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of this meeting was not reported in the press, but speakers at a public meeting on 17 June said that the deputation had been insulted, and so they were withdrawing the compromise, and would refuse to attend a meeting called by the manager for the following day. New conditions for ending the strike were then drawn up, which represented a considerable hardening of the railwaymen's position - there was to be no change in the

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1) GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 329 (actual file).  
2) S, 14,25/6/1921.  
3) E, 16/6/1921. Employees with 15 or more years continuous service received a retirement gratuity of half their monthly pay, which was forfeited if they went on strike - Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 193 (13-22), 1921.  
4) S, 14/6/1921.  
5) E, S, 18/6/1921.  
6) ABP, 21/6/1921.

union, or concession of strike pay; the service break was to be condoned, and all future negotiations would have to take place through the union president.<sup>1</sup> Some railwaymen did apparently want to abandon the strike at this point, but were persuaded to continue by Sen Gupta's endorsement of further struggle.<sup>2</sup> Their resolve was doubtless also strengthened (and opposition to continuing the strike undermined) by C.R. Das' speech proclaiming that the strike was part of the non-cooperation movement, and his sanctioning the use of non-cooperation funds to finance the strike, made a few days later.<sup>3</sup>

From the middle of June onwards there were no serious attempts by either side to reach a compromise. The railway company began to recruit new staff, and to evict strikers from their quarters, while the union and the non-cooperators continued to maintain the strike with their food and other forms of assistance. By the end of August the strike funds were exhausted, and all hopes were pinned on obtaining further support from Gandhi, then on a tour of eastern Bengal and Assam.<sup>4</sup> Gandhi met strike representatives at Chittagong on 31 August, but to their disappointment he chastised them for having relied on nationalist finance, and advised them to support themselves by spinning and weaving if they wished to continue the strike.<sup>5</sup> Without further aid it was not possible to pursue the strike, and it collapsed during the next fortnight.<sup>6</sup>

While these strikes did begin partly in response to the brutal treatment of the tea plantation labourers, and received considerable support from non-cooperators, it is clearly simplistic to describe them as wholly sympathetic, or political strikes. Except in Chandpur itself, the main strikes only started when rumours spread that railwaymen and steamer employees had also been assaulted, and attention rapidly focussed on workplace grievances once the strikes were under way. When the employers refused to negotiate without the strikes ending first, the question of

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1) ABP, 19/6/1921; E, 25/6/1921.

2) E, 21/9/1921.

3) E, 15/6/1921; ABP, 16/6/1921; E, 21/9/1921.

4) J.M. Sen Gupta circulated a notice to this effect towards the end of August - Saha, History of the working class movement, p.55.

5) Krishnadas, Seven months with Mahatma Gandhi, (Madras, 1928), pp.115, 121-4. Government sources do not report details of this meetings (Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 46 (41-6), 1921), but describe similar advice given to steamer clerks and workshop employees still on strike at Barisal (Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 209 (17-37), 1921).

6) E, S, 9/9/1921. Some railwaymen did take up Gandhi's suggestion, though nationalists had to finance the weaving operations - ABP, 14,21/9/1921.

the terms on which the strikes would end became paramount. Non-cooperators were able to exercise considerable influence on the duration of the strikes largely because their offer of assistance enabled the workers to continue to seek satisfactory terms for a settlement - without such assistance, both main strikes would probably have collapsed at the beginning of June. This is not to suggest that the railwaymen and steamer crews were unaffected by the nationalist movement for indeed the context of the strike was probably an important factor in the unity and purposiveness of the strikers, but that their ability as workers to give form to their nationalism was conditional on 'external' assistance, particularly when the employers demonstrated their unwillingness to negotiate a settlement. Thus the steamer crews stopped accepting aid from nationalist sources when it was clear that they were about to lose their jobs permanently. In June, the railwaymen were primarily concerned with preserving their gratuities (an issue which C.F. Andrews, by then an experienced railwaymen's negotiator, said was responsible for prolonging strikes on several lines)<sup>1</sup> than with their jobs as such, and so were willing to continue accepting whatever practical assistance was forthcoming. The possibility that railwaymen would actually lose their jobs only became real in August as more and more recruits were taken on, and the response was that many individuals returned to work.<sup>2</sup> Thus, even so far as these strikes were concerned, it seems that workers' acceptance of non-cooperator leadership and assistance was largely conditioned by their own assessment of what action was appropriate.

#### General effects of politics

The contribution made by individual politicians, particularly nationalists and non-cooperators, in leading strikes and unions, and channelling other forms of assistance to workers, were not the only ways in which trade unionism was influenced by political events. The very domination of political life by mass political agitation, and constitutional changes, between early 1919 and the beginning of 1922 can be shown to have led some employees to limit the extent of their activity, and by implication, to have encouraged others to strike or form unions.

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1) E, 16/6/1921.

2) On 24/8/1921 the railway manager reported that 3300 out of 8000 workers had returned to work, and 3000 new recruits had been engaged - Confidential, GB Political (Political), File 193 (13-32), 1921.

The course of agitation conducted by the RWA and the Indian Telegraph Association (ITA) in 1920-21 provides a very clear example of the negative effect of political activities, particularly the non-cooperation movement, on trade unionism. Ties between these two unions first developed towards the end of 1919 when Henry Barton of the ITA spoke at the RWA's inaugural meeting, and were consolidated when he became the RWA president a year later.<sup>1</sup> Both union's relations with their employers reached a crisis late in 1920, which provided the opportunity for a joint campaign to emerge.

In November 1920 the ITA threatened to withdraw its cooperation from the Telegraph Department unless positive steps were taken to rectify longstanding grievances over pay and conditions, and stated that the union would take no responsibility for any disruption - a veiled threat to strike.<sup>2</sup> The railwaymen presented a similar ultimatum to their employers a month later, as has already been noted.<sup>3</sup> In January 1921 each union independently issued statements denying any intent to strike,<sup>4</sup> and they only began to cooperate publicly at the beginning of February.

The first sign of this cooperation was the publication of telegrams showing the RWA had informed the Telegraph Department of its support for the ITA, and had threatened "serious cooperative dislocation", while the ITA had similarly pledged to support the RWA's campaign.<sup>5</sup> Several joint union meetings took place after this, and eventually, on 24 February, the two unions resolved to strike at the end of the month. Negotiations to end the dispute continued throughout this time, and after the strike threat had been formally made, and finally the union leaders seized the opportunity presented by some minor concessions to call the strike off.<sup>6</sup> A joint union meeting on 27 February postponed strike action for another week, and instructions to this effect were about to be despatched to branches when it was decided to convene an extraordinary meeting. A statement issued by Barton said that this second meeting was called after "information of an important nature as received", and

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1) E, 18/12/1919, 16/12/1920. See also RWA meetings - S, 6/7/1920, 3, 17/8/1920, 6/11/1920.

2) S, 14/11/1920.

3) See pp. 207-8.

4) E, 24/1/1921 (RWA); S, 27/1/1921 (ITA).

5) S, 6/2/1921.

6) E, 14, 24, 28/2/1921; S, 10, 15, 25, 27/2/1921.

it was decided to send the following telegram to the Government:

'Information received necessitates suspension of agitation regarding re-revision [sic] till more opportune moment arrives. This decision is chiefly in National Interest ... '.

Barton's statement continued,

... Government may rest assured that it is purely out of consideration for the consequences which we are informed must follow as the result of planned tactics by certain political agents who are waiting to turn to account any disorganization of the service. The question we are combating will be revived when the political clouds which are forming in certain areas lift. (1)

It might be argued that the RWA and ITA were exceptional in this respect largely because the RWA leadership and the ITA membership belonged overwhelmingly to the European and Anglo-Indian communities, whose antipathy to the non-cooperation movement was well known, and who would therefore have been horrified at the thought of being associated with it in any way.<sup>2</sup> However, other groups of employees were also wary of allowing the charge that they were part of the non-cooperation movement to go unchallenged. In January 1921, for example, the president of the Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association declared that a drivers' strike then in progress had nothing to do with the non-cooperators, an opinion supported by some taxi drivers.<sup>3</sup> Speakers at a tram strike meeting later that month also repudiated the suggestion made in the Englishman that their strike was politically motivated.<sup>4</sup> Similar suggestions that the Lilua railway workshop strike, in March 1921, was organised by a Khilafat Committee were strongly refuted by the BCLF secretary, himself involved in negotiating a settlement of the dispute.<sup>5</sup> Other unions' and workers' expressions of concern to observe "constitutional" behaviour also only appears to have any real meaning in the context of wanting to distance themselves from the non-

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1) S, 2/3/1921.

2) Confidential, GoI Commerce & Industry (Post and Telegraphs), September 1918, No.6-8 (ITA); see also meeting reports, e.g. S, 6/7/1920, 13, 17/8/1920, 6/11/1920. Leading RWA members and other European railwaymen raised subscriptions in honour of General Dyer, responsible for the Jalianwala Bagh massacre - E, 19, 26/7/1920; S, 14/7/1920. This strike was also opposed by a railwayman on the grounds of 'undermining the Empire' - S, 27/2/1921; see also S, 20/3/1921.

3) E, 17, 25/1/1921; S, 18/1/1921.

4) E, 31/1/1921. The allegation was made in E, 28/1/1921.

5) E, 7/3/1921.

cooperation movement.<sup>1</sup>

The positive aspect of the general political atmosphere on trade unionism is less easy to demonstrate so clearly. However, one interesting feature of factory and non-factory workers' strikes was the use of nationalist slogans. "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!", or "Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!", for example, were often shouted during taxi, tram, railway and jute strikes between January 1921 and the beginning of 1922,<sup>2</sup> while one of the December 1921 dock workers' strike demands was that they should be allowed to shout "Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!" while at work.<sup>3</sup> Other slogans of this nature used by strikers were "Bande Mataram", and "Hindu-Musalman ki jai!", reported from taxi and tram strikes early in 1921.<sup>4</sup> Besides these slogans, a procession of railway workshop strikers was reported to have carried a "tricoloured flag" on a demonstration in March 1921, while national songs were sung at meetings during the Burma Oil Company strike at Chittagong, in April 1921.<sup>5</sup> This use of nationalist slogans and emblems seems to indicate that the non-cooperation movement inspired workers to pursue demands they might otherwise have foregone, and links up with the phenomenon of the "new consciousness". As a missionary observer of the strikes wrote in 1921,

There is no doubt Gandhism [sic] was the match that lit the fire, but the fuel was already there in the shape of a longstanding almost inarticulate sense of injustice among the workmen. (6)

### Conclusion

The presence of political leaders, like other types of outsider, was largely because employees involved them in strikes and trade union leadership. One reason for this, indicated by the engagement of a lawyer by the Kharagpur railway workshop strikers in 1918, was because

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- 1) See, e.g., E, 14/6/1920 (CU), 16/6/1920 (RWA), 7/12/1920 (EBRLEA), 6/9/1921 (KhA); S, 29/9/1920 (ABPCC), 16/10/1920 (CPTEA), 19/11/1920, (CPSA); The Servant, 5/1/1921 (BHLA - cutting in S.K. Ghosal Papers).
  - 2) ABP, 27/1/1921, 1, 23/2/1921, 12/3/1921, 1, 5/4/1921, 6/9/1921, 5, 29/1/1922; E, 10, 17/1/1921, 2, 12/3/1921, 15/8/1921, 5, 14/11/1921; S, 12/2/1921, 2, 3, 6/4/1921.
  - 3) ABP, 16/12/1921.
  - 4) ABP, 1, 12/2/1921; E, 12/1/1921.
  - 5) ABP, 29/4/1921; E, 16/3/1921. A tricolour national flag was first used in Bengal in 1906 - Sarkar, Swadeshi movement in Bengal, p.307.
  - 6) E.B. Sharpe, "Industrial unrest in Bengal", The Church Missionary Review, No.835, September 1921, p.250. The article was about the Kanchrapara railway workshop strike.

employees feared victimization if the identity of the actual worker-leaders became known. Even subordinate supervisory employees favoured outsider union officials since they were not subject to pressures from departmental managers, as discussion over the presidency of the Customs Preventive Service Association in November 1920 reveals.<sup>1</sup> Other reasons for involving outsiders seem to have centred on notions of acquiring a channel of influence. The change of CTEU officers in September 1921, for example, was urged on grounds of the need for "men of influence" to hold union office.<sup>2</sup> The organisers of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Association drew up a list of educationists and Education Department officials from which to choose a president, and the man selected, Sir P.C. Ray, was described at the union conference as a "friend of teachers".<sup>3</sup> Even where evidence suggests that political outsiders initiated the relationship with employees, or dominated the conduct of a strike or union, closer examination of events shows that the politicians' freedom of action was limited by the employees' perceptions of their needs, and appropriate forms of action.

The evidence presented in this chapter also shows that the politically charged atmosphere of the post-War years itself influenced employees' conduct. European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen and telegraphists, who had been in the forefront of trade union formation and activity at one stage, withdrew from confrontation with their employers at the beginning of 1921 specifically because they feared it would assist the non-cooperation movement. Similarly, though largely by implication, mass nationalist activities inspired groups of factory and non-factory workers in particular to engage in trade unionism, often striking for the first time, and certainly acting in a more militant fashion than before.

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1) E, 24,27/11/1920, 6,7/12/1920.

2) See p.203.

3) ABP, 3/2/1921; Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.8.

CHAPTER 8: Union federations and organizational consolidation

The main concern of this chapter is with the various attempts to establish a trade union federation made between 1920 and 1922. Since the success and character of union federations depends to some extent on the character of its constituents some attention must also be paid to the question of union organizational consolidation

Bengal Workers' Union

The first attempt to form a trade union federation, under the name Bengal Workers' Union, probably began in March 1920.<sup>1</sup> Very little is known about the BWU, but the outlines of its history have tentatively been established. According to police intelligence reports, the BWU was established when S.N. Haldar

changed the name of the Press Employees' Association to the Bengal Workers' Union, according to Bepin Babu's B.C. Pal's instructions, with a view to amalgamating labour associations in Bengal into one ... (2)

Another report gives the same account, but refers to the Journalists' and Press Employees' Association, another union.<sup>3</sup> The precise connection between the PEA and the JPEA is not clear, and seems to have confused contemporaries, but there is evidence that they were separate unions, and that both merged into the BWU.

The JPEA was established in January 1920, and was based at 84 Sitaram Ghose Street where J.L. Banerji, one of the union's vice-presidents, lived. All the officers were nationalists, or had strong nationalist associations. The president was C.R. Das, other vice-presidents were B.C. Pal, Panchkari Banerji, Basanta Kumar Vidyanidhi, and Krista Chandra Smrititirtha, while the secretary was Panchashikha Bhattacharya.<sup>4</sup> The BWU also had its office at this address, and among its officers were C.R. Das (president), B.C. Pal, and J.L. Banerji (vice-presidents), and Panchashikha Bhattacharya (secretary).<sup>5</sup> The only contemporary reference to the JPEA dates from March 1920, when it was

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1) Saha, History of the working class movement, p.220 (extract from Special Branch reports). But see also p.220, footnote 1.

2) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.4.

3) Saha, History of the working class movement, p.220.

4) Ibid., pp.219-20; ABP, 17/3/1920. For Banerji's address, see ABP, 2/10/1919, 8/12/1920.

5) Saha, ibid., p.220.



connected with a short strike,<sup>1</sup> suggesting that it disappeared at about the same time that the BWU was formed.

The PEA was founded just before the JPEA, probably in December 1919 when some printers met at C.R. Das' house to seek his advice about re-establishing a printers union. Nirmal Chandra Chandra was the first PEA president, S.N. Halder was a vice-president, and two printers were the joint secretaries, indicating that the PEA was organizationally distinct from the JPEA and the BWU.<sup>2</sup> However, by March 1920 it appears that some people were not very clear about this distinction. J.N. Gupta, a compositor and later one of the PEA's vice-presidents, wrote several letters to the press in which he said that the PEA had been formed early in 1920, with C.R. Das a president, B.C. Pal as vice-president, and Panchashikha Bhattacharya as secretary.<sup>3</sup> The confusion is added to by the absence of reports of PEA meetings or activity between April and July 1920, but instead, references to printers' meetings under a variety of headings - "Printers' Association", "Printers' and Journalists' Association", and "Bengal Press Association".<sup>4</sup> The meeting advertised under the last heading took place on 16 May, and was reported under the heading "Bengal Workers' Union".<sup>5</sup> The PEA proper only began to function again from July 1920,<sup>6</sup> indicating that between March and July it was effectively merged with the BWU.

Apart from eclipsing the PEA and the JPEA for a few months the BWU seems to have achieved little. The meeting on 16 May was held to consider proposals for the representation of wage earners in the reformed Legislative Councils. Resolutions were passed proposing to extend workers' voting rights, and against official proposals to establish a limited franchise. However the issue soon ceased to be of any relevance as the authorities decided to nominate labour representatives.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) ABP, 17/3/1920. However a police Special Branch report said that the JPEA was changed into the BWU at a meeting in April - Saha, History of the working class movement, p.220.
  - 2) GB "List of Labour Unions", p.4. This document's report that the PEA was established on 21 January 1920 seems wrong since a PEA meeting was advertised in ABP, 16/1/1920, and its formation was commented on in ABP, 17/1/1920. See also Saha, ibid., pp.223-4.
  - 3) ABP, 24/3/1920, 10/7/1920.
  - 4) ABP, 17/4/1920, 1,15/5/1920.
  - 5) ABP, 20/5/1920.
  - 6) ABP, 13/7/1920; see p.221.
  - 7) ABP, 20/5/1920; Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary, 3/1/1921, p.9.

In June police reports said that "Halder Sen and Banarji [sic]" were drafting rules for the BWU, and that municipal sweepers and "mill employees" had agreed to join. However, no details of these developments were given, and it is not at all certain that there was any real basis to them since there were no sweepers' or factory workers' organizations at this time, at least not in the sense of formally constituted unions. In July the same sources reported that relations between the constituent organizations in the BWU was deteriorating, alleging that all the initiative for the BWU had come from nationalists.<sup>1</sup> This suggestion that there was tension between the actual workers who had formed unions, and the nationalists, is supported by the letters of J.N. Gupta, and the report of the final BWU meeting in July.

Gupta's first letter, published in March, thanked C.R. Das and other outsiders for having helped to establish the PEA, but said that the union was already becoming dormant because of the leaders' practice of conducting business in English, and their lack of awareness of printers' problems.<sup>2</sup> A month later he published another letter which was simply a prescription for a successful mass organization - rule, minutes and propaganda should be circulated, and a management committee consisting of ordinary members should be formed - implying that none of these things had been done.<sup>3</sup> His third letter was printed in July, just before the final BWU meeting, and plainly said that the nationalists were a hindrance to the PEA because employers prevented anyone from joining the union while they dominated it, and he called for the union's constitution and personnel to be changed if it was to be made into a viable labour organization.<sup>4</sup> These letters, or at least the problems they referred to, seem to have had some effect for on 11 July a BWU meeting heard a letter from C.R. Das in which he suggested that the BWU should be called the PEA, that workers should elect their own officers, and that the "leaders" (apparently referring to the nationalists) would remain only as patrons. This suggestion was modified by a resolution that the PEA should be constituted separately from the BWU, but that the latter should continue to function, and organize unions for other groups of employees. However, this proposal was not acted on, and so the BWU came to an end.<sup>5</sup>

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1) GoI Home (Political), July 1920, Deposit 13, 104.

2) ABP, 24/3/1920.

3) ABP, 17/4/1920.

4) ABP, 10/7/1920.

5) ABP, 13/7/1920.

The attempt to establish the BWU was rather premature given that most unions at that time had only been in existence for a few months or even weeks. However, the conflict between nationalist outsiders and the actual workers, providing yet another example of the limited facility for outsiders to 'manipulate' workers, was probably the main cause of the BWU's demise. The next and more successful attempt to form a federation was also initiated by outsiders, but they seem to have developed a more cooperative relationship with their workforce contacts.

### Bengal Central Labour Federation

The BCLF was inaugurated in January 1921 at a "preliminary meeting" of factory sardars and trade union outsiders to discuss the formation of a "central federation of labour unions in Bengal".<sup>1</sup> Although the chairman of the meeting, K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, and the man chosen as the provisional secretary of the federation, Muhammed Mahsin, had some connection with established unions<sup>2</sup> it does not seem that any of these organizations, or other formally established unions, were represented at the meeting. The extent to which the BCLF succeeded in drawing unions together can only be gauged from reports of the Federation's constitutional conference, held on 17 April.

This conference was attended by representatives ("mill sardars" according to one report)<sup>3</sup> from all the factory areas along the river Hugli between Hajinagar and Gauripur in the north and Baj Baj in the south, together with "delegates" from the following "labour unions" -

Jamshedpur, Cossipore, Barrackpore, Ghosuri, Kankinara, Jagdal Ichapur, Bally, Chapdani, Garden Reach, Calcutta Tramway, Calcutta Taxi Drivers, Pressmen, Kanchrapara and Burn & Co's employees. (4)

Apart from the Barackpur and Champdani "labour unions", all of these can tentatively be matched with named unions known from other sources.<sup>5</sup> Representatives from the Indian Seamen's Union, and the Howrah Labour Union also attended the conference, making a total of 17 unions in

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1) E, 18/1/1921.

2) K.C. Ray Chaudhuri was president of the Employees' Association - ABP, 21/10/1919, 7/11/1920; M. Mahsin helped to form the Howrah Labour Association - ABP, 30/11/1920 - and spoke at a meeting of the Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association - E, 17/1/1921.

3) ABP, 19/4/1921.

4) ABP, 23/4/1921; "Chapdani" is the spelling given for Champdani.

5) See Table 8.1 for details.

the BCLF.<sup>1</sup> The labour market groups into which these unions can be classed, and a comparison of the BCLF unions with the range of unions existing early in 1921, is given in Table 8.1.<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 8.1:** Trade unions in Bengal existing by 17 April 1921, and participating in the BCLF conference

labour market group	existing unions	No.	B C L F conference (a)	No.
<u>supervisory</u>	FA ICSA IPA	3		0
<u>subordinate supervisory</u>	AIPMSA ITA AIPOA LMA BRSA PEA (B) CPSA	7		0
<u>clerical</u>	ABGSTA CIOU AEMOA EA ABTA IBIISA ABHSTA KM AISASA PBEKS CAOA PEA BPRMSA WBSA CA CCEA	16	PEA	1
<u>factory</u>	BaLA CLU BELA CoJMWA <sup>†</sup> BLA JJMWU BJMWA KanLU <sup>†</sup> BPMWA KkJMWA* CJMWA	11	BJMWA KmJMWA* CJMWA CLU CoJMWA <sup>†</sup> JJMWU KanLU <sup>†</sup>	7
<u>non-factory</u>	BA ISU CLA JA CPEA KhA CTEU LA CTPMDA TU ISA ULA ISFEU	13	CTEU CTPMDA ISU	3
<u>railway</u>	BNRILU EBRIEA RWA	3		0
<u>mixed</u>	BPA HWU CPTEA HLU	4	HLU HWU	2
<u>not known</u>	GRLU	1	GRLU	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>58</b>		<b>14</b>

(a) excluding the Jamshedpur, Barackpur and Champdani "labour associations"

+ or, CoLa                      † or, KanJMWA                      \* or, KkLU

1) ABP, S, 19/4/1921.

2) For detailed union references, see Appendix III.

The table clearly indicates that the BCLF was primarily a federation of factory workers' unions; a few non-factory unions also took part in the conference, but only one clerical union joined. The high proportion of factory unions in the BCLF, many of which had only recently been formed, indicates the close connection between factory workers' unionization early in 1921, and the establishment of the Federation. Mahsin's role in propagating factory unions, and in the BCLF, is a further pointer to this relationship.<sup>1</sup> At least four more factory unions joined the BCLF later in 1921, according to a list of the Federation's "surviving members" drawn up in August, indicating that there was no significant change in the composition of the BCLF during its existence.<sup>2</sup> Both the founding and later unions were all based in the Calcutta-Hugli area to which the Federation, despite its name, also remained confined.<sup>3</sup>

The absence of other workers' unions, particularly those of clerical employees, which formed the core of the BCLF's successor, is not easy to account for. One factor might have been clerks' hostility to cooperating with factory and non-factory workers, although in view of the participation of such unions in the later federation, this cannot have been decisive.<sup>4</sup> The presence of C.R. Das, A.K. Azad and other nationalists and non-cooperators at the April conference, not to mention Mahsin's Khilafat Committee associations, may also have alienated some workers. However, no attempt seems to have been made by outsiders to 'use' the BCLF, at least not at the outset, or in the way demonstrated by the BWU, while Mahsin publicly declared that he had no connections with the Khilafat Committee.<sup>5</sup> Besides, the BCLF's constitution declared that it was a "non-sectarian, non-partisan and non-political" organization.<sup>6</sup>

Clerical employees might also have been wary of associating with workers whose propensity to strike had already been clearly

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- 1) GoI Home (Political), January 1921, Deposit 75.
  - 2) GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs; see p.230, footnote 2.
  - 3) Two regional federations - the Raniganj Central Labour Federation, and the Chittagong Central Labour Union - were also formed in 1921, but nothing is known of their composition or functioning. For details, see Appendix III.
  - 4) For clerks' attitudes, see speeches reported in Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.102; ibid., 2 (3), October 1922, p.19.
  - 5) ABP, 19,23/4/1921. Mahsin was the secretary to the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee - ABP, 20/8/1920 - but later disclaimed any "direct" connection with this committee - ABP, 9/3/1921.
  - 6) Swadharma, 15/5/1921. p.79.

demonstrated. However, both in principle and in practice the Federation was a decidedly conciliatory organization. The inaugural meeting in January had decided that the BCLF should have three aims - to advise on union formation in the factory areas, to "bring about conciliation between employers and employees", and to "settle labour disputes".<sup>1</sup> These terms were not used in the Federation constitution, drawn up in April, which only stated ambiguously that the BCLF intended to "establish a better understanding between Labour and Capital".<sup>2</sup> However, a message to the April conference from C.F. Andrews, a Federation vice-president, and Mahsin's speech, made it clear that the organisers intended to prevent strikes wherever possible.<sup>3</sup> Andrews saw in the Federation an organization

which shall be able to help the labouring classes to obtain what is just, without the terrible human waste and suffering of a great strike ... .

Mahsin emphasised the need for some kind of order to be restored to the factory areas, particularly as the sardars' authority had been undermined, as a result of which numerous spontaneous strikes were taking place. He reported that

Since the inauguration of this Federation in January last we have been receiving cases of strikes, labour troubles for settlement but we could not cope with the situation without an organization properly equipped with men and money in proportion to the enormous strain put on us. (4)

This clearly implies that the April conference was held primarily with the view of strengthening the BCLF's potential as an industrial conciliator by consolidating its organizational structure.

In May Mahsin wrote to the press claiming that the BCLF had been successful in its objective of promoting industrial peace, claiming there has hardly been any labour trouble during the last few months in which the members of the Federation had not tried on the side of law and order and for the best interests of both the employers and the employees [sic]. (5)

Evidence for the Federation's intervention in industrial disputes early in 1921 is very sparse, and scarcely supports Mahsin's implied claim of widespread activity. In March, for example, a BCLF representative tried

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1) E, 18/1/1921.

2) Swadharma, 15/5/1921, p.79.

3) ABP, 23/4/1921.

4) Ibid. For the previous part of his speech, see p.179.

5) E, 1/6/1921.

to intervene in a strike at Saxby and Farmer's engineering works which had been going on for nearly a month, but the manager refused to cooperate, and the strike collapsed two days later.<sup>1</sup> The Federation also attempted to resolve the dispute at the Lilua railway workshop where a strike had been in progress since the beginning of February. On 4 March BCLF and Howrah Labour Union leaders addressed a strike meeting where although they criticised the workers for going on strike, they advised the men to stay out for another week while they tried to obtain a settlement. The strike continued but no further progress was made until the end of March after C.F. Andrews had written to N.N. Ganguli, one of the Federation organisers, offering his assistance. The BCLF organisers promptly despatched the workshop mistris (skilled workers, who also appear to have been foremen in this instance) to see Andrews, to whom the mistris pledged to accept such terms for ending the strike that he thought would be satisfactory. Andrews, together with the BCLF and HLU secretaries then negotiated with the railway authorities, and reached a compromise agreement which was sufficient to end the strike. Andrews then went to the Railway Board in Simla to pursue the men's main grievances, as he had promised.<sup>2</sup> The BCLF organisers' concern to prevent strikes was also illustrated by their role in a dispute at the Kankinara paper mill in January 1922. On 15 January, Mahsin told the workers that the precarious state of their industry precluded concession of all their demands, and he advised them not to strike. The men apparently agreed to pursue their grievances by other means, but were presumably unsuccessful in this as a week or so after Mahsin spoke to them a strike began. The BCLF again intervened, and secured the men's agreement that K.C. Ray Chaudhuri and Mahsin would negotiate a settlement on their behalf.<sup>3</sup> The lack of other reports of attempts at conciliation is not altogether surprising since existing sources tend to stress strike occurrence rather than avoidance. Allowing for some exaggeration in Mahsin's press statement, it is nevertheless conceivable that the BCLF did contribute to the diminution of strikes in the Calcutta-Hugli area, particularly among factory workers, early in 1921.

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- 1) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1246-7.
  - 2) Ibid., pp.1248-9; C.F. Andrews to N.N. Ganguli, 22/3/1921, C.F. Andrews Papers, File 25, No.43; ABP, 5,9,30,32/3/1921, 1/4/1921; E, 13/5/1921; S, 29/3/1921.
  - 3) E, 18/1/1922; S, 4/2/1922. No report of the BCLF's contribution to the settlement was given, only the fact that the strike ended - S, 9/2/1922.

The opposition to strikes expressed by C.F. Andrews, and some of the other BCLF organisers, stemmed from a humanitarian concern to avert the suffering they necessarily involved.<sup>1</sup> Such humanitarianism underlay the Federation's involvement with the tea plantation workers following the Chandpur incidents, and its opposition to the east Bengal steamer and railway strikes of May to September 1921. Within a week of the labourers having been evicted from Chandpur railway station the BCLF had organised and despatched a team of volunteers to east Bengal under Mahsin.<sup>2</sup> He returned to Calcutta almost immediately, where he spoke at a public meeting on the Chandpur events, convened by the Federation, on 29 May. Mahsin and the other speakers, who included Andrews, Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty, and J.L. Banerji, condemned both the treatment of the tea plantation labourers, and the strikes.<sup>3</sup> Their concern was that the strikes prevented the labourers from continuing with their journey, as a telegram to J.M. Sen Gupta, a prominent strike organiser, made clear:

Bengal Central Labour Federation after careful deliberations with Andrews and others consider steamer hartal before repatriating stranded coolies unwise and urge you to stop it without delay.  
M. Mohsin (Secretary) [sic]. (4)

In addition to this protest the Federation collected more than Rs.1000 to assist the labourers, and sent N.N. Ganguli with more volunteers to supervise their departure from east Bengal. Three steamers were chartered with the help of some liberal politicians, and on at least one occasion a ship's serang (sardar) was bribed not to join the strike. Andrews, after having tried unsuccessfully to negotiate an end to the railway strike, went to the area from which many of the labourers had originated, and supervised their resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

The Federation's opposition to the Chandpur strikes, and its association with liberal political figures, seems to have provoked the accusation that it was opposed to the non-cooperation movement. Such a charge was implied by a statement from the Federation issued

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- 1) See C.F. Andrews' message to the BCLF conference (p.225), and his letter to R. Tagore, 22/3/1921 describing N.N. Ganguli's concern to save the labourers from "exploitation" - meaning political involvement - C.F. Andrews Papers, File 7, No.192.
  - 2) E, 26/5/1921.
  - 3) E, 30/5/1921; S, 31/5/1921.
  - 4) E, 1/6/1921; ABP, 2/6/1921.
  - 5) ABP, 8, 10/6/1921; E, 11, 14, 16, 25, 27/6/1921; S, 10, 14, 29/6/1921.  
Another BCLF meeting on Chandpur was held on 16 June - ABP, E, 17/6/1921.



at the end of June, claiming that they had only sought help from the liberals in their capacity as citizens who could exert some influence on the shipping companies, not as politicians.<sup>1</sup> In any case, speeches made at the meeting on 29 May, and another BCLF sponsored meeting on 16 June, clearly show that opposition to the strikes in eastern Bengal was combined with strong nationalist sentiment. Indeed, several of the Federation's associates at the meetings belonged to a 'purist' faction of non-cooperators who insisted on following Gandhi's ideals to the letter.<sup>2</sup> At the June meeting, for example, Padamraj Jain said that the strikes were ill-advised, and suggested that the organisers were motivated by the same concern for prestige of which they accused the Government. Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty asserted that "strikes did not form any part in the programme of non-cooperation", and accused the strike organisers of "murdering Gandhi".<sup>3</sup> Mahsin had already justified the Federation's policy in a letter written after the 29 May meeting:

We have in fact always been trying to exert our influence to see that labour is not utilised for any political purpose in strict accordance to the line of actions chalked out at present by the Indian leaders to whom the conscious mass of India looks for guidance and help [sic]. (4)

This view of the relations between the non-cooperation and trade union movements clearly underlay one of the last activities in which the BCLF engaged - the dissuasion of workers from taking part in a non-cooperation hartal planned for 24 December 1921. An earlier mass political hartal had taken place on 24 November, and was a spectacular success since all industry, transport and commerce came to a halt for the first time during the non-cooperation movement. According to the Indian Annual Register,

All mills were closed and the mill-hands occupied themselves with signing bhajans (religious songs) and taking ablutions in the river. (5)

A Bengal Government official wrote that "nothing short of picketing

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1) E, 25/6/1921.

2) J.L. Banerji resigned from the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee in May 1921 in protest at some members' continuing to practice law - S, 8/5/1921 - and he and S.S. Chakrabarty were only reconciled to C.R. Das' leadership in September - E, 22/9/1921. Mahsin's exclusion from the re-formed Bengal Khilafat Committee (August 1921) may also be related to such differences. For membership of the new committee, see Confidential, GB Political, File 333 (11-16), 1921 KWs, p.4.

3) ABP, E, S, 17/6/1921.

4) E, 1/6/1921.

5) Indian Annual Register 1922, (1st edition), p.308.

the town [Calcutta] with troops would have been effective", but that the peaceful nature of the hartal did not justify taking such a step.<sup>1</sup> The success of the November hartal however prompted the Government to abandon its policy of containing the non-cooperation movement, and from 19 November, non-cooperation organizations were proscribed, and many leaders and volunteers were arrested. Initially the volunteers were mainly students and other 'middle class' people, but from mid-December factory workers began to form a noticeable proportion of those arrested, and the Government feared that large numbers of them would try to enter Calcutta on 24 December.<sup>2</sup> The BCLF leaders were also alarmed by the November hartal for on 21 November Mahsin sent the following telegram to Gandhi:

As Secretary of the Labour Federation I have always acted on your advice that labourers be not asked to join political strikes. Do you advise the same on the Prince's visit [24 December] to Calcutta?. I am not afraid of serious disturbance [sic].

He received the reply:

Labourers need not join hartal. (3)

The Federation also approached the Government about this time seeking advice on means for protecting labourers from the "dangers of various propogandas",<sup>4</sup> and organised the distribution of leaflets in factory areas urging workers not to participate in the December hartal.<sup>5</sup> Mahsin himself made the same appeal at a meeting of Rishra, Hastings and Wellington jute mill workers on 2 December, where he deprecated strikes in general, saying that the proposed political hartal was against their interests, and argued that the workers needed to develop solidarity among themselves, and to settle grievances by appealing to the authorities. As a result of his appeal the men pledged not to take part in the hartal.<sup>6</sup>

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- 1) H.L. Stephenson to the Secretary, Government of India, Home Department, 26/11/1921, in Confidential, GB Political, File 39 (113-116), 1921. For other reports see Confidential, GB Home Department, File 395/24, "History of the Non-Cooperation Movement and Khilafat Agitation in Bengal", p.12; E, S, 18/11/1921; Indian Annual Register, ibid. pp.307-11.
  - 2) Confidential, GB Political, Files 39 (113-116), (118-128), 1921; Confidential, GB Home Department, File 395/24. By 15 December, 735 people had been arrested in Calcutta alone - telegram, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 28/12/1921, IO File J&P 9/21 (IOL&R: L/PJ/6/1726).
  - 3) E, 24/11/1921; for full text of the BCLF telegram see S, 24/12/1921 (interview with Mahsin about the anti-hartal leaflets).
  - 4) GB Commerce, December 1921, B 36 (abstract). The Government does not seem to have responded.
  - 5) E, 23,29/12/1921; S, 24/12/1921.
  - 6) E, 5/12/1921.

Despite some opposition to the BCLF's viewpoint in the factory areas, the absence of factory workers from the 24 December hartal must be attributed in part to the Federation's propaganda, as well as police and other measures.<sup>1</sup>

It should not be inferred from this that the BCLF was a well established and powerful factory workers' federation by the end of 1921. On the contrary there are signs that it was virtually moribund by then if it had not already been so for several months. In August a Calcutta police Special Branch report listed six factory unions in Barackpur and Serampur as "constituting the surviving members" of the BCLF, and also reported that three other unions which had been represented at the April conference had ceased to function.<sup>2</sup> The Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association ceased to exist around November 1921, and while the tramway and seamen's union continued to flourish, they do not seem to have played any part in the Federation after April 1921.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Mahsin seems to have been the only organizer who was active in the second half of 1921 - Andrews was out of India, the BCLF president died in October 1921, and although N.N. Ganguli retained his formal links with the Federation until April 1922 he became professor of Agriculture at Calcutta University towards the end of 1921, and thus probably had little time for other activities.<sup>4</sup>

Other evidence of the weakness of the BCLF is provided by reports of attempts to establish new union federations, proposals for reorganising the BCLF, and disagreements between the remaining leaders. In January 1922 the Titagarh Congress Committee organised two factory workers' meetings at which the main speaker, Swami Dinananda, suggested

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- 1) Besides arresting people the police visited factory sardars asking them to restrain people from joining the hartal - E, 7/12/1921 - while some sardars were compulsorily enrolled as special constables thus giving the Government control over them - Confidential, GB Home Department, File 395/24, p.12. A report in E, 29/12/1921 claimed that BCLF leafleters were beaten up by hartal supporters at Jagatdal.
  - 2) The "surviving members" were the Kankinara, Kharda, Rishra, and Cossipur Jute Mills Workmen's Associations, the Ramkristopur Flour Mills Labourers' Union, and the Metiaboruz Jute Mills Workmen's Union; the moribund unions were the Howrah Labour Union, the Garden Reach Labour Union, and the Baj Baj Labour Association - GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs.
  - 3) The last reference to the CTPMDA is to an unsuccessful attempt to organise a strike in November 1921 - S, 15/11/1921. Nothing is known about any of the other unions associated with the BCLF.
  - 4) C.F. Andrews to N.N. Ganguli, 14/9/1921, C.F. Andrews Papers, File 25, No.58; E, 21/4/1922; S, 14/10/1921; Karmi, 1 (3), October 1921, p.28.

that unions should be formed in each factory, and united under a Calcutta Central Labour Union.<sup>1</sup> Nothing seems to have come of this suggestion, but it implies either that the earlier factory unions had become defunct, or perhaps that nationalists were attempting to form a rival trade union federation. In February and March 1922 meetings of mainly clerical union representatives took place with a view to forming a new federation which for a time considered the possibility of reorganizing the BCLF and then joining it.<sup>2</sup> However, this option was abandoned, and the BCLF collapsed soon afterwards.<sup>3</sup> In April 1922 the BCLF treasurer resigned, accusing Mahsin of having accepted money from Congress workers, and thus of mixing politics and labour.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after this N.N. Ganguli also severed his links with the Federation, alleging that it had been involved in "futile political demonstrations", while the social and welfare objectives with which it had been formed had been overlooked.<sup>5</sup>

One reason for the brief existence and general weakness of the BCLF was that its organizational consolidation, indicated by the April 1921 conference, came at a time when the immediate causes of and conditions for the post-War upsurge in trade unionism were changing. Food prices began to fall from the beginning of 1921, as has already been shown, and real wage levels stabilised or perhaps even rose, thus removing or reducing the economic pressures for collective action that had been present in 1918-20. At the same time the post-war economic boom collapsed, and by the middle of 1921 the signs of a depression were apparent as factories closed, or began working short time.<sup>6</sup> The jute industry, for example, adopted a 54 hour (or 4 day) working week in April 1921, which was extended indefinitely at the end of the year. Since no formal khoraki (food allowance) arrangements appear to have been made, unlike the situation in 1919, most jute factory workers would have had to subsist on four days earnings.<sup>7</sup> Although the sub-

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1) ABP, 1/2/1922.

2) ABP, 11/3/1922.

3) For further discussion of these meetings, see pp.245-6.

4) E, 17/4/1922. The accusation was not substantiated. It might perhaps indicate that the January 1922 factory workers' meetings were actually attempts to revive the Federation with nationalist support.

5) E, 21/4/1922; see also N. Gangulee, India. What Now?, (London, 1933), p.171.

6) See p.176. Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1920-21, pp.vi-vii, x; ibid., 1921-22, pp.vii, x-xi.

7) IJMA, Report of the Committee for the Year ended 31st December 1921, (Calcutta, 1922), pp.1-3; ibid., 1922 (Calcutta, 1923), pp. iii, 2. For the situation in 1919, see p.174.

sequent depression of earnings and living standards may have engendered a further need for collective action, short time working also made strikes or indeed any of the established forms of trade unionism less effective. This change in particular made it necessary for the Federation organisers to develop a viable alternative strategy for protecting workers' interests if they were to retain their allegiance, but there is no evidence that this was even attempted. This points to another equally significant element in the Federation's demise - the inherent weakness of most of the constituent unions, and the role played by the organisers.

The BCLF officers and organisers were all outsiders who, as has been shown, were generally dependent on the actual employees for their ability to exercise leadership and to organise viable unions.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the nature of the Federation's links with factory workers in particular was crucial to both its initial organizational success, and its ultimate demise. Unfortunately little is known about this aspect of the Federation. Mahsin perhaps used contacts made in his former capacity as a Khilafat Committee member,<sup>2</sup> while N.N. Ganguli apparently sought on his own initiative to start welfare work among factory labourers.<sup>3</sup> Mahsin's speech to the April conference shows that one reason for forming the Federation, and for the organisers' success in drawing various "labour associations" together was that factory sardars wanted to re-establish some degree of discipline and control over the workforce.<sup>4</sup> The presence of factory sardars, but not apparently of shop-floor workers, at the January and April meetings also highlights the significance of the sardars for the BCLF.<sup>5</sup> The fact that one Bakr Sardar was the secretary of a union established

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- 1) See Chapter 7. J.N. Roy and M. Mahsin became the president and secretary respectively in January - E, 18/1/1921; C.F. Andrews was a vice-president - E, 1/6/1921; M.A.C. Kashiani the treasurer - Confidential, GB Political, File 291 (1-2), 1921; and N.N. Ganguli was an organiser - C.F. Andrews to R. Tagore, 22/3/1921, C.F. Andrews Papers, File 7, No.192.
  - 2) ABP, 14/8/1920; GoI Home (Political), January 1921, Deposit 75.
  - 3) C.F. Andrews to R. Tagore 22/3/1921. Ganguli founded the Behala Karmi Sangha which started a free primary school, and had a medical committee and a hospital - Karmi, 1 (3), October-November 1921, p.28; ibid., 1 (4), December 1921, p.71 (Bengali section).
  - 4) ABP, 23/4/1921. See p.179 for his speech.
  - 5) E, 18/1/1921; ABP, 19/4/1921. The BCLF conference in April was held in the Indian Association hall, and admission was by ticket - ABP, 22/3/1921.

with Mahsin's help, and which was represented at the April conference, also suggests that some of the factory unions were organised if not dominated by sardars.<sup>1</sup>

This combination of sardars and social-welfare minded outsiders contained the seeds of the BCLF's demise. Insofar as the Federation was based on sardari institutions, this provided unique access to factory workers. On the other hand, success for the factory unions and the Federation depended on distinguishing themselves from the sardars if the latter were not simply to re-establish their traditional dominance by adopting the guise of trade unionists. This process could perhaps have been avoided had the outsiders worked to develop the elements of militancy exhibited during 1920-21 which had threatened the sardars' position in the first place. However, the outsiders were for their own reasons and beliefs concerned to curb strikes, and were assisted in this by the deterioration of conditions in which successful strike action could occur. It therefore seems probable that the Federation organisers themselves contributed if unwittingly to its demise before they actually resigned, and permitted the factory sardars to regain their former dominance over factory workers.<sup>2</sup>

#### Trade union consolidation 1920-22

The demise of the factory unions in 1921 meant that factory workers contributed little or nothing to the formation of the BCLF's successor, the Bengal Trades Union Federation, formed early in 1922. Before discussing the steps leading to the setting up of the BTUF it is useful therefore to review the process of union consolidation in general to the beginning of 1922. Other unions besides those of factory workers disappeared in 1920-21, and the character of the organizationally successful unions,

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- 1) ABP, 13/4/1921. The Baranagar Labour Association (not in the BCLF) also had sardars on its committee - GB "List of Labour Unions", p.17. D. Kooiman, "Jobbers and the emergence of trade unions in Bombay City", International Review of Social History 22 (3), 1977, pp.313-28 has shown that sardars (called jobbers in Bombay) took part in union formation elsewhere in India, but their presence in Bengal had been difficult to establish.
  - 2) New factory workers' unions were not formed until 1923 - the Gauripur Works Employees' Association in November 1923 (GoI, Industries and Labour, May 1924, File L881 (7) ), and the Bengal Jute Workers' Association some time during that year - Johnston and Sime, Exploitation in India, [c.1925], p.15 stated that the BJA had been active "for the past two years". Both union's existence was facilitated by outsider assistance.

and therefore also of the BTUF, was shaped by experiences and developments in that period.

The statistics of union formation and demise discussed in Chapter 5 showed that although practically all the factory workers' unions had disappeared by the beginning of 1922, so had many clerical and non-factory employees' organizations. The extent of union demise, and the structure of the organized sector of the unionized workforce in January 1922, is summarized in Table 8.2.<sup>1</sup>

**TABLE 8.2:** Trade union formation and demise 1918-1921, and degree of union consolidation, January 1922

	employee groups								TOTAL
	supervisory	subordinate supervisory	clerical	factory	non-factory	mixed	railway	not known	
existing January 1918	2	1	2	1					6
established, January 1918 - December 1921	3	10	25	24	31	6	7	3	109
TOTAL	5	11	27	25	31	6	7	3	115
demised, January 1918 - December 1921	2	5	15 <sup>a</sup>	22	21 <sup>b</sup>		1	3	69
existing, January 1922	3	6	12	3	10	6	6		46

Key: (a) four unions amalgamated  
(b) three unions amalgamated

Several unions which only existed for a short time appear to have functioned primarily as strike committees. In November 1920, for example, the Calcutta Coachmen's and Syce's Union gave three days notice of their intention to strike if demands for higher wages were not conceded. The strike took place, and ended a few days later when most employers granted wage increases, but no further union activity was reported.<sup>2</sup> The Central Labourers' Union, the Kanchrapara Labour Union, the Goalundo Labour Union and the Khulna Labour Association

1) For details and references, see Tables 5.8 (p.128) and 5.10 (p.133).  
2) ABP, 12,14,17,19,20/11/1920.

also apparently collapsed when strikes with which they were associated came to an end.<sup>1</sup>

It might be argued that such organizations were clearly strike committees rather than trade unions, despite their formal names.<sup>2</sup> However, their mode of formation, in connection with a specific problem (rather than from a more abstract concern to establish a union) was identical to that of many unions which did become organizationally stable. Examples of the latter process discussed earlier show that at least three conditions had to be fulfilled for this to happen - the continued existence of grievances, people willing and able to organise further agitation, and sufficient support from the employees concerned.<sup>3</sup> While some of the 'strike committee' unions may have been strike committees in reality, which can only be determined through further research, we can also infer that some organizations did not develop any further because they lacked one or more of these conditions. The same inference can be made in respect of the short-lived supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical workers' unions, which in view of these groups' aversion to striking could hardly be called strike committees.<sup>4</sup>

Unions with weak leadership or little commitment from potential members would probably also have been very susceptible to any sign of hostility to the union or even to employees making demands. Excise sub-inspectors, for example, did not even dare to set up a union because their Commissioner refused to grant permission.<sup>5</sup> Similar pressure probably also accounts for the rapid demise of other supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical employees' unions, although others proved more resilient, as in the case of the Bengal Police Association. The BPA was formed in January 1920 by criminal intelligence and other police officers who intended to utilise the police force command structure

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- 1) CLU: "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1253, 1255; KanLU: ibid., pp.1261, 1263; CLU: E, 3,8/6/1921; KLA: E, 10/6/1921. The Barakar Labour Association - "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1223 - and the Oil Mill Employees' Union - S, 29/4/1921; E, 13/5/1921 - were also only associated with strikes.
  - 2) The "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1187-8 claimed that "organised bodies of labour hardly exist", and that "a certain number" of unions were fundamentally strike committees.
  - 3) See Chapter 6.
  - 4) For example, the Bengal Civil Service Association, the Bengal Settlement Kamungoes' Association, and the Bengal Public Health Association. For these and other short-lived unions see Appendix III.
  - 5) ABP, 18/11/1920 (letter about excise department grievances).



to develop branches, and collect subscriptions. The police Inspector-General interviewed the BPA leaders, at the Governor's behest, and pointed out that the authorities could hardly allow the organization of the union in this way, or even permit the establishment of branches as this would tend to undermine discipline. The BPA founders agreed, and resolved to confine the union to a central committee.<sup>1</sup> Documentary evidence of similar opposition to other unions is limited to reports of pressure on union activists or potential members. In 1920 the Collector of Customs tried to get the Customs Preventive Service Association to abandon their outsider president, but without success.<sup>2</sup> In 1921 two Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union activists were dismissed and others transferred; Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association leaders were also dismissed or transferred to undesirable posts, and in 1921-2 local officials' opposition led to the closure of an Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association branch at Saidpur.<sup>3</sup> In 1920, when the Press Employees' Association still had several nationalists among its officers, it was reported that printers were intimidated from joining the union by their employers.<sup>4</sup> While such pressures undoubtedly led many employees to abandon their unions, it was probably a less significant determinant of successful unions' character than their experience in seeking redress of grievances.

In 1918-20 employers generally responded to trade unionism by making some concessions, usually in the form of wage increases. As has already been shown, however, these reforms themselves often became a source of renewed agitation because they failed to meet employees' expectations and requirements.<sup>5</sup> Employers responded to such second phases of agitation, which developed in 1920-21, in three main ways, each of which effectively resulted in an industrial relations' stalemate.

The most frequent response was to accept protests, resolutions and deputations, but to refuse to make any further changes of any

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- 1) GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2 (actual file). The BPA still existed in December 1926 - Indian Quarterly Register, 1926, vol.II, (Calcutta, n.d.), p.7.
  - 2) E, 24,27/11/1920, 6,7/12/1920.
  - 3) BNRILU: annual report in Swadharma, II (1), 16/4/1922, p.8; BPRMSA: ABP, 18/8/1921; S, 8/12/1921; Labour, 1 (7), August 1921, pp.1-2; EBRIFA: Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference, p.6
  - 4) ABP, 10/7/1920.
  - 5) See Chapter 6.

significance. Post Office employees succeeded in getting an official enquiry into their wages and conditions early in 1920,<sup>1</sup> but were then extremely dissatisfied with the outcome. In January 1921 they drew up a lengthy memorandum containing fresh demands which they sent to the Viceroy, but this achieved little except a re-examination of some anomalies created by the enquiry committee's recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Their consequent frustration was expressed in their union journal in August 1921:

So ... we find ourselves landed in a chaotic position  
in which the mind finds but little to console itself with.

We feel ... that all our weepings and moanings have fallen  
on indifferent ears. (3)

This article concluded by contrasting their experiences with that of the Indian Telegraph Association, suggesting that inadequate organization on their part was responsible for their failures. The Press Employees' Association faced a similar impasse over their demand for the abolition of piece-work in the Government presses. This had been the main aim of an unsuccessful strike in July and August 1920, and resolutions calling for an end to the system were passed at intervals in 1921. Finally the Government of India set up an enquiry committee in January 1922, but the union was still referring to this problem in speeches made four years later.<sup>4</sup>

Several other groups of employees were also able to obtain official enquiries into their wages and conditions. Committees concerned with ministerial officers' and Government teachers' pay and conditions were set up towards the end of 1920, and occupied these groups' attention throughout 1921.<sup>5</sup> The strike call issued by telegraphists and railwaymen in February 1921 was cancelled at the last moment partly because the authorities agreed to set up a committee to enquire into some of

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- 1) Report of the Postal Committee 1920, (Simla, 1920).
  - 2) E, 7/12/1920; ABP 24/12/1920; Labour, 1 (1), February 1920, pp.1-40 (the memorandum), and passim, 1921.
  - 3) Labour, 1 (7), August 1921, pp.15-16.
  - 4) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1196-7; ABP, 2/3/1921, 24/5/1921, 21/9/1921; E, 23/8/1921; Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Grievances of Piece-workers in the Government of India presses, (Simla, 1922). Speakers at the June 1926 All India Press Employees' Conference referred to piece-workers' continued hardships - The Masses of India, II (9), September 1926, p.16.
  - 5) Ministerial officers: ABP, 18/11/1920; S, 5/7/1921; GB Finance (Finance), January 1922, A 45. Teachers: GB Education (Education), December 1922, A 36-42.

the issues over which they were agitating.<sup>1</sup> However, other unions which pursued demands to the extent of going on strike were less fortunate. Of the two major tramway strikes in which the Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union was involved in 1921, the first gained little for the workers, and the second was effectively abandoned partly in order to preserve the union.<sup>2</sup> The Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union also faced an intransigent management, and this union disappeared with the defeat of the railway strike in September 1921.<sup>3</sup>

This stalemate, or at best postponement of a resolution of grievances until the implementation of committee reports, could perhaps have been broken by more effective unionization. Some trade union leaders did speak in terms of the need to mobilise members and develop their own strengths, but given the established unions' small membership this was clearly a long term perspective, as Table 8.3 shows.<sup>4</sup>

The figures of union membership in 1920-22 presented below are very crude insofar as there is no information regarding the data on which the figures are based - whether they refer to fully paid up union members, for example, or just to the number of membership cards issued. However, although there is no way of overcoming this problem, or verifying the figures, there seems no reason to suspect serious exaggeration except for the ISFEU (and perhaps the JPEA and PEA). Membership figures by themselves are a less useful indicator of union strength than information about the degree of unionization - the actual membership as a percentage of the potential membership.<sup>5</sup> This is difficult to show since detailed workforce statistics are not available, except for the railway lines, and one or two other employers. In order to provide some means of indicating the degree of unionization in 1920-22, subsequent membership figures of unions have been given where they have been found.

It is clear that both the actual membership and the degree of unionization in 1920-22 show that most unions were very weak. Only

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- 1) E, 28/2/1921, 8, 16/3/1921; Report of the Telegraph Committee 1921, (Simla, 1921). The railway enquiry committee was an internal affair for which no separate report was issued. (See also pp.215-6).
  - 2) ABP, 20/11/1921; see pp.202-4.
  - 3) The Chandpur union branch secretary wrote a letter dated 7 September which is the last contemporary reference to this union - ABP, 11/9/1921.
  - 4) See p.239.
  - 5) Blackburn, Union character and social class, pp.14-17. Blackburn also argues the need to take "union character" into account in order to make comparison of unionization more meaningful.

TABLE 8.3: Trade union membership and unionization, 1920-22<sup>1</sup>

union	actual reported membership			later membership	potential membership (c. 1921)
	1920	1921	1922		
ABMOA		600		8000	
ABTA		3000			
BA		100			
BNRILU		6000		9000	55555
BPRMSA	2000			10244	
BELA		900			
CTPMDA	600	1400			5000
CPTEA	1000	1500		1500	50000
CPC		500		1468	
CTEU		2000		3000	2500
CRU	14				
CIOU		30			
CA		50			
CPSA		201	212		
EBRIEA	561	535	2303	8500	46972
EA	3347	5768	2465	2250	
GRLU		1000			
IBIISA		600		1210	
ISA		1500			
ISBU	1500				
ISU		1800		30000	
ISFEU		26000		1000	
ITA	1857	2800			
JA		150			
JPEA	4000				
KhA		500	1000		
PEA		3000		500	
RWA	16559				244736
ULA		300			

1) No membership figures have been found for unions omitted from this table. Sources: GoI Industries and Labour (Labour), File 881 (13), 1925; Administration Report on Indian Railways, 1920-21; GB "List of Labour Unions", passim; GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 & KWs; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1200; Employees' Association, Third Annual Report of the Employees' Association ... for the year ending 30th June 1922, (Calcutta, n.d.), p.3; ibid., Seventh Annual Report ... For the Year Ending 30th June 1926, (Calcutta, n.d.), p.1; Bakhale, Directory of Indian Trade unions, passim; The Collegian, XV, June 1921, p.301; Newsletter of the ITF, II (4), April 1924, p.52; ibid., II (10), October 1924, p.123; International Transport Workers' Federation, 'Circular' [c.1929]; ABP, 11/3/1920, 28/4/1920, 16/8/1921, 19/4/1922; E, 20/9/1920, 14/2/1921, 7/4/1921, 8/8/1921, 10/11/1921, 27/2/1922; S, 4/7/1920, 10/8/1920, 31/10/1920, 15/12/1920, 7/5/1921.

the CTEU appears to have achieved a high degree of unionization, which probably accounts for its ability to survive two relatively unsuccessful strikes in 1921. The ITA was also probably strong in the sense that most Anglo-Indians were members. However, this group's monopoly of key telegraph posts was already under threat from Indianization, and the union's apparent unwillingness to organise Indians ultimately proved a serious weakness.<sup>1</sup> It should also be noted that many of these figures probably represented nominal rather than active membership. In 1921, for example, the Employees' Association secretary reported that only about 2000 members paid their subscriptions regularly.<sup>2</sup>

Low union membership was not of itself a barrier to the mobilization of support as participation in strikes indicates, and the proper organization of such mass forms of trade unionism could have broken the stalemate in which many unions found themselves. However, the commitment of many of the more stable unions to 'constitutional' trade unionism ruled this out. This principle was described most succinctly by the president of the Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association when he said that his union aimed

through constitutional means that is not to threaten the Administration with strikes and other obstructive measures to force out of their hands privileges we require for our well being. (3)

The Railway Workmen's Association and many Government clerks' unions also emphasised their adherence to 'constitutional' trade unionism, sometimes linking this with expressions of concern to secure the mutual interests of employees and employers.<sup>4</sup> These two themes were both stated in the articles of the Indian Seamens' Union Rules and Regulations

Policy of the Union:

The guiding policy of the Union is Co-operation, ... , it is a relation of mutual understanding and help between the employers and the employed in questions of labour

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- 1) In 1918 it was reported that nearly all the Anglo-Indian telegraphists (and two-thirds of the staff) were ITA members - Confidential, GoI Commerce and Industry (Post and Telegraphs), September 1918, No.6 - and there is no reason to suppose that this proportion fell significantly in 1920-22. The decision to increase the proportion of Indian telegraphists was also made in 1918 - Confidential, GoI Commerce and Industry, May 1918, A 1-3. In April 1924 a separate Indian union, the All India Telegraph Union, was established - Saha, History of the working class movement, p.225.
  - 2) Karmi, 1 (6), February 1922, p.65.
  - 3) Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference, p.13.
  - 4) See pp.157-8, 161-5, 216-7.

both International and Local.

Creed of the Union:

The amelioration of the general conditions of the Indian Seamen and persons connected with ships and shipping by legal and constitutional methods ... (1)

These constitutionalist tendencies were strengthened by trade unionists' experiences in 1920-21, for as the hazards of strike action were demonstrated, so existing and newly developing 'constitutional' avenues seems to provide the only means of pursuing demands. The Indian Seamen's Union's agitation over the method of recruiting seamen in 1921-2 shows how existing and new channels of 'constitutional' agitation were seized upon by union leaders. In March 1921 the ISU drew up a catalogue of grievances, centring on the demand for the abolition of recruitment by middle-men, which it hoped to discuss with the Bengal Government Marine Department.<sup>2</sup> The Department however refused to meet the ISU delegation, so the union protested, and decided that the "next constitutional step" would be to approach the Governor of Bengal. It was also suggested at the meeting which took this decision that if the Governor did not respond favourably, "all constitutional means for redress of grievances would be at an end", and a strike would be inevitable.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, in July, the Marine Department received a deputation, and though the union received little more than sympathy for their cause, the ISU secretary seems to have been very pleased with the outcome.<sup>4</sup> At a meeting in August he paid tribute to the Governor, shipping companies, and the union members, for exerting sufficient pressure to make the Marine Department recognise the union by receiving the deputation. He also argued that although there had been strong feeling in favour of a strike, strikes were not the proper way to acquire sympathy, and moreover had been shown to be a great folly.<sup>5</sup>

At this stage the ISU probably anticipated that the Government of India would soon ratify the convention adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 1921, recommending that recruitment of seamen involving payment of fees by men to recruiters should be

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- 1) Indian Seamen's Union, Rules and Regulations, (Calcutta, n.d.), p.1. These were probably drawn up pre-December 1922 since R. Braunfield, who died in December 1922, was named as the ISU president - ibid., cover.
  - 2) E, 10,23/3/1921.
  - 3) E, 4,26/4/1921, 17,18/6/1921.
  - 4) S, 30/6/1921; Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, pp.18-19.
  - 5) E, 8/8/1921. Daud was probably referring to the east Bengal railway and steamer strikes then still in progress.

abolished. However, in September the Government refused to ratify the convention, and instead proposed to hold an enquiry into seamen's recruitment.<sup>1</sup> The ISU protested at this decision, but signified its willingness to cooperate by demanding representation on the enquiry committee, to which the union's secretary was appointed.<sup>2</sup> The ISU also sent seamen to give evidence to the committee, and the report, published in May 1922, recommended that the traditional system should be replaced by official recruitment bureaux.<sup>3</sup> The ISU's faith in 'constitutional' channels was thus vindicated, although two more years were to elapse before the new system was set up in Bengal.<sup>4</sup>

The development of more formal industrial relations' institutions, and discussion of measures to legalise unions, also appeared to provide an alternative to militancy or strikes. In February 1921 K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, a nominated Labour Representative in the Bengal Legislative Council,<sup>5</sup> moved a resolution asking for an enquiry into the causes of strikes in Bengal. A committee was eventually set up which, besides reviewing evidence for all the strikes which had taken place between July 1920 and March 1921, recommended that Works' Committees should be established, together with a Conciliation Board to deal with disputes in public utilities.<sup>6</sup> The Government had previously proposed to set up a Works Committee for its printers, in July 1920, but it is not clear whether this was actually established, and one had been formed in the ordnance factory at Ichapur by February 1921.<sup>7</sup> None seem to have been set up in the private sector however, and this suggestion does not seem to have been pursued by any groups of employees. The Government was also involved in strike arbitration, firstly in the aftermath of the tram strike which ended in February 1921, and then following a strike

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- 1) Daud, Indian Seamen's Union, pp.23-6; "The Genoa Labour Conference - Official Correspondence", Bulletins of Indian Industry and Labour, No.17, (Calcutta, 1921), passim.
  - 2) E, 6/10/1921; ABP, 2/11/1921; Daud, ibid., p.27.
  - 3) Confidential, GoI Commerce (Lascar Seamen), August 1922, A 1-7; E, 19/1/1922; S, 5/2/1922; Daud, ibid., pp.28, 32-3.
  - 4) Daud, ibid., pp.36-49.
  - 5) Ray Chaudhuri and H.C. Bhattacharya of the PEA were nominated to the Legislative Council to represent the "Labouring Classes" in January 1921 - Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary, 3/1/1921, p.9. The PEA was very gratified, and saw this as a means of pursuing their grievances - ABP, 9/2/1921.
  - 6) "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", pp.1190-93.
  - 7) Calcutta Gazette, IA, 4/8/1920, p.685; "Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest", p.1253; The Fireworker, 1 (2), July 1921, p.3.

on the Light Railways' system in June 1921.<sup>1</sup> The Committee on Industrial Unrest's recommendation for a Conciliation Board was finally implemented in August 1921 when a Conciliation Panel of employers, employees and 'members of the public' was formed.<sup>2</sup> However, the panel, from which a Board was to have been drawn, was never called on.

Trade unions' legal status was rather precarious. Government employees' organizations were technically illegal until the promulgation of what were known as the 'recognition rules' in October 1921, although no action seems to have been taken or considered against them on this ground.<sup>3</sup> Other unions were not illegal, but the successful prosecution of the Madras Labour Union's leaders in 1921 showed how tenuous their legal position was.<sup>4</sup> Moves to give Government employees' unions an official status were initiated in 1919, and in March that year the ITA and the Foremen's Association were given conditional offers of recognition. The terms were that a unions should be confined to a "distinct class" of employee; that no outsider should hold any position in the union; that it should only concern itself with collective, not individual, problems; and that communications should continue to pass through the established channels. The FA accepted these conditions, but the ITA with its outsider founder and general secretary, did not.<sup>5</sup> No other unions seem to have been offered these terms. In October 1920 new proposals for 'recognition rules' were drafted and circulated to all the provincial Governments, and a final version was drawn up a year later.<sup>6</sup> These rules differed from the earlier ones only insofar as

- 1) "Resolution on the Report of the Calcutta Tramways Strike Committee"; "Resolution on the Report of the Light Railways Conciliation", Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 27/7/1921.
- 2) GB Commerce (Commerce), September 1921, A 10-37; "Resolution on the constitution of a conciliation panel to deal with labour disputes affecting public utility services", Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 31/8/1921.
- 3) Royal Commission on Labour in India. Report, (Cmd.3883, London, 1931), p.323.
- 4) A note written around March 1921 stated that there was no legislation directly pertaining to unions in India, but that unions could be charged with breach of contract, or restraint, which British unions were by then protected against - Note, by Sir E. Charmier, n.d., in IO File I&O 183/21, Part 1 (IOL&R: L/E/7/1191). On the Madras Labour Union, see Mathur and Mathur, Trade union movement in India, pp.16-18.
- 5) Enclosure to GoI Home (Police) Despatch to Judicial and Public Department (India Office), 26/8/1920, in IO File J&P 6306/20 (IOL&R: L/SG/7/453); T. Holland to L. Kershaw, 6/4/1921, in IO File I&O 183/21, Part 1 (IOL&R: L/E/7/1191); E, 3/5/1919.
- 6) GB Political (Political), December 1920, A 12-20.



Government employees were not prohibited from employing outsiders in their unions. However, recognition was only discretionary, and the right to refuse recognition to unions with outsider officers was specifically upheld. Police and prison officers were permitted to form unions, subject to closer scrutiny over their rules and officers.<sup>1</sup>

Steps to introduce a law for the registration of all unions were also initiated in 1921. In September the Government of India addressed a memorandum on this subject to the provincial Governments, and the Bengal authorities also asked selected unions for their opinions. All the unions approached expressed great interest in the proposals, either accepting them as they stood, but more often stressing that any legislation should protect workers, and give them some degree of equality of treatment and status with employers. The Press Employees' Association, for example, was concerned that registration should entail recognition of unions by employers as of right, arguing that capital in India must recognise "genuine combinations of workers in the interests of both Capital and Labour".<sup>2</sup>

Union consolidation in 1921 thus took place in the context of a general decline in the level of strike activity and union formation, reflecting both the diminution of immediate economic pressure, and employers' opposition to militancy and refusal to make concessions in response to other types of demand. Union leaders who were still pursuing grievances and who had sufficient support for maintaining a union were thus faced with the twin problems of preserving their organization, and enhancing its effectiveness. The piece-meal development of industrial relations' institutions, the involvement of individual trade unionists on committees, and other moves to legitimise unions, all seemed to herald increased possibilities for 'constitutional' trade unionism, and to provide a means for breaking the employers' deadlock on negotiations. The Bengal Trade Unions Federation was thus formed when trade unionists were on the defensive, and actively seeking ways of cooperating with the authorities to realise their objectives.

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1) GB Political (Political), May 1922, A 14.

2) GB Commerce, August 1922, A 32-51; ABP, 31/3/1922. These proposals were shelved later in 1922.

Bengal Trade Unions Federation

The first steps to form a new union federation were taken in December 1921 when several unions began to exchange correspondence on the subject.<sup>1</sup> No details of this correspondence have come to light, but as a result, representatives of about a dozen unions attended a meeting in February 1922 to debate the issue.<sup>2</sup> The speech by M.L. Sircar, the conference convenor, made it plain that the federation was being sought as a means to overcome weaknesses rather than to consolidate strength:

It is my sincere conviction that under present conditions of the society as we find it, we will not be able to maintain our struggles for existence without the help of co-operative combination, closer adhesion, and unification of the interests of workers. We have as men, our inherent rights and privileges ... and although we have almost parted with them or more correctly, been made to part with them we can no longer continue to treat them with indifference, but should seriously set about to reclaim them.

He explained that organization was necessary in order to prevent "employers and capitalists" from dictating terms, and their immediate objective was to establish a trade union federation, to strengthen the unions' voice.<sup>3</sup> Resolutions approving the principle of federation, and appointing a committee with one representative from each union present to discuss the issue further, were also passed.<sup>4</sup>

A slight controversy arose at the next meeting, on 4 March, when two speakers pressed for measures to be taken to reorganise the BCLF in order to embrace all unions in Bengal, and referred to the work this federation had performed in the factory areas. Other speakers opposed this, and argued for an organization "to embrace such bodies as were more in the nature of Trade Unions".<sup>5</sup> This appears to reflect hostility towards association with factory workers and their organizations on the part of some of the white collar unions which dominated these early meetings.<sup>6</sup> However, a compromise was eventually agreed whereby

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1) Karmi, 1 (11), July 1922, p.125.

2) Lists of unions at the meeting give either 10 or 11 organizations, while a composite list runs to 12 unions: BNRILU, CAO, COLU, CPC, CPTEA, CTEU, EA, EIRILU, IBIISA, ISU, Kha, RWA(IS). See ABP, 1/3/1922; S, 28/2/1922; The Century Review, VIII (7), 1/4/1922, p.4.

3) Karmi, 1 (7), March 1922, pp.82-4.

4) S, 28/2/1922; Karmi, 1 (7), March 1922, p.90.

5) ABP, 11/3/1922; E, 10/3/1922.

6) A speaker at an IBIISA meeting later in 1922 said: "The members of the Association do not belong to the working class - an uneducated, fleeting and easily excitable body ..." - Karmi, 2 (3), October 1922, p.19. See also the presidential address to the BTUF conference in April 1922, in Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.102.

the unions present formed themselves into a Federal Council to discuss the BCLF constitution, or alternatively to form a separate federation. A draft constitution, presumably of an alternative to that of the BCLF, was also circulated for discussion.<sup>1</sup>

The question of reviving the BCLF or of establishing a new federation was decided at the meeting of the Federal Council of Labour Unions on 11 March, which resolved

That this Federal Council does not approve of the Constitution of the B.C.L.F. and resolves to form a separate Labour Federation in Bengal. (2)

No reasons for this decision were reported, nor have any details of the discussion at the meeting come to light. Other resolutions passed at this meeting inaugurated the new Federation, decided that a trade union conference would be held at Easter, and set up the Reception Committee to organise the conference. Several Government clerks' unions had taken part in this and the previous meetings, but they withdrew from the Federation at this stage because of "technical difficulties" which reportedly prevented them from cooperating with other employees' organizations. Proposals for these unions to hold their own conference and to join the Federation at a later stage were made, but not acted on.<sup>3</sup>

The BTUF conference was held in Calcutta over two days, beginning on 14 April.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-five unions, nearly half the total then in existence, were represented at the conference, as indicated in Table 8.4.<sup>5</sup> Seven of the unions not present at the conference were probably defunct, or at least dormant by April 1922,<sup>6</sup> while 12 unions at the conference do not seem to have been active subsequently.<sup>7</sup> Excluding these 19 unions from consideration means that there were approximately 35 relatively stable unions in existence at this time, of which only one-third joined

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- 1) ABP, 11/3/1922; E, 10/3/1922; The Century Review, VIII (7), 1/4/1922, p.4.
  - 2) Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.110.
  - 3) E, S, 14/3/1922; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.110; ibid., 1 (11), July 1922, pp.125-6. Nothing in the 'recognition rules' prevented cooperation with other non-Government employees, so presumably other pressures were exerted to ensure Government employees' isolation.
  - 4) Main reports: Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, pp.101-4, 111-16; ibid., 1 (10), June 1922, pp.117-19; ibid., 1 (11), July 1922, pp.125-6; The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, pp.2-6.
  - 5) See p.247.
  - 6) EIRILA, HLU, HWU, ISFEU, SERIB, TPMWA, ULA. For details see Appendix III.
  - 7) ABISA, AWU, BPMWA, CLA, ChLA, EIRILU, PBBKS, RjCLF, RWA(IS), SS, TWU, WBSA. For details see Appendix III. The SS and TWU were mentioned in the Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, XIII, 15-18, 20-21 August 1923 on a list of unions "reported from time to time".

TABLE 8.4: Bengal trade unions and the BTUF conference, April 1922 (1)

Employee group	Unions not at the conference	No.	Unions at the conference (a)	No.	TOTAL UNIONS
<u>supervisory</u>	FA ICSA IPA	3		0	3
<u>subordinate supervisory</u>	AIPMSA AIPOA BRSA BSCSA CPSA ITA	6		0	6
<u>clerical</u>	ABMOA ABTA (b) AISASA CAOA CCEA 1922 COA DBEA	7	ABISA ABTA (b) AWU BPRMSA (c) EA IBIISA PBBKS PEA WBSA (d)	9	16
<u>factory</u>	KkLU TFMWA	2	BPMWA	1	3
<u>non-factory</u>	CC&CDA CPEA (e) ISFEU ULA	4	CLA COLU CTEU ISU JA Kha SS TWU	8	12
<u>railway</u>	EIRILA RWA SERIB	3	BNRILU EBRIEA EIRILU RWA(IS)	4	7
<u>mixed</u>	BIPA BPA HLU WU	4	ChLA CPTEA	2	6
<u>other</u>		0	RjCLEF	1	1
TOTAL		29		25	54

- Key: (a) omitting the Indian Colliery Employees' Association and the Jamshedpur Labour Association, based in Bihar.  
 (b) the ABTA and ABHSTA both claimed this name; the presence of one and absence of the other from the conference is assumed.  
 (c) probably the "Postal Union" - see note (e).  
 (d) listed, despite the barrier to Government employees' unions.  
 (e) possibly the "Postal Union".

1) For unions at the conference, see Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111; The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, p.4. For other details, see Appendix III.

the BTUF. The non-BTUF unions consisted primarily of Government employees' organizations, while practically all the viable private sector and railway unions joined the new Federation. The BTUF was thus certainly more representative than either of its predecessors, but was dominated by clerical or clerical based unions. Many of these were committed to 'constitutional' behaviour, as the Federation's conference proceedings make clear.

The conference president, Raja Manindra Chandra Sinha, M.B.E., of Paikpara Raj, set the dominant theme of the conference in his opening speech:

What we need more and more in India is less of this class distinction, landlord and tenant, zamindar and ryot, capitalist and labourer and more of the common platform of fellow workers, toiling for the good of one another ... (1)

The ideal of promoting a corporate industrial relations system was reflected in conference resolutions. The first two of these, for example, proclaimed

that the amelioration of labour in the province of Bengal, as elsewhere, lies in the hearty cooperation of Capital and Labour for their mutual development.

that in the best interests of employers and employees organised trade unions should be recognised. (2)

The Federation's constitution also stated that their objective was to strengthen unions so as "to consolidate the best interests of the employers and employees."<sup>3</sup> This ideal was also reflected in resolutions calling for the principle of "equitable profit-sharing between employer and employee" to be introduced; for conciliation boards made up equally of workers and employers; and condemning the East Indian Railway authorities' refusal to permit arbitration of an ongoing strike.<sup>4</sup>

A major obstacle to the realization of this ideal identified by speakers was that the employers, unlike themselves, were already organised, thus resulting in imbalance where there should be equity, not to mention the practical problems employees faced. Implicitly it was suggested that the organization of workers through unions, and of cooperation between unions, would redress this imbalance, enabling the

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1) Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.102.

2) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/4/1922. p.4.

3) Karmi, 1 (10), June 1922, p.120. It is not certain when the constitution was actually adopted.

4) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, pp.4-5.

corporate industrial relations system to flourish. The successful organization of unions and the adoption of responsibilities by taking up the role of communicators between employers and employees would also enable them to discipline and guide the workforce. H.W.B. Moreno, the Reception Committee chairman and subsequently a BTUF vice-president,<sup>1</sup> hoped that the conference

will result in some good for the labourers of India, most of whom are inarticulate and all of whom are in need of guidance in the right channels of usefulness to themselves and to those whom they serve. (2)

He also envisaged that the Federation would exercise similar control over its constituent unions, arguing that

A disorganised union is not only a source of sudden and grave danger to employers at large, but is the worst calamity that can happen to a faithful body of workmen. (3)

and suggested that the Federation would rescue

any recalcitrant unit ... that is on the road to disorganization by offering to reorganise it in the proper channels ... . (4)

In view of this insistence on cooperation between employees and employers, it is interesting to note that the BTUF organisers' attitude towards strikes was somewhat ambiguous. The constitution clearly stated that they intended to "promote the interests of labour in Bengal by the adoption of all constitutional means."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Sinha's presidential address condemned strikes, which he felt were caused by agitators who raised employees' hopes, so leading to frustration and strikes when employers rejected their demands.<sup>6</sup> Moreno referred to strikes as an "evil" to be opposed, but appeared to concede that they were justifiable if arbitration and conciliation had failed.<sup>7</sup> M.L. Sircar, a key organiser and subsequently secretary of the BTUF,<sup>8</sup> argued

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- 1) S.K. Bose, "'Industrial Unrest' and Growth of Labour Unions in Bengal, 1920-24", Economic and Political Weekly, XVI (44-46), November 1981 p.1855 (from intelligence branch sources).
  - 2) Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.114.
  - 3) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, p.3. This journal, edited by Moreno, gives slightly different versions of his speech from that in Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, pp.114-16, and ibid., 1 (10), June 1922, pp.117-19.
  - 4) Karmi, 1 (10), June 1922, p.119.
  - 5) Ibid., p.120.
  - 6) Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.104.
  - 7) Karmi, 1 (10), June 1922, pp.118-19.
  - 8) Karmi, 1 (8), April 1922, p.98; The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, p.2.

however, that it was wrong to see strikes simply as being capricious acts, since

It is in many instances employers who make the mistakes of helping to keep the atmosphere surcharged, by their thoughtless action in embarking upon a policy retaliation and revenge as soon as a 'strike' comes to an end, instead of trying to study the problems of working men with sympathy, understanding and, what I think of the greatest importance, prayer [sic]. (1)

The possibility that strikes were justified in certain circumstances was also upheld by a resolution seeking legal sanction for peaceful picketing, on the grounds that this was necessary to prevent black-legging.<sup>2</sup> Later in 1922, in a document containing the BTUF's views on proposed trade union legislation, the organisers did make clear their view that strikes were justified as the only alternative open to workers if conciliation failed to solve their problems.<sup>3</sup>

Other resolutions passed at the conference in April contained a series of demands for regulation of working hours, and overtime rates; for maternity leave and pay; for minimum wages linked to the cost of living; and for housing, educational facilities, and the prohibition of alcohol sales in factory districts. Another resolution demanded legislation to enable workers' representatives to be elected to the Legislative Councils.<sup>4</sup> However, none of these resolutions, nor any of the speeches, showed any concern with practical steps to ensure that resolutions could be implemented. Presumably they thought that the developing prospects for 'constitutional' trade unionism, plus their own efforts in establishing the Federation, were sufficient in themselves. The only resolutions of immediate practical importance entailing action by the unions were the organizational measures connected with the Federation itself. These proposed that a General Council should be formed with two representatives from each member union, which would then elect office bearers at its first meeting. A third resolution also proposed that the BTUF should be made into the provincial body of the All India Trade Union Congress.<sup>5</sup>

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1) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, p.3; see also Karmi, 1 (11), July 1922, pp.125-6.

2) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, p.4; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.112.

3) Industrial and Labour Information, III, 1922, pp.538-9.

4) The Century Review, VIII (12), 13/5/1922, pp.4-6.

5) Ibid., p.6.

### Conclusion

Two attempts were made to establish a trade union federation in 1920 and 1921 when the post-First World War phase of trade unionism was still on the ascendant. Both of these failed to develop, the first after several weeks, and the second after at most a year, partly because they were organised by outsiders who either tried to mould the federation according to their own objectives (BWU), or who were divorced from the organizationally more active and stable unions (BCLF). The BCLF's relative success but ultimate failure also seems to have turned on the nature of the organisers' links with factory sardars, who were able to undermine the Federation when the problems which had forced them to seek the outsiders' aid disappeared.

The recession, opposition to pressure from employees, and the piecemeal introduction of industrial relations' institutions and other legitimate platforms from which trade unionists could voice their views tended to strengthen the hand of those employees and outsiders who sought a corporative solution to workers' problems. Consequently, even unions which had been involved in or threatened strikes in 1920-21 became wary of embarking on such a course in 1921-22, and eager to make use of any 'constitutional' opportunities. Since these unions' caution facilitated their organizational stability, so they tended to dominate the BTUF when moves to set it up began.

The BTUF was formed at the beginning of 1922 in what subsequently turned into a period of relative quiescence on the part of employees. Since the 'constitutional' unions were mostly those of clerical workers, or were led by outsiders drawn from a similar social background, it was largely a clerical workers' organization to begin with. Factory workers were not represented because their unions had all collapsed. Supervisory and subordinate supervisory workers had never been associated with other groups of employees, and doubtless remained aloof since they were in the ambiguous position of being part of the establishment at the same time as being employees. Unions of Government clerical workers were prevented from joining the Federation. However, despite these limitations, the BTUF became an important organizational centre for unions in Bengal within a few years.<sup>1</sup>

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1) See Bose, "'Industrial Unrest' and Growth of Labour Unions in Bengal, 1920-1924", pp.1855-1859 for a brief account.



CHAPTER 9: Conclusions

In this thesis an attempt has been made to delineate the characteristics, course, and underlying processes of the development of trade unionism in Bengal from its earliest manifestations to the foundation of a successful trade union centre. A broad definition of the groups of people among whom trade unionism might be expected to occur, and of the forms which such activity might take, more in keeping with contemporary than traditional perspectives, has enabled a more accurate outline than is at present available to be given. Emphasis has been placed not only on description of the evidence for trade unionism, but also on examination of the processes involved in employees taking to collective activity to protect workplace or labour market conditions.

The history of trade unionism during this period falls into two distinct periods: from the turn of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries, and, from the early twentieth century onwards. By the 1820s at the latest it is evident that employees were familiar with demonstrations, deputations, petitions, and strikes, as well as collective desertion and other forms of 'hidden' activity which enabled them to evade unacceptable working conditions. At present there is insufficient evidence on which any periodization of trade unionism during this period can be suggested, but it is noticeable that there was no particular change in the forms or levels of activity following mid-nineteenth century industrialization. It appears that there was little or no development in terms either of the spread of established forms of trade unionism throughout the whole of the workforce, or through the use of new forms of activity, such as trade unions, until the turn of the nineteenth century.

Deputations, petitioning and desertion continued to occur in the early twentieth century, but from the 1890s it is evident that the number of strikes, and of people simultaneously engaging in collective activity, increased and a small but growing number of trade unions were formed. These features, signifying the beginning of a relatively rapid period of change, serve to distinguish this from the previous period. On the basis of levels and forms of activity, three or four phases of heightened activity can be identified - the mid-1890s, 1905-8, 1912-16, and 1918-19 to 1921-22.

The first of these phases has only tentatively been defined, and much of the evidence for increased activity in the 1890s might simply reflect public concern with manifestations of behaviour that had little or no connection with trade unionism. However, it does appear that for a short time factory workers probably struck more frequently than in the immediate past, and were prepared to riot on occasion if their demands were not conceded. The first clear indication that factory workers could form permanently constituted organizations also dates from this period, although it is not certain that the Mahomedan Association functioned as a trade union until later. The culmination of agitation among ICS officers with the formation of a union in 1894 is more thoroughly documented, but though synchronous with increasing activity by factory workers, clearly stemmed from a different complex of determinants.

The second phase of activity in the early twentieth century is well documented, and there can be no doubt that significant developments from earlier levels of activity were beginning to take place. Strike activity probably increased in 1905, and certainly changed in character the following year when relatively privileged groups such as European and Anglo-Indian railwaymen went on strike for the first time. While further research may indicate that the overall level of strikes in 1905-8 was not much greater than in the previous two decades, the formation of trade unions by subordinate supervisory, clerical and factory employees marked a new departure. Most of these unions disappeared after 1908, but newly discovered reports suggest that the level of strikes remained relatively high, perhaps higher than in 1905-8, between 1912 and 1916.

The fourth phase of activity, beginning at about the end of the First World War and lasting until 1921-22, has been extensively documented here for the first time. The period as a whole was marked by a general movement from petitioning and deputations to strikes and trade union formation, involving all sections of the workforce in various ways. Several successively overlapping phases of activity can be distinguished. In 1918-19, and particularly from the end of the War, all types of employees began to demand higher wages and improved working conditions, mainly through petitions. Petitioning continued throughout the period, but towards the end of 1919 there was an appreciable increase in the number of strikes, and employees began holding meetings and conferences,

some of which developed into unions in 1920. During the first half of 1920 subordinate supervisory and clerical workers in particular began to form unions. Factory employees were also active at that time, but only dominated the post-War period from the end of 1920, and until the middle of 1921, first with a totally unprecedented number of strikes, and then by forming a number of unions. Strike levels began to fall from the middle of 1921, declining more rapidly among factory than non-factory employees. The rate of union formation also fell from its early 1921 peak. By the beginning of 1922 many unions had ceased to function, and a period of relative quiescence that lasted until the late 1920s set in. However, a qualitative change had occurred insofar as a number of unions were successfully established and functioning, and the Bengal Trade Unions Federation had been formed.

The increasing tendency for employees to resort to trade unionism, and particularly the development of unions, imply that employees' ideas and attitudes underwent a parallel degree of change. Although the importance of consciousness was emphasised in the opening chapter, treatment of this issue, particularly for the nineteenth century, still requires further research, and present conclusions are only tentative. It is apparent that employees were motivated to engage in trade unionism by the notion that wage or salary income had to be related to needs during most of the period covered in this thesis. Need was not defined in an absolute sense, but as something determined by historically and socially defined notions of appropriate living standards, and the nature of the work performed. Evidence from the 1920s indicates that such ideas were still powerful enough to motivate comparatively militant behaviour, and formed elements of a corporative view of society, in which employees and employers were seen as being bound together by mutual interests and duties. One of the employers' duties was to ensure the well-being of the workforce in return for service from the latter, and thus failure to raise wages in line with living costs, for example, was a fault against which employees were fully justified in protesting collectively. Evidence from the post-First World War period also suggests that this perspective was beginning to break down under the strain of the continued need for workers to agitate for their rights, and was being replaced or supplemented by the view that employees' and employers' interests were opposed in a more fundamental sense.

There is virtually no information about employees' consciousness of each other, and of relations between workers in the same or different occupations. It could be, for example, that factory workers' inability to establish stable unions was related to an insufficiently developed consciousness of common interests. In the 1920s it is evident that clerical workers were hesitant to associate themselves with 'manual' employees, but nevertheless did join with non-factory workers' unions to form the BTUF.

The apparent lack of development for much of the nineteenth century, and the subsequent period of cumulatively increasing activity, were underlain by processes of change in employees' relationship to the labour market. Trade unionism develops because employees generally have little or no significant access to alternative means of obtaining a living. However, it is clear that in Bengal large sections of factory and non-factory employees, and many clerical and subordinate supervisory workers, did retain important ties to non-labour market occupations and sources of income for much of the nineteenth century. Factory and non-factory workers also retained the facility of moving around within the labour market until well into the twentieth century. By at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, all these employees' access to non-labour market incomes was beginning to decline, or to be threatened. Many subordinate supervisory and clerical employees had been small landlords, but subinfeudation and marginal improvements in tenants' security reduced the amount of rent individuals could obtain. Factory and non-factory employees, drawn from petty tenants and landless labourers, were faced with a contraction in the possibilities for obtaining income from the rural sector as agricultural stagnation set in, and the continued growth of population led to worsening output/labour and land/labour ratios. Any ability that clerical and subordinate supervisory employees may have had to move around within the labour market had disappeared by the 1860s, as evidence for the surplus of English-knowing job applicants indicates, while for factory and non-factory workers, such opportunities began to decline in the 1880s and 1890s. While minor groups of employees such as expatriates, Anglo-Indians, and sections of other labour market groups had probably been dependent on labour market incomes since the turn of the eighteenth century, this proportion of the workforce grew sharply from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

During most of the nineteenth century it appears that living costs

only increased gradually, sudden changes rarely being experienced, while incomes either kept pace with living costs, or deteriorated almost imperceptibly. Up to the 1880s, factory and non-factory workers appear to have been able to obtain wage increases to match price rises. Insofar as many of these employees may also have been cultivators or agricultural labourers, food price rises could also have meant that increased expenditure on one account was matched by increased income on another, thus further mitigating any pressure for trade unionism. Subordinate supervisory and clerical employees were in a less favourable position, for although the wage rates of Government employees was raised in 1868, they remained unchanged for the next forty years or more. While this implies that these workers' living standards must have fallen, they probably did not fall so far as to reduce them to the level of factory and non-factory employees, and probably affected all members of the subordinate supervisory and clerical groups equally, thus preserving relative differences in income.

Food prices and living costs began to rise sharply in the 1890s, stabilised in the first few years of the twentieth century, but then rose again in 1903-8. It appears that price changes of this rate and magnitude had not taken place in the nineteenth century, at least not in its latter half, but they were outstripped by the rate and degree of change that took place during and after the First World War. Food and other prices only began to stabilize, and the real value of wages to increase slightly again, from 1921 onwards. It therefore seems that the tendency for workers to become more dependent on labour market incomes coincided with or was closely followed by a relatively sharp increase in living costs, necessitating remedial action which increasingly could only take the form of trade unionism.

Employees' own understanding of their situation was, as has been indicated, an important factor affecting the decision to engage in trade unionism, and in determining the forms of collective activity adopted. While in part their consciousness was formed as a result of experiences within the labour market, its development was also related to the more generalised process of social awakening and emergence of 'modern' forms of agitation which took place in the nineteenth century. A prominent feature of this process was the development of mass nationalist agitation, the influence of which is indicated by the close parallel between the 1905-8 and 1919-22 phases of nationalist activity, and the

development of trade unionism.

Many other factors influenced the actual manifestation and forms of trade unionism, but they were essentially subordinate to these processes. Among the constraints on trade unionism were legal prohibitions and sanctions, and the informal disciplinary structure of sardars and heads of offices. However, where sufficient need existed, employees could and did openly act in defiance of these constraints. From the opposite perspective, it is clear that the nature of leadership available to workers was of some importance, particularly for employees whose labour market situation made them relatively vulnerable to dismissal. Thus the formation of trade unions by factory workers, for example, only appears to have taken place because people from outside the factory labour market offered their assistance. Nationalist politicians were prominent among the outsiders who helped to form unions, particularly in 1919-21, but their effectiveness, like that of any other outsiders, was clearly limited by employees' needs and consciousness.

Finally, it can be noted that this study has also revealed distinct and relatively consistent differences in the forms of collective activity used by different groups of workers. Petitioning was used by all types of employees, but supervisory grades only developed to the extent of forming unions, being among the first groups to do so. Subordinate supervisory and clerical workers occasionally went on strike, but began forming unions in 1905-8, and emerged from the post-War period as the most strongly unionized groups. Factory and non-factory employees characteristically engaged in desertion and 'hidden' forms of behaviour during much of the nineteenth century, but subsequently resorted to strikes more and more frequently. Factory workers were not very successful at forming unions, except on a short term basis, but non-factory employees were almost as successful as clerical grades. These differences are largely attributable to variations in the manner and extent to which the major processes of change affected different groups of employees, and additionally to the numerous secondary factors. While these differences in behaviour undoubtedly existed, and might be used to justify distinct treatment of supervisory, subordinate supervisory and clerical workers, for example, as a 'white collar' group,

what is more remarkable is that in spite of the diversity of the labour market as a whole, trade unionism occurred among all sections of employees, and developed from relatively 'unorganized' to more formally organized behaviour, within a similar chronological framework.

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Appendix I - Petitions

This Appendix contains a selection of petition texts or extracts to illustrate employees' attitudes towards their employers, and conceptions and justifications for their demands. The extracts have been arranged chronologically, and are quoted as given in the source.

- 1) Head-constables and writer-constables, June 1896  
(GB Police, September 1896, A 70-71).

To - The Honorable Sir Alexander MacKenzie, B.A., K.C.S.I.,  
Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (through proper channel).

The humble petition of the undersigned head-constables and  
writer-constables of the Police force of Dacca.

Most respectfully sheweth,

That under the present system of recruiting Sub-Inspectors in the Police Department, the number of head-constables is being gradually decreased, and that of the Sub-Inspectors increased. The posts of Sub-Inspector are filled up by annual competitive examination in which those that have passed the Entrance Examination are allowed to appear.

2. That the competitive examination system as the only mode of filling up vacancies in Sub-Inspectorships is highly prejudicial to the interest and prospects of promotion of head-constables and writer-constables who have been serving in the Department for a long time prior to the introduction of the competitive examination system.

3. That head-constables and writer-constables, who unfortunately do not know English, but who have long been serving in the Department to the entire satisfaction of their superiors, and who have thus gained experience for practical and efficient service, have lost all chances and claims for promotion.

4. That those of the head-constables and writer-constables who know English sufficient for practical purposes and for efficient discharge of police duty are in no better position, inasmuch as they cannot expect to pass successfully the competitive examination owing to their limited knowledge of such subjects as History, Geography and Mathematics, &c., a knowledge of which is not a sine qua non for

the efficient discharge of Sub-Inspector's duties.

5. That among head-constables and writer-constables who have entered the Department long before the introduction of the competitive examination, there are many who, though strong enough to pass the examination successfully, are not allowed to appear in it on account of overage, and are thus deprived of promotion, though their qualification and experience is such as to enable them to cope with any difficult work they may be called upon to perform.

6. That when the posts of writer-constables were first created, competent persons of respectable families and good character were attracted to accept service as writer-constables, prospects being held out to them for higher posts and emoluments, but that under the present system they have lost all chances of promotion.

7. That the various responsibilities attached to the heavy work of writer-constables are in no way inferior to those of ordinary clerks or muharrirs of other Departments with much higher salaries than what is allowed to writer-constables who perform all the writing work of stations, and, being in charge thereof during the absence of station officers, are held responsible for all sorts of station work; but still they have been patiently working on such a scanty pay in the hope of future promotion for which little room has been left by the present examination system and by the decrease in the number of posts of head-constables.

8. That in every Department of the public service officers are promoted according to their experience, seniority, and merits; but by a departure from the general rule in this Department great hardship has been caused to head-constables and writer-constables. Under the old system when a head-constable used to be promoted to a Sub-Inspectorship, all the subordinate officers were benefitted by gradual promotion for which little room has been left.

9. That when the examination system was first introduced, only those that had passed the First Arts Examination were allowed to appear in the Sub-Inspectorship examination, but owing to the paucity of the number of candidates appearing in the examination sufficient room was left for promotion of those already in the service; but now the qualification of the candidates has been lowered and the examination has been thrown open to such persons as have

passed the Entrance Examination, and hence the successful examinees are annually so large that there is scarcely any hope for promotion of head-constables and writer-constables.

10. That Your Honour's petitioners venture to hope that on a reference to District Officers throughout the Province, experienced head-constables and writer-constables would not be found wanting in qualifications for holding posts of Sub-Inspectors, if weighed against the Sub-Inspectors appointed under the examination rules; in what they lose by their want of sufficient knowledge in Mathematics, History &c., they gain by experience and practical efficiency.

11. That in bringing the above matter to Your Honour's kind notice, your petitioners humbly beg to submit that the system of recruiting Sub-Inspectors has injuriously affected head-constables and writer-constables of long standing and experience, and that they have been practically debarred from promotion though qualified, and hence they humbly solicit that the examination rules be re-considered and modified so as to leave sufficient room for promotions of qualified head-constables and writer-constables by adopting a system of appointment of Sub-Inspectors by simultaneous competitive examination and nomination from qualified head-constables and writer-constables, so that a certain percentage of Sub-Inspectorships may be annually filled up by nomination, and that writer-constables may be allowed higher salaries until they are promoted to the grades of head-constables or Sub-Inspectors.

And your petitioners as in duty bound shall every pray.

The 7th June 1896

Harendra Chandra Ghosh and others.

2) Government copy-writers, April 1904

(GB Financial (Finance), October 1904, A 11-12)

To His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal,

The humble memorial of the undersigned copyists in the offices of the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, the District Judge and the Collector-Magistrate of Chittagong.

Most respectfully sheweth,

That your memorialists are very much grateful to Your Honour's Government for the assurance of Your Honour's gracious intentions to



effect improvement in the position of the copyists as expressed by the Hon'ble Mr. Shirres at the Legislative Council on the 12th March last.

That Your Honour's memorialists beg humbly to submit that the copyists may be included in the permanent establishment of Government, as the fees realised in the copying departments are sufficiently large and steady and there is no likelihood of the abolition of the copying departments.

That your memorialists submit that in view of the large income of the copying departments, copyists may be given a fixed salary, which will confer upon them the same status as that of the other ministerial officers of the Government, and that in the event of this plan being accepted, the past services of the memorialists be counted as pensionable.

Your humble memorialists under the above circumstances pray that your Honour's Government would be graciously pleased to give a generous consideration to the prayers herein submitted, in passing orders for the betterment of the position of the copyists.

And for such act of kindness Your Honour's memorialists, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

Chittagong

The 27th April 1904

Jibon Krishna Nundy, and others.

3) Jute factory weavers, 1906

(GB General (Miscellaneous), January 1907, B 41-44, actual file)

To. The Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department.

The humble petition of the weavers working in the Hastings Jute Mill, at Rishra, near Serampore.

Most respectfully sheweth,

(1) That, under the existing arrangements, your humble petitioners have to work in the above mill from 4 A.M. to 8-15 PM.

(2) That your petitioners get only an hour's leisure during working hours for dinner, and 5 hours' rest at night, which time, as fixed by the mill-owner, is very insufficient for recreation, there being no other shifting but one in the weaving department.

(3) That your petitioners, by excessive and hard toil, suffer from constant illness, and thereby gradually decay in health; slowly

drag themselves towards their graves.

(4) That your petitioners further beg to state that long working hours is injurious to their health; this place being infected with an epidemic of cholera and malarious fever.

(5) That your petitioners humbly pray that the 8 hours' rule under the Factory Act may be enforced to save their health and life; for which act of generosity your petitioners, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.

Rishra  
The July 1906

We have the honour to be  
Sir,  
The Weavers of the Hastings Jute  
Mill, Rishra

4) Kharagpur railway workshop employees, November 1918

(Confidential, GoI Railways (Establishments), June 1919,  
Case No.1827E-18 No.1)

To

The Chief Mechanical Engineer.  
Bengal Nagpur Railway, Khargpur  
(Through the Superintendent of Workshops, Khargpur)

The humble petition of all the workmen of Khargpur workshop, including Engineering, Signals and Shed -  
Most respectfully sheweth:-

1. That everything in the bazar has become dearer by leaps and bounds and rice - the chief article of food could not be obtained by the poor people whose pay is inadequate. Nothing has been done by the Company either to increase the wages according to the circumstances or to see that articles are being sold at cheaper rates.

2. This necessitated your humble petitioners to strike only for a few hours on 22nd October 1918.

3. The Superintendent of Workshops promised to redress the grievances if your humble petitioners go to work. Accordingly the orders were obeyed implicitly and a petition signed by all the workmen and through foreman representing all the grievances was submitted to the Superintendent of Workshops on 24th October 1918, but no orders have yet been passed upon the same.

This indifferent behaviour of the superior officers forced the humble petitioners to strike again on 5th November 1918, with the full hope that their following grievances will be kindly considered and

immediate justice rendered at your generous hands:

(a) Men drawing less than one rupee daily wages, or Rs.25 fixed pay should get annas four special permanent increase, and those drawing above should get annas two.

(b) War bonus of 25 per cent. should be granted just as in Great Indian Peninsula Railway, to all men getting Rs.50 or below.

(c) Provident Fund should be deducted from all workmen getting above Rs.15 on daily wages, so that when they leave the Company services they might not go as beggars elsewhere.

(d) Passes should be granted as per rules of 1906, either for families or self without restriction of any leave.

(e) Grade increase should be granted to any one after the completion of one year's service from the office without the foreman writing for the same and without any restriction to the grade of the post.

(f) Male coolies should be given eight annas onset and female coolies six annas.

(g) Bound apprentices of "B" grade should be appointed from Rs.10 and not below with the usual yearly increment.

(h) Bengal Nagpur Railway should open a co-operative stores in Gole Bazar, Khargpur, where articles can be sold cheaper for the railway employees as is being done by Messers. Tata Iron and Steel Company, and Madras and Southern Mahratta and Nizam's Guaranteed State Railways.

(i) The present Bazaar Master who sees only to fill his pocket by illegal means should be removed and a suitable man caring for the benefit of the railway employees should be appointed instead.

The members of the Bazaar Sub-Committee should be appointed on the votes of the workmen.

(j) The wages of all the workmen for the days on strike should be paid to them as the strike took place owing to the superior officers not taking steps in time to redress the grievances of the workmen though represented a fortnight ago and the Company should guarantee not to dismiss anyone owing to the strike.

5. The above resolutions were passed by all the workmen unanimously in a meeting held by them at 3 P.M. in a maidan near Type 2. It was decided by one and all to keep on the strike for such time as is notified by the Company that their humble prayer is granted and their grievances set forth in this petition are redressed.

It was also resolved to send a copy of the same to the Agent, Bengal Nagpur Railway, Calcutta, and to the Secretary, Railway Board, Simla, for taking immediate steps in the matter and to redress the grievances of the poor people impartially.

For which act of kindness the poor petitioners ever pray.

Khargpur:

The 6th November 1918

The most humble petitioners

All strikers of Khargpur Workshops,  
Engineering, Signals and Shed.

5) East Indian Railway employees, May 1919  
(Pioneer, 7 May 1919)

To The Agent, East Indian Railway.

The petition of the European and Indian Employees in all Departments.

Sheweth -

1. That while your petitioners affirm their loyalty to the interests of the Company, and indeed because of that loyalty, they wish to bring to your notice causes of discontent which unless they be removed, will certainly militate against the good working of the railway and therefore against the said interests of the company.

2. That before stating the said causes of discontent the petitioners would like to call attention to the fact that they have certainly worked faithfully and well for the Company, especially during the period of the war when work increased and the staff was depleted.

As evidence of this fact they beg leave to refer to -

(a) The increased earnings and profits of the Company which show a steady and substantial rise year by year.

(b) The speech of Mr. Clarke at the Railway Conference last year, in which he praised the steadiness and loyalty of railwaymen.

3. Through no fault of petitioners the cost of living has increased by at least 100 per cent while salaries have remained the same or in some cases have been decreased during the past fifty or sixty years.

4. Owing to the present political situation in India the future generation of the class to which Railway employees belong will find it impossible to hold their own unless they are well educated and fitted for service. But the cost of education has increased along with the need for education. And yet the petitioners dare not neglect the duty of giving their children a better education than their own

has been.

5. Petitioners are willing to work, and to work hard - some of them work eighteen hours and more at a stretch in all weathers and seasons - but in order that their work may be effective, and that they may not be hampered by care and anxiety, they feel they must have a living wage and fairly adequate provision against sickness, old age and death which the present Provident Fund can hardly be regarded to establish.

6. They beg to assert that the present scale of pay does not afford them a living wage. Obviously what was enough fifty years ago is not enough now.

7. Almost every service has recognised this and has increased salaries.

8. In England employees have gone to great lengths in their determination to secure better pay, obtaining not only a general increase of salary but lesser hours of work. Petitioners earnestly trust that they will not be constrained to any similar action and are prepared to exhaust every constitutional means to arrive at a peaceful settlement. With this in view they beseech the fulfilment of the promise made years ago to appoint a Conciliation Board to deal with the manifold grievances which undoubtedly exist and may cause an upheaval in the near future.

9. It is a sound and accepted business principle that workmen must have a living wage. It is an equally well established principle that to allow workmen to share in profits increases efficiency and profits.

10. But petitioners seek only that that they should be paid such wages as will enable them to live fairly and out of debt.

11. After earnest consideration petitioners have come to the conclusion that this will only be possible if there be an increase of pay as follows:-

(a) A thirty per cent permanent grade increase for all employees receiving over rupees fifty per mensem.

(b) A fifty per cent permanent grade increase for all employees receiving fifty rupees and under.

12. Petitioners venture to think that their request is sound and reasonable and they expect and pray that you will be pleased to consider it with that fairness to which they are entitled by reason of their past services. If the matter must be referred to England then petitioners pray that you may frankly, freely and fairly commend the petition to the Board of Directors, intimating the same to the staff through the columns of the Weekly Gazette by the 2nd week in May next.

And Petitioners as in duty bound will every pray.

6) Police syces /grooms/, August 1920

(GB Political (Police), November 1920, B 167-74, actual file)

To. The Assistant Commissioner  
Lallbazar Street  
Calcutta  
Through The Inspector of Police  
No 1 Wellesley Street, Calcutta.

Honoured Sir,

We beg to bring to your kind notice that we are poor and helpless syces. There has been a great injustice upon us by reducing the pay one rupee from each syce.

Further we beg to state now there is a famine so we ought to have got increment.

In conclusion we beg to state to your honour that if we do not get any increment we shall die by starvation with our family. Also we beg to state to Your honour will please enquire that how much the pay syces of Government House they are getting or the Fort William syces and the syces of the New infantry and kindly pay us according the rules of Government we can't support us by the present pay because what shall we eat and our family and how do will make our clothes etc. so we hope your gracious honour should please inform us before the 1st September 1920 and oblige. You are our Master and so you are like our father and mother be kind upon us and give your long life with good prosperity.

Waiting for your kind order

We have etc.

All syces.

No 1 Wellesley Place  
Calcutta

[In the margin] :-

If we get the pay Rs15/- or 16/- we shall not work.

7) Calcutta tramwaymen, January 1921

(Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette, 13/4/1921, pp.694-5)

To the General Manager,  
The Calcutta Tramways Co., Ltd.

Sir,

In October last we the Drivers and Conductors of the Company

submitted a petition through Driver No.134 stating our grievances.

During the strike which followed our representative interviewed you on several occasions, and on your granting us certain concessions on the promise of a consideration of our other grievances, we re-joined work.

We regret to find that nothing has been done to redress our other grievances, which are mentioned below:-

- (1) Under the present system we have sometimes to work over 12 hours daily and at other times get no work although we have to put in attendance daily.
- (2) Our pay ranges nominally from Rs.24 to Rs.28 per month, but as the system of payment is by the working hours and not by the day, we can never get our full pay. At the present 12 hours work counts as a day, and as every day we cannot get work and even when we get work we cannot get twelve hours work, we never earn a full month's pay.
- (3) There being too many temporary men there is never sufficient work for all.
- (4) There is no fair distribution of work.
- (5) Constant harassment by Inspectors and Flying Checkers to compel Conductors to pay gratuity.
- (6) When incapacitated by accident (due to no fault of ours) in the course of our employment we get no pay or compassionate allowance.
- (7) We get no leave, casual or otherwise, during the year, and if we go away even on the most urgent necessity we are liable to be dismissed.
- (8) On account of shortage of cash due to accident we are liable to be suspended, although we make it good.
- (9) A Conductor's deposit is liable to be forfeited on the Company dismissing him without any enquiry in his presence, without the alleged offence being tried by Court.
- (10) Employees are frequently suspended and dismissed without proper enquiry on a complaint by any passenger, When even a case is proved to be false a suspended servant gets no compensation.
- (11) When an employee has to attend Court in connection with any case by or against the Company he gets no pay or allowances.
- (12) Since last year we have not been given any warm clothing, not even an overcoat, although we have to begin work early in the morning

at 4.30 A.M. and work till midnight.

(13) We are not properly defended in cases of accidents and we are often wrongly convicted when fault is not ours at all.

We beg most respectfully to request you to -

- (1) Fix 8 hours as a working day and pay overtime allowance for work done in excess.
- (2) Give us a fixed monthly salary on a graduated scale, with a minimum pay of Rs.30.
- (3) Not to introduce any more extra hands till all men have been provided with permanent jobs.
- (4) See that Head Starters distribute work fairly and not for gratification as at present.
- (5) Make proper enquiries in cases reported by Flying Checkers and Inspectors.
- (6) Grant us compassionate allowances in cases of accidents.
- (7) Make rules for the grant of privilege and casual leave.
- (8) Allow us to make good shortage of cash within a week without its entailing suspension.
- (9) Abolish forfeiture, except in cases where a man is found guilty of cheating by a competent Court of Justice.
- (10) Not to dismiss any employee without conducting an enquiry, in his presence and giving a right if he chooses to appear by a lawyer or other representative.
- (11) Count the attendance in Court under summons as a witness as attendance on duty.
- (12) Supply us with an overcoat for the winter months free of cost.
- (13) Employ competent lawyers for the Company for the purpose of defence.

We shall be obliged if you will let us know your decision on or before the 25th January 1921, failing which we shall have no other alternative but to regretfully suspend work - a course which we are extremely reluctant to adopt.

The 23rd January 1921.  
Drivers and Conductors.  
C-o Walters Mother, Nikareepara,  
Tollygunge.

We remain,  
Sir,  
Your most obedient servants,  
Conductors and Drivers of the  
Calcutta Tramways Co., Ltd.



Appendix II - List of trade unions (1918-1922) for which only one reference has been found (Table 5.7). For details see Appendix III.

Strikes:

Calcutta Coachmen's and Syces' Union  
Goalundo Labour Union  
Khulna Labour Association

Meeting:

All India Railways Locomotive Officers' Conference  
Bengal Civil Service Association  
Bengal Coal Company Workshop Workers' Association  
Bengal Process-Servers' Conference  
Bengal Public Health Association  
Bengal Settlement Kanungoes' Association  
Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association  
Calcutta Rajak Union  
Clerks' Association  
Dacca Labourers' Association  
Indian Amalgamated Society of Ships' Officers  
Indian Standard Wagon Labour Association  
Law Clerks' Association  
Mohurir's (Clerks') Union  
Provincial Conference of District Board Subordinate Engineering Staff  
Shorthand Writers' Association  
Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha  
Tailors' Union

Deputation:

Provincial Engineers' Association (Bengal)

Intelligence Branch list:

Anjumani Mazduran  
Barbers' Association  
Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1922]  
Carters' Association (Madarbari)  
Government Offices' Lower Staff Union  
Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association (Calcutta)  
Howrah Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
Kanchrapara Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
Kankinara Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
Karmachari Mandal  
Kharda Jute Mills Workmen's Union  
Lohars' Association  
Metiaburuz Jute Mills Workmen's Union  
Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association  
Ramkristopur Flour Mills Labourers' Union  
Rickshawallas' Association  
Rishra Jute Mills Workmen's Association  
Sibpur Flour Mills Labourers' Union

Other list:

Allahabad Bank Indian Staff Association  
Art Workers' Union  
Bangiya Sramajibi Sangha

Other sources:

Alipur Peons' Association  
Manjhis and Dandis Association  
Stevedores' Labour Union

Appendix III - Trade Unions in Bengal

This Appendix gives the information on which Tables 4.3, 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10 are based. It is therefore limited to giving the name, date of formation, last report, names of founding officers, membership (unless this is apparent from the organization's name), and employee-group classification of each union. Federations, and union organizations based in Bengal, but with separate provincial branches (which have been counted in the tables), have been excluded. Omission of other data such as the foundation date, or names of office bearers, means that this information has not been found. When only the year in which a union was established is known, the date of the earliest contemporary reference found ('First report') is given. The date of the last reference ('Last report') from which union demise is calculated has only been given if before January 1923. References have been compressed to save space, and are detailed in a separate bibliography at the end of the Appendix.

Accounts Offices' Association

See Civil Accounts Offices' Association.

Alipur Feons' Association

Meeting, November 1921. Class: non-factory (single reference).

(GoI Home Political 1921, Deposit 415 (1-5)).

All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association

Established 29-30/12/1920; last report, October 1921. Officers: R.N. Gilchrist, Beni Madhav Das, Khan Sahib Moulavi Imdadul Haq, Moulavi Syadul Haq, Amrita Lal Gupta, Jogesh Chandra Datta. Class: clerical. (Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, pp.50-51; E, 4/10/1921).

All Bengal High School Teachers' Association

Established 27-28/3/1921; amalgamated with the All Bengal Teachers' Association in March 1922. Members: private school teachers.

Officers: Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray, Haridas Ray, Jogesh Chandra Sen, Upendra Nath Sen, Ramesh Chandra Bhattacharya, Rebati Raman De, Nagendra

Nath Das. Class: clerical.

(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference; AEP, 1/4/1922).

All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association

Established 4/4/1920. Officers: Jiban Krista Banerji, Bipin Behari Ray Chaudhuri, Kamini Kumar Banerji. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.3; Proceedings of the All-Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, Second Sessions).

All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference

First report: second conference session, 24/9/1920. Apparently amalgamated with the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association in December 1920. Officers: Brajendra Nath Mukherji, Jyotirindranath Ray Chaudhuri. Class: clerical.

(AEP, S, 29/9/1920; Proceedings of the All-Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, Second Sessions, pp.xxii-xxxiii).

All Bengal Teachers' Association

Established 6/2/1921. Members: teachers in private schools.

Officers: Rai Jogendra Chandra Ghosh Bahadur, Rai Sahib Ishan Chandra Ghosh, Rai Rasamay Mitra Bahadur, Hemanta Kumar Chaudhuri, Biraj Manta Bhattacharya. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; Collegian, XV (11 & 12), June 1921, pp.300-301).

All India Association of European Government Servants

Established 1922. First report: application for official recognition in June 1922. Class: supervisory.

(IO File J&P 6306/20, in IOL&R: L/SG/7/453).

All India Postal Officers' Association

Established February or March 1920. Members: Post Office superintendents and deputy post-masters. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(AEP, 11/3/1920).

All India Provincial Medical Service Association

Established 24-6/1/1920. Members: Government service doctors.

Class: subordinate supervisory.

(E, 27/1/1920).

All India Railway Labour Union

See Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union.

All India Railways Locomotive Officers' Conference

First report: conference, 10/5/1920. Class: supervisory (single reference).

(E, 11/5/1920).

All India Sub-Assistant Surgeons' Association

Established 1905. First report: 12th Annual Conference, December 1917. Class: clerical.

(AEF, 8/1/1918).

Allahabad Bank Indian Staff Association

First report: April 1922. Class: clerical (single reference).

(Karmi, 1(9), May 1922, p.111).

Anjuman Jahajian

See Indian Seemans' Anjuman.

Anjumani Mazduran

Founded 1920. Class: factory (single reference).

(Ray, 1929: 87).

Art Workers' Union

First report: April 1922. Class: clerical (single reference).

(Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union

Established 5/5/1921; last report, September 1921. Members: Indian railwaymen. Officers: J.H. Sen Gupta, Jogesh Chandra Sen, Bidhu Ehusan

Bose. Class: railway.

(AEP, 14/5/1921, 11/9/1921; S, 25/6/1921; GB List of Labour Unions, p.11).

Baj Baj Labour Association

Established 2/1/1921; last report, August 1921. Class: factory.

(Servant, 5/1/1921; GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs).

Bali Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: April 1921; last report, September 1921. Class: factory.

(AEP, 23/4/1921; GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5).

Bangiya Sramajibi Sangha

First report: April 1922 (as Sramajibi Sangha). Members: book-binders.  
Class: non-factory (single reference).

(Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111; Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, vol.13, 1923, p.68).

Barakar Labour Association

Established November 1920; last report, February 1921. Members: Kulti ironworks employees. Class: factory.

(GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1223; AEP, 12/2/1921).

Bsranaganar Labour Association

Established 1909; began functioning, September 1919; last report, August 1921. Members: jute factory workers. Officers: Munshi Habibulla.  
Class: factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.16-17; GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5 KWs).

Barbers' Association

Established March 1920; last report, September 1921. Class: non-factory, (single reference).

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5).

Bengal Bank Clerks' Association

See Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association.

Bengal Civil Service Association

Established 26/12/1920. Members: deputy collectors and other Bengal Civil Service employees. Officers: Khan Bahadur Aminul Islam, Rai Bahadur Jamini Mohan Mitra, Rai Sahib Bijay Behari Mukherji, Moulavi Aminuzzaman Khan. Class: subordinate supervisory (single reference).  
(ABP, S, 29/12/1920).

Bengal Coal Company Workshop Workers' Association

First report: 14/11/1921 meeting. Class: factory (single reference).  
(ABP, S, 16/11/1921).

Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union

Established 14/11/1920 as the Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur, a branch of the prospective but stillborn All India Railway Labour Union. Members: mainly Indian Bengal Nagpur Railway employees. Officers: N.C. Sen, Kashi Nath Mutu, Ajodhya Prasad, A.N. Bose. Class: railway.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.15; ABP, 18, 19/11/1920).

Bengal Paper Mill Workers' Association

First report: January 1921; last report, April 1922. Members: Bengal Paper Mill (Raniganj) workers. Officers: K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, Swami Darsananda. Class: factory.

(GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, pp.1244-45; E, 21/6/1921; S, 16/11/1921; Karmi 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

Bengal Police Association

Established 27/1/1920. Members: Bengal Police subordinate officers. Officers: S.C. Majumdar, E. Jones, Satish Chandra Chaudhuri, Bhujendra Nath Sarkar. Class: mixed group.

(GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2 (actual file); GB Political (Political), December 1920, A 18).

Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association

Established June 1920. Members: mainly postal clerks. Officers: Nirmal Chandra Sen Gupta. Class: clerical.

(Labour, 1 (2), March 1921, p.6).

Bengal Process-Servers' Conference

First report: second conference session, 29/12/1921 (single reference).

Class: non-factory.

(E, 3/2/1922).

Bengal Public Health Association

Established 14/9/1921 (single reference). Members: public health service doctors. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(E, 15/9/1921).

Bengal Registration Service Association

First report: March 1921; last report: January 1922. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(ABP, 11/3/1921; E, 9/1/1922).

Bengal Settlement Kamungoes' Association

Established 5/9/1921 (single reference). Officers: R.N. Chatterji, Homanta Kumar Kairal. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(ABP, 10/9/1921).

Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association

Established 6/5/1921; last report, December 1921. Members: sub-deputy collectors. Officers: Rajendra Lal Acharya, Durga Das Majumdar, Privalal Trivedi, Suresh Chandra Gupta. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(ABP, 10/5/1921; E, 3/1/1922).

British India Police Association

Established March 1921. Members: provincial police force officers and subordinates. Class: mixed.

(British India Police Conference, Address, p.1; Proceedings of the British India Police Conference. Second Sessions, 1921).

Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association

Established 5/2/1922 (single reference). Officers: Wahed Ali, Munshi Haji Elahi Baksh, Girja Shankar Mukherji, Maulavi Abdul Hafiz Sharifabadi. Class: non-factory.

(E, 8/2/1922).



Calcutta Coachmen and Syces' Union

First report: November 1920 (single reference). Members: coachmen and grooms employed by firms and individuals. Class: non-factory. (AEP, 12,14,19/11/1920).

Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1920]

Also known as the Corporation Employees' Association. Established 11/2/1920; last report: September 1920. (See Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1922]). Class: clerical. (Saha, 1978: 220; E, 30/9/1920).

Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1922]

Probably synonymous with the Calcutta Corporation Outdoor Employees' Association. Established 7/4/1922. Class: clerical (single reference). (Bakhale, 1925: 27; Ray, 1979: 87).

Calcutta Corporation Outdoor Employees' Association

See Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1922].

Calcutta Labour Association

See Kasipur Labour Association.

Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association

Established 15/10/1920. Members: Port Trust supervisors, clerks and menials; c.1400 (1921). Officers: H.W.B. Moreno, A.T. Basu, L.E. Richmond, H.W. Wilson. Class: mixed.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.9; S, 16,31/10/1920).

Calcutta Postal Club

Established 1908; joined the Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association in 1920. Members: Post Office clerks; c.1000 (1921). Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.1; Labour, 1 (1), February 1921, pp.ii, 5; S, 26/5/1921).

Calcutta Postal Employees' Association

Also known as the Calcutta Postal Peons' Union.

Established 9/1/1921. Members: Post Office messengers and overseers.

Class: non-factory.

(GoI Home Political, April 1921, Deposit 41; Saha, 1978: 224).

Calcutta Postal Peons' Union

See Calcutta Postal Employees' Association.

Calcutta Rajak Union

First report: October 1921 (single reference). Members: washermen.

Class: non-factory.

(E, S, 15/10/1921).

Calcutta Reporters' Union

Established June 1920; federated to the Press Employees' Association in February 1921; last report: April 1921. Members: newspaper reporters.

Officers: Mr Exley, W.H. Elliot, Mr Brown, Binay Krista Banerji.

Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; ABP, 2/3/1921; Labour, 1 (3), 1921, p.29).

Calcutta Seamen's Club

Established 1895. Class: non-factory.

(AITUC, Ninth Session, pp.20-21).

Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association

Established 23/5/1920; last report: November 1921. Members: c.1400 (1921).

Officers: Ram Chandra, Basanta Singh, Nazimuddin, Bhakat Ram, Brindaban Sharma. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; S, 15/11/1921).

Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union

Established 4/10/1920. Members: tram drivers and conductors; c.2000 (1921). Officers: N.C. Sen, G.P. Chaubey, Ambica Prasad Bajpai,

P.P. Adhikari, Nirmal Chandra Chandra. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.8-9; ABP 26/10/1920).

Carters' Association (Madarbari)

Established 8/5/1921 (single reference). Officers: Maulavi Nazu Mia.

Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.12)

Carters' Union

Established 1917 (single reference). Class: non-factory.

(McPherson, 1974: 37).

Central Jute Mill Workmen's Association

Assumed to be identical with the Ghusuri Labour Union.

Established 6/3/1921; last report: August 1921. Officers: Mujibar Rahman Middey, Talukdar Singh, M. Muzaffar Hussein. Class: factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1266; GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5 Kws).

Central Labourers' Union

First report: February 1921; last report: April 1921. Members: Ichchapur ordnance factory workers. Officers: D.N. Hajumdar. Class: factory.

(E, 23/2/1921; ABP, 23/4/1921).

Central Oriya Labour Union

Established October 1921. Members: Oriya porters and labourers in Calcutta. Officers: Padam Raj Jain, Purma Chandra Bose. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; ABP, 27/10/1921).

Chittagong Burma Oil Labour Union

Established April 1921; last report: April 1921. Members: Burma Oil Company depot employees. Officers: J.M. Sen Gupta, Binod Behari Chakrabarty. Class: factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; ABP, 13,24/4/1921).

Chittagong Central Labour Union

See Chittagong Labour Association.

Chittagong Labour Association

Established 24/4/1921; last report: April 1922. Members: general labourers. Officers: M. Abdul Bari Chaudhuri, J.M. Sen Gupta. Class: mixed.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; ABP, 27/4/1921; Karni, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

Civil Accounts Offices Association

Also known as the Accounts Offices Association.

Established 1920; first report: September 1921. Members: Government accountants and accounts clerks. Officers: Kali Kinkar De, Rai Ashutosh Banerji Bahadur. Class: clerical.

(Ray, 1979: 86; E, 10/9/1921; ABP, 5/4/1922).

Clerks' Association

Established 10/4/1918 (single reference). Officers: I.A. Isaac. Class: clerical.

(E, 12/4/1918).

Commercial Intelligence Office Union

Established 7/7/1920. Members: clerks in the Government Commercial Intelligence Office; c.30 (1921). Officers: C.S.R. Rao, A.N. Basu. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8).

Compounders' Association

Established 7/3/1920; last report: March 1921. Members: compounders employed by private pharmacists. Officers: Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, Moulavi Mahabul Ali Khan, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Bipin Chandra Pal, Dr. S.K. Malik, Dr. S.K. Ray, Panchanan Pal, Iswar Chandra Mandal, Lalit Mohan Dirghangi, Prabhakar Bandopadhyaya, Satish Chandra Bhattacharya, Nagendra Nath Chaudhuri, Aswini Kumar Bhattacharya. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; ABP, 12/3/1920, 11/3/1921).

Corporation Employees' Association

See Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association [1920].

Cossipur Jute Mills Workmen's Union

See Kasipur Jute Mills Workmen's Union.

Cossipur Labour Association

See Kasipur Labour Association.

Currency Office Association

Established 17/2/1922. Members: Government Currency Office clerks.  
Class: clerical.

(Bakhale, 1925: 20).

Customs Preventive Service Association

Established 14/11/1920. Members: European and Anglo-Indian customs officers. Officers: H. Barton. Class: subordinate supervisory.

(S, 19/11/1920).

Customs' Union

Established 11/6/1920; last report: July 1920. Members: Indian and Anglo-Indian customs house employees; c.200. Officers: H. Barton, Han Mohan Goswami, Ashutosh Mukherji. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; E, 14/6/1920, 28/7/1920).

Dacca Labourers' Association

First report: June 1921 meeting (single reference). Officers: Kamini Mohan Banerji. Class: non-factory.

(ABP, 1/7/1921).

District Board Engineering Association (Bengal)

Established May 1921; last report: April 1922. Members: District Board engineering staff and subordinates. Officers: Rai Annada Prasad Sircar Bahadur. Class: clerical.

(E, 27/5/1921, 14,21/4/1922).

District Police Ministerial Officers' Association

Presumed identical to the All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference.

(GB Political (Political), December 1920, A 18).

Dress and Cloth Employees' Association

Presumed identical to the Poshak o Bastra Pabshayi Karmachari Samiti.

Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association

Established 12/10/1920. Members: 561 (1920), 535 (1921), 2303 (1922).

Officers: Surendra Nath Ghose, Jatindra Nath Gupta, Dharendra Mohan Chatterji, Sukhendra Saha. Class: railway.

(ABP, 19/10/1920, 7/8/1921; Proceedings of the FERIE Conference, 1923, p.2; Newsletter of the ITR, April, October 1924).

East India Railwaymen's Union

See Railwaymen's Union.

East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association

First report: December 1921; last report: April 1922. Members: East Indian Railway employees in the region of Asansol. Officers: Swami Darsananda, Syed Muhammed Hussein, R.N. Misra. Class: railway.

(ABP, 1,22/3/1922; E, 23/12/1921, 7/1/1922, 14/4/1922).

East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union

Established 3/5/1921; last report: April 1922. Members: throughout the East Indian Railway line. Officers: Syed Erfan Ali, Janaki Jiban Chakrabarty, J.N. Bose, S.N. Banerji. Class: railway.

(ABP, S, 4/5/1921; ABP, 28/5/1921, 10/2/1922; E, 18/4/1922).

Employees' Association

Initially called Indian Employees' Association.

Established 14/6/1919. Members: clerks in private business offices; 3347 (1920), 5768 (1921), 2465 (1922). Officers: K.C. Ray Chaudhuri, H.W.B. Moreno, Man Mohan Malik. Class: clerical.

(EA 1st Annual Report, p.1; 3rd Annual Report, p.3; ABP, 22/8/1919, 21/10/1919; S, 21/9/1919).

Foremen's Association

First report: December 1918; last report: January 1922. Members: European civilian ordnance engineers; c.130 (1918). Officers: F.W. Dunn, J.W. Gault, A.E. Chubb, C.J.E. Lomas. Class: supervisory.

(E, 24/12/1918, 30/1/1919; S, 15/1/1922).

Garden Reach Labour Union

First report: April 1921 (the "Labour Union" from Garden Reach);  
last report: August 1921. Membership: c.1000. Class: not known.  
(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5 Kws; ABP, 23/4/1921).

Ghusuri Labour Union

See Central Jute Mills Workmen's Association.

Goalundo Labour Union

First report: 2/6/1921 (single reference). Members: quay and other  
general labourers. Class: non-factory.  
(E, 3,8/6/1921).

Government Offices Lower Staff Union

First report: September 1921. Class: non-factory (single reference).  
(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5).

Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association (Calcutta)

Established December 1922. Officers: Samsul Haq. Class: non-factory  
(single reference).  
(Saha, 1978: 222).

Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association (Chittagong)

Established 19/5/1921; last report: June 1921. Officers: Maigum.  
Class: non-factory.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.12; ABP, 1/7/1921).

Howrah Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: September 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.  
(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5).

Howrah Labour Union

Probably established February 1921 (other dates: January 1920, 11/7/1920,  
28/11/1920). Members: East Indian Railway Lilua workshop employees, and  
labourers. Officers: A.K. Fazlul Haq, Khagendra Nath Ganguli, Muhammed  
Mahsin, Sadat Ali, M. Mujibar Rahman Middey, M. Abbas Ali. Class: mixed.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; Bakhale, 1925: 24; ABP, 13/7/1920,  
ABP, 30/11/1920).

Howrah Workers' Union

First report: 12/1/1921. Members: factory and other workers in Howrah.  
Class: mixed.

(AEP, 13/1/1921; ITF Address Book 1924, p.37).

Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association

Initially called the Bengal Bank Clerks' Association.

Established 17/7/1920. Members: c.600 (1921). Officers: Gopi Prasad Ghosh, Bhupendra Nath Bose, Surendra Nath Mukherji, Khagendra Nath Ghose.  
Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8).

Indian Amalgamated Society of Ships' Officers

Formed 1/3/1920 (single reference). Members: ships' officers and engineers. Class: supervisory.

(S, 28/2/1920, 2/3/1920).

Indian Civil Service Association

Established 1894. Members: ICS officers. Class: supervisory.

(Confidential GoI Establishments, March 1919, A 330).

Indian Employees' Association

See Employees' Association.

Indian Journalists' Association

Established June 1922. Officers: Mrinal Kanti Bose. Class: clerical.

(Saha, 1978: 225).

Indian Labour Union

Also known as the Indian Mill-Hands' Union.

Established 19/8/1906; last report: 1908. Members: jute factory workers. Officers: Aswini Kumar Banerji, Prabhat Kusum Ray Chaudhuri.  
Class: factory.

(Saha, 1978: 218; Sarkar, 1973: 233).

Indian Mill-Hands' Union

See Indian Labour Union.



Indian National Seamen's Union

Established 4/7/1920 by amalgamation of the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union and the Indian Seamen's Union [1919]; amalgamated with an ISBU faction in December 1920 to form the Indian Seamen's Union [1920].

Officers: R. Braunfield, Sachindranath Mukherji, Piyush Kanti Ghose, Dr. A. Suhrawardy, Khan Bahadur Abdus Salaam, S. Mahbub Ali, M. Ashraf Ali, Mahababul Haq, Samud Khan. Class: non-factory.

(Saha, 1978: 220-21; ABP, 14/7/1920; E, 13/12/1920; S, 14,21/7/1920).

Indian Police Association

Established 1911. Members: expatriate police officers. Class: supervisory.

(GB Political (Political), December 1920, A 18; Indian Police Association Bulletin, III (6), July 1923, p.374).

Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur

See Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union.

Indian Seamen's Anjuman

Established 1908; dormant until transformed into the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union in 1918. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.2; Daud, n.d.: 1).

Indian Seamen's Association

Also known as the Anjumani Jahajian.

Established 5/11/1920; last report: February 1921 (this union was re-established later). Officers: Shaik Samir, Dr. A.H. Zahir Ala.

Class: non-factory.

(E, 6/10/1920, 14/2/1921. See also GoI Industries and Labour, May 1924, 1881(7) ).

Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union

Established 8/3/1918; 11/7/1920, officially amalgamated with the Indian Seamen's Union [1919] to form the Indian National Seamen's Union.

Officers: R. Braunfield, K. Ahmed, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Ashraf Ali, Madudar Rahman, Akram Khan, Latif Ahmed, Muhammed Daud, Moghul Jan, Sachindra Mohan Ghose, Dr. A.H. Zahir Ala, S.A. Khalik, Moulavi Wahed Hussein, Syed Minnat Ali. Class: non-factory.

(ABP, 28/4/1920, 14/7/1920; Daud, n.d.: 2).

Indian Seamen's Union [1919]

Established 29/3/1919; 11/7/1920, amalgamated with the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union to form the Indian National Seamen's Union. Officers: R. Braunfield, Shaik Mahbub Ali, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Maulavi Abdul Karim, Dr. A. Suhrawardy, Manfur Khan, Munshi Abdul Samad Chaudhuri.

Class: non-factory.

(E, 2,8/4/1919; AEP, 14/7/1920).

Indian Seamen's Union [1920]

Established 12/12/1920. Officers: R. Braunfield, A.K. Ahmed, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Ashraf Ali, Mandad Rahman, Akram Khan, Latif Ahmed, Muhammed Daud, Dr. A.H. Zahir Ala, Moghal Jan. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.1-2; Daud, n.d.: 8).

[Indian Standard Wagon Labour Association]

Established 24/11/1921 (single reference). Officers: S.C. Sanyal, Radha Kissen Lal. Class: factory.

(S, 27/11/1921).

Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Association

Established 16/12/1920. Officers: Moulavi Nural Haq Chaudhuri, Abdul Majid. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.9-10; AEP, 15/12/1920).

Indian Telegraph Association

Established 1906/7. Members: predominantly Anglo-Indian telegraphists in the Telegraph Department; 1620 (1918-19), 1857 (1919-20).

Class: subordinate supervisory.

(Confidential GoI Commerce and Industry (Post and Telegraphs), September 1918, No.6; S, 10/8/1920).

Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union

Presumed identical with the Jagdal Labourers' Union.

Established 8/4/1921; last report: September 1921. Officers: Kabir Ahmed, Thakur Prasad, Bakar Sardar, Mohendar Singh. Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5; AEP, 13/4/1921).

Jagdal Labourers' Union

See Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union.

Jamadar's Association

Established 28/4/1920. Members: durwans (door-keepers) working in Calcutta. Officers: Sri Ram Beri, Bholonath Barman, Purushattam Ray. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.6-7).

Journalists' and Press Employees' Association

Established 21/1/1920; last report: April 1920. Members: private printing press employees. Officers: C.R. Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, Jitendralal Banerji, Panchkari Banerji, Basanta Kumar Vidyanidhi, Krista Chandra Smrititirtha, Panchashikha Bhattacharya. Class: clerical.

(ABP, 17/3/1920; Saha, 1978: 219-20).

Kanchrapara Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: September 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5).

Kanchrapara Labour Union

First report: 10/3/1921; last report: April 1921. Members: Kanchrapara railway workshop employees. Officers: Sudhangsu Kanti Bose. Class: factory.

(GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1261; ABP, 23/4/1921).

Kankinara Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: August 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs).

Kankinara Labour Union

First report: April 1921. Members: jute factory workers.

Officers: Latafat Hussein. Class: factory.

(ABP, 23/4/1921; McPherson, 1974: 69).

Karmachari Mandal (Barabazar)

Established 1920 (single reference). Members: clerks in Indian firms.

Class: clerical.

(Ray, 1979: 85-6).

Kasipur Jute Mills Workmen's Union

First report: April 1921; last report: August 1921. Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs; ABP, 23/4/1921).

Kasipur Labour Association

Presumed identical with the Calcutta Labour Association, of 30 Lockgate Road (Kasipur).

Established November 1920; last report: April 1922. Members: a contract employer's labourers. Class: non-factory.

(Ray, 1979: 87; Saha, 1978: 221; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

Khansamas Union

Established 3/4/1921. Members: cooks and waiters in Calcutta; c.500 (1921). Officers: Muhammed Daud, Amir Ali, Kalu, Serajuddin Ahmed, Rahemtulla. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; S, 7/9/1921).

Khanda Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: August 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs).

Khulna Labour Association

Established 7/6/1921 (single reference). Members: steamer contract labourers. Officers: Binay Bhushan Bose. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; E, 10/6/1921).

Labour Association of Bengal

See Stevedores' Labour Union.

Lascars' Association

Presumed identical with the Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Union.

(GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 302 - actual file).

Law Clerks' Association

Established 4/12/1920 (single reference). Class: clerical.

(ABP, 15/12/1920).

Licensed Measurers' Association

Established 5/12/1920; last report: July 1921. Members: employees in the Bengal Chamber of Commerce's licensed measurers' department.

Class: subordinate supervisory.

(E, 6/12/1920; S, 12/7/1921).

Lohars' Association

Established 3/4/1921 (single reference). Members: blacksmiths from Gaya province, working in Calcutta. Officers: Chulhan Mistri.

Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

Mahomedan Association

(Sometimes known as the Kankinara Mahomedan Association).

Established 1895.

(Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, I, 1908, p.263).

Manjhis and Dandis Association

First report: November 1921 (single reference). Members: boatmen.

Class: non-factory.

(Confidential, GB Political, File 333, 1921).

Masons' Association

See United Labour Association.

Metiaburuz Jute Mills Workmen's Union

First report: August 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs).

Mohurirs' (Clerks') Union

Established May 1921 (single reference). Members: Midnapur criminal lawyers' clerks. Officers: Adhar Chandra Ray, Ram Mohan Singh.

Class: clerical.

(S, 11/5/1921).

Oil Mill Employees' Union

First report: April 1921; last report: September 1921. Members: castor oil mill workers. Officers: S.N. Haldar. Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5 KWs; S, 29/4/1921).

Oriya Labour Union

See Central Oriya Labour Union.

Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association

Established 18/9/1921 (single reference). Members: Calcutta Corporation employees. Officers: Haladhar Mahapatra, Dadhi Charan Saw, Mayadhar Das, Madhu Sudan Patnaik, Gajadhar Das. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.10-11).

Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti

First report: April 1921; last report: April 1922. Class: clerical.

(ABP, 13/4/1921; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

Postal League (Dacca)

Established 1908.

(Sarkar, 1973: 241; Singh, 1975: 20)

Postal Peons' Union

See Calcutta Postal Employees' Association.

Press Employees' Association

Established December 1919 or January 1920. Members: printers and compositors in Government and private printing presses in Calcutta; c.3000 (1921). Officers: Nirmal Chandra Chandra, I.B. Sen, Ambica Prasad Bajpai, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, Atul Chandra Bhattacharya, Anath Nath Patra, Jitendranath Gupta, Kumudini Kanta De, Rakhal Chandra Kar, Surendra Nath Basu, Hem Chandra Bhattacharya, Aswini Kumar Das, Abdul Aziz, Alimuddi Jamadar, Golam Mustafa, Satya Charan Datta, Trilochan Sarkar, Tamizuddin Mia, Aswini Kumar Chaudhuri, Jyotish Chandra Ghosh, Kshetra Mohan Ghosh, Jyotirmoy Sarkar, S.N. Haldar. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; Saha, 1978: 223).

Press Reporters' Association

See Calcutta Reporters' Union.

Press Workers' Union

Also known as the Printers' Union, and the Printers' and Compositors' League.

Established 21/10/1905; turned into a provident fund society in 1914.

Officers: A.K. Ghosh, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Premtosh Bose, Narsingha Chandra, Charu Chandra Mitra. Class: clerical.

(Bose, 1956: 178-9; Saha, 1978: 218).

Printers' and Compositors' League

See Press Workers' Union.

Printers' Union

See Press Workers' Union.

Provincial Conference of District Board Subordinate Engineering Staff

First report: first conference session, 3-4/4/1920 (single reference).

Officers: Jitendranath Chakrabarty. Class: clerical.

(ABP, 6,28/4/1920).

Provincial Engineers' Association (Bengal)

First report: April 1921 (single reference). Class: subordinate supervisory.

(E, 6/5/1921).

Railwaymen's Union

Also known as the East India Railwaymen's Union.

Established 27/7/1906; last report: 1906. Members: Indian employees working on the East Indian railway. Officers: A.K. Ghosh, Premtosh Bose. Class: railway.

(Saha, 1978: 218; Sarkar, 1973: 217-22).

Railway Workmen's Association

First report: September 1919. Members: in Bengal, European, Anglo-Indian and Indian railwaymen on the Bengal Nagpur, East Indian, and Eastern Bengal lines; c.16559 (1920). Officers: J.H. Abbott, T. Smith, P.T. Kelly. Class: railway.

(E, 13/11/1919, 6/3/1920; S, 25/9/1919, 12/12/1919, 8/12/1920).

Railway Workmen's Association (Indian Section)

First report: February 1922; last report: April 1922. Assumed to be a branch of the Railway Workmen's Association.

(Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111; 1 (11), July 1922, p.125).

Ramkrishnapur Flour Mills Labourers' Union

First report: August 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5 KWs).

Raniganj Labour Association

Presumed identical with the Raniganj Central Labour Federation

(E, 21/6/1921).

Raniganj Workmen's Union

First report: June 1921 (also last report). Officers: Swami Darsananda. Class: not known.

(E, 21/6/1921; EA 2nd Annual Report, p.14).

Rickshawalla's Association

First report: November 1921 (single reference). Members: rickshaw pullers in Calcutta. Class: non-factory.

(E, 10/11/1921; Ray, 1979: 88).

Rishra Jute Mills Workmen's Association

First report: August 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5 KWs).

Serangs' Association

Presumed identical with the Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Union.

(GB Political (Political), September 1921, B 300-352 - actual file).

Shorthand Writers' Association

Established 23/7/1921 (single reference). Officers: A.K. Nag.

Class: clerical.

(E, 23/7/1921).

Sibpur Flour Mills Workmen's Union

First report: September 1921 (single reference). Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A 54-5).



Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha

Established 20/4/1921 (single reference). Officers: Pramathanath De, Jnanada Charan Gupta Bhaya. Class: not known.

(ABP, 3/5/1921).

Society of European Railwaymen of India and Burma

First report: December 1921; last report: April 1922. Officers: T.H.W. Dowman. Class: railway.

(S, 1/12/1921; Century Review, VIII (9), 15/4/1922).

Sramajibi Sangha

Presumed identical with the Bangiya Sramajibi Sangha.

Stevedores' Labour Union

First report: June 1922 (single reference). Class: non-factory.

(GB Commerce, July 1922, A84-5 KW).

Tailors' Union

First report: January 1921 (single reference). Class: non-factory.

(ABP, 30/1/1921; GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5).

Taxi-Cab Union

First report: October 1915 (single reference). Class: non-factory.

(GB Police, October 1915, B 154-8 abstract).

Titagarh Paper Mills Workmen's Union

First report: September 1921; last report: February 1922.

Class: factory.

(GB Commerce, September 1921, A54-5; S, 4/2/1922).

Transport Workers' Union

Established 1921; last report: April 1922. Class: non-factory.

(Ray, 1979: 87; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1922, p.111).

United Labour Association

Initially known as the Masons' Association.

Established 24/1/1920. Members: building workers and foremen.

Officers: Jafar Ali, Majam Mistri, Anath Nath Bose. Class: non-factory.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; S, 29/1/1920).

Writers' Buildings Staff Association

Established 2/7/1920; last report: August 1921. Members: c.570 (1921). Officers: Surendranath Ghose, Kamini Kumar Ray. Class: clerical.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; E, 27/8/1921).

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Appendix IV - Biographical

This provides minimal information about all the individuals named in the text, particularly their associations with trade unionism, and in Appendix III. For the union leaders analyzed in Table 7.2 sufficient additional information has been given to justify the class into which they were placed; the absence of data on, for example, an individual leader's occupational status or political affiliation means that such information has not been found. Trade union leaders' class has only been given when their characteristics were used to construct Table 7.2. Individuals' preferred English name-forms have been used (e.g., there are entries under Basu, and Bose; Datta and Dutt), but spellings have generally been standardized (e.g., for Banerjee, Bannerjee etc. see Banerji). References to published and secondary sources have been compressed; for details see the Select Bibliography at the end of the Appendix.

ABBOTT, J.H., President, Railway Workmen's Association, March 1920; prominent member, Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Association. Class: Anglo-Indian politician.  
(E, 16/2/1920, 6/3/1920).

ACHARYA, Rajendra Lal, President, Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association, May 1921.  
(ABP, 10/5/1921).

ADHIKARI, P.P., Assistant Secretary, Calcutta Tramways Employees' Union, October 1920.  
(ABP, 26/10/1920).

AHMED, A.K., Also known as K. Ahmed. Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, March 1918; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920], December 1920; MLA, December 1920. Class: moderate politician.  
(ABP, 22/12/1920; S, 23/12/1920; Daud, n.d.: 2).

AHMED, K., See A.K. Ahmed.

AHMED, Kabir, President, Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union, April 1921; munshi (scholar). Class: miscellaneous outsider.  
(ABP, 13/4/1921).

- AHMED, Latif, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]. Piece-goods and sugar merchant. Class: businessman outsider. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.2; ABP, 28/4/1920).
- AHMED, Sirajuddin, Also known as Sirajuddin. Secretary, Khansamas Association, September 1921; a khansama (servant). Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; S, 7/9/1921).
- ALI, Amir, Vice-President, Khansamas Association, September 1921. (S, 7/9/1921).
- ALI, Jafar, President, United Labour Association, January 1920; contractor and head mason. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; S, 29/1/1920).
- ALI, Jafar/Jahar, a Wellington jute mill sardar whose dismissal was sought during a strike in March 1921. (ABP, 9/3/1921; S, 9/6/1921).
- ALI, M. Abbas, Joint Secretary, Howrah Labour Union, March 1921; time-keeper, British India Steam Navigation Company works. Class: employee. (GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1266; GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; E, 30/3/1921).
- ALI, M. Ashraf, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, March 1918; Vice-President, Indian National Seamen's Union, July 1920; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; MLC. Class: moderate politician. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.2; ABP, 14/7/1920; Daud, n.d.:2).
- ALI, Mahabab, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1919], March 1919; Vice-President, Indian National Seamen's Union, July 1920; spoke at Compounders' Association meeting, March 1920; spoke at non-cooperation meetings, September, November 1920, and February 1921. Class: non-cooperator politician. (ABP, 31/3/1920, 14/7/1920, 17/9/1920, 11/11/1920, 24/2/1921; E, 8/4/1919).
- ALI, Majahar, Active at Kharagpur; workmen in the railway workshop; leader, 19/3/1920 hartal; presided, 9/9/1920 non-cooperation meeting; moulati. (Confidential GB Political, File 106 (34-50), 1920; ABP, 15/9/1920).

- ALI, Sadat, Vice-President, Howrah Labour Union; "member" of the Bengal Central Labour Federation; chaired Lilua workshop strikers' meeting, March 1921; Secretary, Howrah Khilafat Committee, November 1920. Class: non-cooperator politician. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1266; ABP, 9/11/1920, 9/3/1921).
- ALI, Syed Erfan, President, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union, May 1921; President, Calcutta Tramways Employees' Union, September-November 1921; Vice-President, Bengal Central Labour Federation; MLC, December 1920. Class: moderate politician. (ABP, 23/12/1920, 28/5/1921; E, 26/9/1921; S, 26/11/1921).
- ALI, Syed Minnat, Also known as Syed Munnetali. Organizer, Indian Seamen's Anjuman; treasurer, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, 1918-20; treasurer, Indian Seamen's Union [1920], 1921-2. Class: miscellaneous outsider. (ABP, 21/7/1920; Daud, n.d.: 1-2, Appendix XIX, lxxxix, Appendix XX, xc).
- ALI, Wajid, President, Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association, February 1922. (E, 8/2/1922).
- ANDREWS, C.F., Vice-President, Bengal Central Labour Federation; mediator in several strikes in Bengal 1921-2. Class: miscellaneous outsider. (GoI Home Political, September 1921, Deposit 1; E, 29/3/1921, 9/5/1921, 1/6/1921, 6/6/1921, 23/2/1922, 21/3/1922).
- ARCHER, H.J., District Secretary, Asansol District organization of the Railway Workmen's Association, September 1919; Secretary, Asansol RWA branch, July 1920. (S, 25/9/1919; E, 5/7/1920).
- ARIFF, Y.C., founded the Carters' Union, 1917; brother of a leading Gujarati merchant of Calcutta. (McPherson, 1974: 37).
- AZIZ, Abdul, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; active at July 1920 meeting of the Bengal Workers' Union; worked in Swarna Press. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; ABP, 13/7/1920).

- BAJPAI, Ambica Prasad, Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, October 1920; Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; associated with the Howrah Workers' Union, January 1921; supporter/promoter, Jamadars' Association; involved with gasworks and tramway strikes, October 1920, and Jessop's and Burn's engineering strike, January 1921; arrested with other non-cooperators in December 1921; editor, Swatantra. Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; AFP, 5,26/10/1920, 12,13/1/1921; S, 9/7/1920, 12/10/1920; Indian Annual Register 1920 (first edition), p.60).
- BAKSH, Elahi, Treasurer, Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association, February 1922.  
(E, 8/2/1922).
- BAKSH, Hakim, Secretary, Central Jute Mills Workmen's Association, (1921).  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14).
- BANDOPAIHYAY, Prabhakar, Assistant Secretary, Compounders' Association, 1921; compounder. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).
- BANERJI, Ashutosh, Rai Bahadur; President, Civil Accounts Offices' Association, April 1922; retired superintendent, Accountant-General's office, Bengal. Class: employee.  
(E, 21/4/1922).
- BANERJI, Aswini Kumar, Generally known as A.C. Banerji. Attended Press Workers' Union meetings, 1905-6; established the Indian Mill-Hands' Union, August 1906; ceased labour activities c.1908.  
(Sarkar, 1973: 209-41).
- BANERJI, Binay Krista, Secretary, Calcutta Reporters' Union; reporter, Statesman. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7).
- BANERJI, Jiban Krista, President, All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association, April 1920; superintendent, 24 Parganas Collectorate. Class: employee.  
(GB Finance, November 1920, B 250-54 (actual file); Proceedings ABMD Conference, p.1).

- BANERJI, Jitendra Lal, Vice-President, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association; associated with the Press Employees' Association, January 1920; spoke at Bengal Workers' Union meeting, May 1920, and at Bengal Central Labour Federation meeting, May 1921; accepted non-cooperation programme in September 1920; arrested with other non-cooperators, November 1921. Class: non-cooperator.  
(Confidential GB Political, File 395/24; ABP, 16,26/1/1920, 20/5/1920; E, 22/9/1921; S, 31/5/1921; Indian Annual Register, 1922, 1st edition, p.56; Saha, 1978: 219-20).
- BANERJI, Kamini Kumar, Secretary, All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association, 1920; head clerk, Alipur. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.3).
- BANERJI, Kamini Mohan, President, Dacca Labourers' Association, June 1921.  
(ABP, 1/7/1921).
- BANERJI, Panchkari, Vice-President, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association; spoke at 24/4/1921 Indian Seamen's Union meeting; appointed by C.R. Das to carry out non-cooperation propaganda in Bengal, May 1921; editor, Nayak. Class: non-cooperator.  
(E, 26/4/1921; S, 6/5/1921; Saha, 1978: 219-20).
- BANERJI, S.N., Travelling Secretary, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union, February 1922.  
(ABP, 11/2/1922).
- BARMAN, Bholu Nath, Vice-President, Jamadars' Association; Secretary, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921; arrested with other non-cooperators, December 1921. Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6; E, 26/9/1921, 7/11/1921, 16/12/1921).
- BARMAN, Madan Mohan, associated with gasworks' strike, October 1920; member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee from Barabazar (Calcutta), 1921.  
(ABP, 12/10/1920; 15/7/1921).
- BARTON, Henry, General Secretary, Indian Telegraph Association from February 1908; President, Customs' Union (1920), Customs Preventive Service Association (November 1920), and Railway Workmen's Association (January 1921); presided at the foundation meeting of the Licensed Measurers' Association, December 1920;

attended Bengal Provincial Postal and Railway Mail Service Association conference, September 1920; spoke at Calcutta Postal Club meeting, April 1921; dismissed as telegraph signaller 1908; elected MLC (Anglo-Indian constituency) December 1920. Class: Anglo-Indian politician.

(Confidential GoI Commerce & Industry (Post and Telegraphs), September 1918, No.6; GB List of Labour Unions, p.1; ABP, 23/12/1920; E, 6/12/1920; S, 19/11/1920, 17/12/1920; Labour, 1 (2), March 1921, pp.4,12).

BASU, A.N., Secretary, Commercial Intelligence Office Union, July 1920. (ABP, 21/7/1920).

BASU, Binay Bhushan, Secretary, Khulna Labour Association; pleader and non-cooperator of Khulna. Class: non-cooperator. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.14).

BERI, Sriram, President, Jamadars' Association 1920; pleader, Small Cause Court, Calcutta. Class: other outsider - lawyer. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.6; ABP, 9/7/1920).

BHATTACHARYA, Aswini Kumar, Assistant Secretary, Compounders' Association; compounder. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).

BHATTACHARYA, Atul Chandra, Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; compositor. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

BHATTACHARYA, Biraj Kanta, Assistant Secretary, All Bengal Teachers' Association, 1921. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

BHATTACHARYA, Hem Chandra, Secretary/Joint Secretary Press Employees' Association 1920; spoke at Tailors' Union meeting, January 1921, tram strikers' meeting, February 1921, Calcutta Postal Club meeting April 1921; compositor and proof-reader until he resigned in August 1920; nominated as one of the Labour Representatives to the Bengal Legislative Council, January 1921. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary, 3/1/1921, p.9; ABP, 20/1/1921, 24/2/1921; Labour, 1 (3), April 1921, p.28).

BHATTACHARYA, Panchashikha, Secretary, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association, 1920; Secretary, Bengal Workers' Union; associated



with C.R. Das. Class: miscellaneous outsider.

(AEP, 24/3/1920; Saha, 1978: 219-20).

BHATTACHARYA, Ramesh Chandra, Joint Secretary, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association, March 1921; headmaster, Gaibandha Islamia High School. Class: employee.

(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).

BHATTACHARYA, Satish Chandra, Assistant Secretary, Compounders' Association,

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).

BISWANANDA, Swami, attended 1st All India Trade Union Congress session, October 1920, as delegate from Bengal and Bihar miners; organized wage claim demands on the Bengal/Bihar coalfields, November-December 1920; associated with Kulti ironworks' strike, November 1920, and formation of Barakar Labour Association; Chittagong Burma Oil Company strike, April-May 1921; East Bengal railway and steamer strikes, May-September 1921; East Indian Railway Labour Union, and East Indian Railway Labour Association, 1922; reputed to be a follower of Gandhi, and ex-Ramakrishna Mission member.

(GoI Home Political, December 1920, Deposit 74, January 1921, Deposit 33; GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, pp.1221, 1223; All India Trade Union Congress, Report, 1920, pp.2, 66-7; AEP, E, S, May-September 1921 passim; E, 6/12/1921; S, 4/3/1922).

BOSE, A.N., Secretary, Commercial Intelligence Office Union, July 1920.

(AEP, 21/7/1920).

BOSE, A.T. (also: Ashutosh), Joint Secretary, Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association; attended inaugural meeting of this union; employee in the Port Commissioners' office.

Class: employee.

(S, 13/10/1920; E, 7/4/1921).

BOSE, Anath Nath, Secretary, United Labour Association; contractor and owner of a private printing press. Class: businessman.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5).

BOSE, Bhupendranath, Vice President, Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association; personal assistant, Imperial Bank of India (Bengal Branch). Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8).

- BOSE, Bidhu Bhushan, Joint Secretary, Assam-Bengal Railway Union.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11).
- BOSE, H.D., presided at a gasworks' strike meeting, October 1920;  
bar-at-law; associated with the Indian National Congress;  
signatory to moderates' letter condemning arrest of non-  
cooperators, December 1921.  
(ABP, 21/7/1920, 19/10/1920, 1/12/1920; E, 15,16/12/1921).
- BOSE, J.N., Organizing Secretary, East Indian Railway Labour Union,  
February 1922.  
(ABP, 11/2/1922).
- BOSE, Mrinal Kanti, Vice-President, Compounders' Association;  
Vice-President, Press Employees' Association, August 1920;  
President, Press Employees' Association, 1922-23. Associated  
with the Indian National Congress from 1908; presided at North  
Calcutta Congress Committee meeting, May 1921; but apparently  
did not participate in the non-cooperation movement.  
Class: nationalist.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.4,6; ABP, 12/3/1920, 12/5/1921;  
Annual Report of the Press Employees' Association, 1932 & 1933,  
p.7; Bose, 1956: 178).
- BOSE, Premtosh, Secretary, Press Workers' Union, 1905; organizer,  
Railwaymen's Union, 1906; prominent Swadeshi movement activist.  
(Sarkar, 1973: 132, 198-232).
- BOSE, Purna Chandra, Secretary, Central Oriya Labour Union, October  
1921. Non-cooperator. Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; E, 29/12/1921).
- BOSE, Sudhansu Kanti, President, Kanchrapara Labour Union, April  
1921; strike leader, Kanchrapara railway workshops, March-  
April 1921; 1st class apprentice. Class: employee.  
(ABP, 11/3/1921, 21/4/1921).
- BOSE, Surendra Nath, Secretary, Press Employees' Association, 1921;  
compositor; took an active part in the July-September 1920  
Government printers' strike. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- BRAUNFIELD, R., President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, Indian  
Seamen's Union [1919], Indian National Seamen's Union, Indian

Seamen's Union [1920]; presided at Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association meeting, August 1920; bar-at-law; retired as a Commissioner of the Calcutta Corporation, November 1918. Class: miscellaneous outsider.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.1; AEP, 14/7/1920; E, 9/8/1920; S, 21/11/1918; Daud, n.d.: dedication, 2).

BROWN, Mr, Vice-President, Calcutta Reporters' Union; reporter, Englishman. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7).

CHAKRABARTY, Binod Bihari, Secretary, Chittagong Burma Oil Labour Union; head clerk, Burma Oil Company. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; E, 5/5/1921).

CHAKRABARTY, Byomkes, Standing Counsel, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association, July 1920; associated with the July-September 1920 Government printing press strike; Vice-President, Press Employees' Association (September 1920); attended an Employees' Association meeting, December 1920; involved with Indian National Congress, but apparently not an active non-cooperator.

(AEP, 21/7/1920, 4, 12/8/1920, 22/12/1920, 21/1/1921; E, 22/12/1921; S, 6/4/1920).

CHAKRABARTY, Janaki Jiban, General Secretary East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union.

(AEP, 11/2/1922).

CHAKRABARTY, Jitendranath, Secretary, Provincial Conference of District Board Subordinate Engineering Staff; overseer. Class: employee.

(E, 20/4/1920).

CHAKRABARTY, Shyam Sundar, attended Press Workers' Union and Railwaymen's Union meetings, 1905-6; associated with the Press Employees' Association and the July-September 1920 Government printing press strike; presided, Bengal Central Labour Federation meetings May and June 1921, Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting, July 1921, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting, October 1921; attended 2nd All India Trade Union Congress session, 1921; spoke at non-cooperation meetings from September 1920; assumed responsibility for the non-cooperation movement

in Bengal on C.R. Das' arrest in December 1921.

(Confidential GB Political, File 395/24; ABP, 10, 12/8/1920, 22/9/1920, 28/5/1921; E, 17/6/1921, 31/10/1921; S, 2/12/1921; Sarkar, 1973: 209-18).

CHANDRA, Nirmal Chandra, President, Press Employees' Association, December 1919; spoke at gasworks' strike meeting, October 1920; presided, Jamadars' Association meeting, November 1920; Treasurer, Calcutta Tramways Employees' Union, December 1920; associated with the May 1921 tram strike; spoke to Bengal Central Labour Federation meeting, May 1921; spoke to Kanchrapara railway strikers' meeting, May 1921; presided, Employees' Association meeting, June 1921; spoke at Indian Seamen's Union meeting, October 1921; organized assistance for Chandpur tea labourers, May 1921; in charge of Tilak Swaraj Funds (non-cooperation movement), May 1921; President, Madhya Kalikata Congress Committee 1921-2. Class: non-cooperator.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; ABP, 12, 14/10/1920, 16/11/1920, 10/12/1920, 19/4/1921, 1, 8, 26, 28/5/1921, 14, 28/6/1921; E, 20/5/1921, 7/6/1921, 29/10/1921; Saha, 1978: 223).

CHANDRA, Ram, Also known as Ram Chandra Punjabi. President, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association (by October 1920 at the latest) up to March 1921; also described as Vice-President CTE&PMDA, July 1920, and Secretary, CTE&PMDA.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; ABP, 31/10/1920; E, 7/7/1920, 9/8/1920, 7/3/1921).

CHATTERJI, B.M., attended a Government printers' meeting in September 1905; spoke at an Employees' Association meeting, October 1919; bar-at-law; member, Indian National Congress (1920).

(ABP, 21/10/1919, 21/7/1920, 1/12/1920; Sarkar, 1973: 208-9).

CHATTERJI, Dharendra Mohan, Travelling Secretary, Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association, July 1921.

(ABP, 7/8/1921).

CHATTERJI, Rajendra Nath, President, Bengal Settlement Kamungoes' Association, September 1921; senior kamungo (settlement officer). Class: employee.

(ABP, 10/9/1921).

CHATTERJI, Sirish Chandra, attended Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union foundation meeting, November 1920, and another meeting in January 1921; Secretary, Dacca Khilafat Committee.

(ABP, 18/11/1920; E, 11/1/1921).

- CHAUBEY, G.P., assisted gasworks' strikers, October 1920; associated with settlement of tram strike, October 1920; member Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union managing committee, October 1920; Secretary, CTEU, December 1920; attended Press Employees' Association meeting, February 1921, attended East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union meeting, May 1921; described as Assistant Secretary of "the Seva Samiti", October 1920. (ABP, 26/10/1920, 10/12/1920, 2/3/1921, 4/5/1921; S, 3/10/1920, 12/10/1920).
- CHAUDHURI, Abdul Bari, President, Chittagong Labour Association, April 1921; merchant from Rangoon. Class: businessman. (GB List of Labour Unions p.11; ABP, 27/4/1921).
- CHAUDHURI, Abdul Samud, See Samud Khan.
- CHAUDHURI, Aswini Kumar, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in a private printing press. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- CHAUDHURI, Hemanta Kanta, assisted formation of the All Bengal Teachers' Association; Secretary, ABTA; ex-Rector (1921) Dutt High School, Netrakona. Class: employee. (ABP, 3/2/1921, 14/5/1921; Collegian, XV, June 1921, p.301).
- CHAUDHURI, K.C., See K.C. Ray Chaudhuri.
- CHAUDHURI, Nagendra Nath, Assistant Secretary, Compounders' Association; compounder. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).
- CHAUDHURI, Nawab Syed Ali Nawab, patron, Indian Seamen's Anjuman, 1908; presided, Employees' Association cooperative store meeting, April 1921. (E, 18/4/1921; Daud, n.d.: 1).
- CHAUDHURI, Nural Haq, President, Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Association, December 1920; involved with organizing the East Bengal steamer strike, May to July 1921; zamindar, merchant, High Court vakil; member of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League. Class: nationalist. (GB List of Labour Unions, pp.9-10; ABP, 15/12/1920, 2/6/1921, 22/7/1921; E, 20/1/1921).

CHAUDHURI, Satish Chandra, Joint Secretary, Bengal Police Association, February 1920.

(GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2, actual file).

DARSANANDA, Swami, involved in colliery and paper factory strikes, Raniganj area, December 1920 and January 1921; and Burn's engineering works' strike, Raniganj, January-February 1921; organized strike and Bengal Paper Mill Workers' Union, February 1921; involved with settling Chandpur tea labourers; described as Secretary, Bengal Paper Mill Workers' Union, Raniganj Labour Association, Raniganj Workmen's Union; attended 2nd All India Trade Union Congress sessions; President and Organizer, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association, December 1921; associated with Raniganj Central Labour Association (January 1922); friend of Swami Biswananda; member of Ramakrishna Mission; coal-field labour organizer; self-proclaimed moderate and cooperator.  
Class: miscellaneous outsider.

(GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, pp.1237, 1243; ABP, 13/2/1921; E, 21/6/1921, 5,6,23/12/1921, 7,13/1/1922; S, 21/6/1921, 29/6/1921, 3/7/1921).

DAS, Aswini Kumar, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in the Art Press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

DAS, Beni Madhav, Vice-President, All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association, December 1920; presided over All Bengal Teachers' Association and All Bengal High School Teachers' Association amalgamation meeting, March 1922; headmaster. Class: employee.  
(Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, p.50; ABP, 1/4/1922).

DAS, Chitta Ranjan (C.R.), presided at meeting in support of East Indian Railway strike, July 1907; involved with settling November-December 1918 Kharagpur railway workshop strike; associated with Press Employees' Association, 1919-20; President, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association, 1920; associated with the Bengal Workers' Union, July 1920; treasurer, Government printing press strike fund, August 1920; associated with the Kankinara Labour Union (1921); President, Kharagpur Indian Railway Labour Union Advisory Committee, November 1920; spoke at Indian Seamen's Union meetings, and Bengal Central Labour Federation meeting, April 1921; associated with East Bengal steamer and railway strikes, May-September 1921; spoke at Raniganj area

workers' meetings, July 1921; authorized by the All India Congress Committee Working Committee to organize labour, January 1921; leading Indian National Congress and non-cooperation movement figure in Bengal.

Class: non-cooperator.

(ABP, 17/3/1920, 13/7/1920, 1/9/1920, 19/11/1920, 11/2/1921, 19/4/1921, 4/6/1921, 22/7/1921; E, 23/2/1921, 12, 26/4/1921; S, 8, 18/12/1918, 14, 15/6/1921; Annual Report of the PEA, 1932 & 1933, p.7; McPherson, 1974: 69; Sarkar, 1973: 217).

DAS, Gajadhar, Assistant Secretary, Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association; mistri (mechanic). Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

DAS, Mayadhar, Secretary, Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association; mistri (mechanic). Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

DAS, Nagendra Nath, Auditor, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association, March 1921; teacher. Class: employee.  
(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).

DAS, Sundari Mohan, President, Compounders' Association; doctor; President, National Medical Institute, Calcutta, April 1921.  
Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; ABP, 24/3/1920; S, 16/4/1921).

DAS GUPTA, Jatindra Nath, See Jatindra Nath Gupta.

DATTA, Jogesh Chandra, Accountant and Treasurer, All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association, December 1920.  
(Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, p.50).

DATTA, Satya Charan, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in the Government of India press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

DAUD, Muhammed, assisted formation of the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, 1918; General Secretary, ISBU; General Secretary Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; spoke at ISU [1920] inaugural meeting; attended Bengal Central Labour Federation conference, April 1921; President, Khansamas' Association, September 1921; spoke at Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting, September 1921; member, All India Trade Union Congress executive council, December 1921; presided over Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union factions unity meeting, January 1922; Vice-President, CTEU.

January 1922; attended Bengal Trade Unions Federation conference, April 1922; pleader and barrister; member of the Indian National Congress, and Muslim League, but not a non-cooperator. Class: nationalist.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.1; ABP, 26/11/1919, 17/6/1920, 19/4/1921, 3/5/1921, 6/9/1921; E, 13/12/1920; S, 7/9/1921, 10/1/1922; Century Review, 13/5/1922, p.4; Daud, n.d.: 2,61).

DE, Kali Kinkar, Secretary, Civil Accounts Office Association.  
(ABP, 5/4/1922).

DE, Kumudini Kanta, Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; compositor, East Indian Railway press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

DE, Pramathanath, Secretary, Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha; EL.  
Class: lawyer.  
(ABP, 3/5/1921).

DE, Rebati Raman, Treasurer, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association, March 1921; teacher. Class: employee.  
(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).

DIRGHANGI, Lalit Mohan, Assistant Secretary, Compounders' Association.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).

DOWMAN, T.H.W., Joint Secretary, later President, Sealdah Railway Workmen's Association branch; founder and Secretary, Society of European Railwaymen of India and Burma, December 1921; employed in Eastern Bengal Railway traffic department.  
Class: employee.  
(E, 24/1/1921, 3/12/1921; S, 12/10/1920; Century Review, 15/4/1922, p.7).

ELLIOT, W.H., Vice-President, Calcutta Reporters' Union; spoke at Press Employees' Association meeting, February 1921 in support of federating the CRU and PEA; spoke at April 1921 Calcutta Postal Club meeting; reporter, Statesman. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; ABP, 2/3/1921; Labour 1 (3), March 1921, p.28).

EXELEY, Mr, President, Calcutta Reporters' Union; chief reporter, Statesman. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7).



FORDHAM, Gelsom, probably attended the railwaymen's meeting at Allahabad, May 1919; General Secretary, Railway Workmen's Association by May 1920; resigned from that office, February 1922.

(ABP, 22/5/1920; E, 10/2/1922; Pioneer, 19/5/1919).

GANGULI, K.N. (Khagandranath), Vice-President, Howrah Labour Union; Treasurer, Howrah District Congress Committee. Class: non-cooperator.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; ABP, 11/5/1921).

GHOSH, A.K. (Anasthasius A.K.), President, Press Workers' Union, 1905-6; involved with the Railwaymen's Union, 1906; defended Kharagpur railway workshop strikers, December 1918-January 1919; presided, Employees' Association meeting, May 1920; patron of EA, 1919-20; presided, Government printing press strike meeting August 1920; associated with the Press Employees' Association; barrister; died, December 1921.

(ABP, 14/5/1920, 4,12,14/8/1920; S, 15/12/1918, 15,28/1/1919, 21/12/1921; Annual Report of the Press Employees' Association, 1932 & 1933, p.7; Employees' Association, 1st Annual Report, p.3 Sarkar, 1973: 209-21).

GHOSH, Gopi Prasad, President, Bengal Bank Clerks' Association; Vice-President, Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association; cashier, Bank of Bengal. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; Karmi, 2 (2), September 1922, p16).

GHOSH, Ishan Chandra, Rai Sahib; President, All Bengal Teachers' Association, February 1921; attended All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, March 1921; presided, Calcutta Teachers' Association (ABTA branch) inauguration, April 1921; presided, ABTA meeting, April 1922; ex-headmaster. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; ABP, 31/3/1921, 30/4/1921; Collegian, XV (9), May 1921, p.233, XV (11 & 12), June 1921, p.301).

GHOSH, Jogendra Chandra, Rai Bahadur; President, All Bengal Teachers' Association; presided, 2nd ABTA Conference, August 1922; MLC; attended Independent Liberal Party members' meeting, April 1921. Class: moderate politician.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; E, 9/4/1921; Collegian, XVIII (4), August 1922, p.136).

GHOSH, Jyotish Chandra, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in private printing press. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

- GHOSH, Khagendranath, (also as GHOSAL), Joint Secretary, Bengal Bank Clerks' Association; bank clerk. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; Bakhale, 1925: 15).
- GHOSH, Kshetra Mohan, Auditor, Press Employees' Association; attended Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting, June 1921; worker in private printing press. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; ABP, 8/6/1921).
- GHOSH, Lalit Mohan, spoke at Government printing press strikers' meeting, August 1920; among those appointed by C.R. Das to carry out non-cooperation propaganda in Bengal, May 1921. (E, 5/8/1920; S, 6/5/1921).
- GHOSH, Piyush Kanti, Vice-President, Indian National Seamen's Union; associated with the October 1920 tram strike; elected to Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union managing committee, October 1920; editor, Amrita Bazar Patrika; member, Indian National Congress. Class: nationalist. (ABP, 5/4/1920, 14,30/7/1920, 5,26/10/1920, 18/3/1921).
- GHOSH, Sachindra Mohan, Assistant General Secretary, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; Assistant General Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1920], 1921-2; pleader. Class: lawyer. (ABP, 28/4/1920, 21/7/1920; Daud, n.d.: Appendix XX, p.xc).
- GHOSH, Surendra Nath, President, Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association, October 1920-1922; clerk, railway engineers' office. Class: employee. (ABP, 19/10/1920; Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference, p.7; GoI Industries and Labour (Labour), L881(10), 1924).
- GHOSH, Surendra Nath, Rai Sahib; President, Writers' Buildings Staff Association; head assistant, Education Department. Class: employee. (E, 6/10/1920, 27/8/1921).
- GILCHRIST, R.N., President, All Bengal Government High School Teachers' Association, December 1920; principal, Krishnagar College. Class: employee. (Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, p.50).

- GODBOLE, D.P., Joint Secretary, Kharagpur branch, Railway Workmen's Association; spoke at Kharagpur non-cooperation meeting, September 1920; in November 1920 asked Calcutta nationalist leaders' assistance to set up an Indian union at Kharagpur; spoke at East Indian Railway Labour Union inaugural meeting May 1921; fitter, Kharagpur railway workshop. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.15; ABP, 15/9/1920, 18/11/1920; S, 4/5/1921; Saha, 1978: 221).
- GOSWAMI, Man Mohan, Secretary, Customs' Union; employed in the Custom House accounts department. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.8).
- GUPTA, Amrita Lal, Joint Secretary, All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association, December 1920. (Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, p.50).
- GUPTA, J.N. (also as Jatindra Nath Gupta, and J.N. (Jatindra Nath) Das Gupta); Secretary, Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association, 1920-23; Joint Secretary and Treasurer, Lalmonirhat Railway Workmen's Association branch, June 1920. (ABP, 19/10/1920; S, 27/6/1920; Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Indian Employees' Conference, pp.6-7).
- GUPTA, Jitendra Nath, Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; attended Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting June 1921; compositor. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; ABP, 8/6/1921).
- GUPTA, Suresh Chandra, Assistant Secretary, Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association, May 1921; sub-deputy collector. Class: employee. (ABP, 10/5/1921).
- GUPTA BHAYA, Jnanada Charan, Assistant Secretary, Sirajganj Sramajibi Sangha; B.L. Class: lawyer. (ABP, 3/5/1921).
- HAFIZ, Abdul, Also known as Abdul Hafiz Sharifabadi; attended Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union meetings; spoke to Lilua railway workshop strike meeting, March 1921; among those appointed by C.R. Das to carry out non-cooperation propaganda, May 1921; Joint Secretary, Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association,

February 1922. Class: non-cooperator.

(AEP, 26/5/1920, 20/6/1920; E, 1/4/1921, 8/2/1922; S, 6/5/1921).

HALDAR, S.N., Associated with the Press Employees' Association or Journalists' and Press Employees' Association and the Bengal Workers' Union, April 1920; attended Government printing press strike meetings, August 1920; spoke to Employees' Association meeting, August 1920; member, All India Trade Union Congress Standing Committee, November 1920; spoke to Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting, November 1920; attended Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union inaugural meeting, November 1920; spoke at HNRILU branch inauguration, Garden Reach, January 1921; attended Bengal Central Labour Federation conference, April 1921; President, Oil Mill Employees' Union, April 1921; spoke at Indian Seamen's Union meeting, April 1921; assisted Kanchrapara railway strikers, April-May 1921; presided Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting, June 1921; spoke at Dacca Labourers' Association meeting, June 1921; gave legal assistance to Assam-Bengal railway strikers, June 1921; elected Vice-President Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, January 1922; associated with February-April 1922 East Indian Railway strike; involved with pre-Bengal Trade Unions Federation meetings, 1922; brother-in-law of C.R. Das; barrister; Indian National Congress member (but not apparently a non-cooperator). Class: nationalist.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; AEP, 26/8/1920, 18/11/1920, 30/1/1921, 19,21,26/4/1921, 3,14/5/1921, 10,15/6/1921, 1/7/1921, 11/3/1922; E, 5/8/1920, 25/11/1920, 22/3/1922; S, 29/4/1921, 10/1/1922; All India Trade Union Congress, Report 1920, pp.66-7).

HANIF, Syed M., Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921.

(S, 27/9/1921).

HAQ, A.K. Fazlul, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1919], March 1919; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, 1920; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; President, Howrah Labour Union, 1921; Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, January 1922; among signatories to call for Moderate Party conference, March 1921; Joint Secretary, British Indian Association anti-non-cooperation propaganda committee, November 1921. Class: moderate politician.

(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.1-2,14; AEP, 28/4/1920, 23/3/1921; E, 8/4/1919; S, 2/12/1921, 10/1/1922).

- HAQ, Imdadul, Vice-President, All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association, December 1920; headmaster; Khan Sahib.  
Class: employee.  
(Collegian, XV (2), January 1921; Ahmed, 1970: 364).
- HAQ, Mahababul, General Secretary, Indian National Seamen's Union, July 1920; INSU delegate to the first All India Trade Union Congress session, October 1920; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; spoke at ISU [1920] meeting, April 1921; pleader; longstanding Muslim moderate in Bengal. Class: moderate politician.  
(ABP, 14/7/1920, 28/10/1920, 26/4/1921; E, 8/10/1920; S, 24/2/1920; Daud, n.d.: Appendix XX, p.xc).
- HAQ, Samsul, President and Secretary, Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association [Calcutta], December 1922. Class: local politician (Calcutta Corporation councillor).  
(Saha, 1978: 222).
- HAQ, Syadul, Joint Secretary, All Bengal Government School Teachers' Association, December 1920.  
(Collegian, XV (2), January 1921, p.50).
- HUSSEIN, Latafat, Secretary, Kankinara Labour Union (1921).  
Class: miscellaneous outsider.  
(McPherson, 1974:69).
- HUSSEIN, M. Muzaffar, Secretary, Central Jute Mill Workmen's Association (March 1921); worked in the New Central jute mill. Class: employee.  
(GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1266).
- HUSSEIN, Syed Abdul, Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921.  
(S, 27/9/1921).
- HUSSEIN, Syed Muhammed, Secretary, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association.  
(ABP, 1/3/1922).
- HUSSEIN, Wahid, assisted gasworks' strikers, October 1920; attended Indian Seamen's Union [1920] meeting, April 1921; presided at a public meeting over tram strike, October 1921; Secretary, National Board of Education, December 1920; arrested at Bengal Khilafat Committee office, December 1921. Class: non-cooperator.  
(Confidential GB Political, File 39 (129-37), 1921; ABP, 12/12/1920; 26/4/1921; E, 24/10/1921; S, 12,17/10/1920).

- ISLAM, Aminul, Khan Bahadur; President, Bengal Civil Service Association, December 1920; inspector-general (registration).  
Class: employee.  
(ABP, 29/12/1920).
- JABBAR, Abdul, Vice-Chairman, Kharagpur Khilafat Day meeting, March 1920; elected to Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union Advisory Committee, November 1920; clerk, Chief Mechanical Engineer's office, Kharagpur.  
(Confidential GB Political, File 106 (34-50), 1920; ABP, 19/11/1920).
- JAIN, Padamraj, associated with the July-September Government printing press strike, 1920; presided, taxi strike meeting, January 1921; spoke at Bengal Central Labour Federation meetings, May and June 1921; spoke to Oriya labourers' meeting concerning the foreign cloth boycott, September 1921; President, Central Oriya Labour Union, October 1921; spoke to Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting, October 1921; associated with the Jamadars' Association (1921); Secretary, Bengal Central Non-Cooperation Committee, November 1920; arrested with other non-cooperators, December 1921. Class: non-cooperator.  
(Confidential GB Political, File 39 (129-37), 1921; GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; ABP, 22/9/1920, 14/11/1920, 23/1/1921, 9/9/1921; E, 17/6/1921, 28,29/10/1921; S, 31/5/1921).
- JAMADAR, Alimuddi, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in a private printing press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- JAN, S. Moghal, founder, Indian Seamen's Anjuman (1908); assisted formation of the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union (1918); Joint Secretary, ISBU, 1918-20; Indian National Seamen's Union delegate to the All India Trade Union Congress session, October 1920; Foreign Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; seaman.  
Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.2; E, 8/10/1920; Daud, n.d.: 1, 2, Appendix XIX, p.lxxxix).
- JONES, E., Secretary, Bengal Police Association, January 1920; police inspector. Class: employee.  
(GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2, actual file).

- JONES, E. (Edgar), Associate Member of the Institution of Locomotive Engineers; associated with the Railway Workmen's Association, June 1920; President, RWA (July 1920); resigned from the RWA, July 1921; Vice-President, Employees' Association, 1921-2. (E, 11/6/1920, 20/7/1921; S, 6/7/1920; Employees' Association, 3rd Annual Report, p.3).
- KAIRAL, Hemanta Kumar, Secretary, Bengal Settlement Kazungoes' Association, September 1921. (ABP, 10/9/1921).
- KALU, Vice-President, Khansamas Association, September 1921. (S, 7/9/1921).
- KAR, Rakhal Chandra, Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; compositor, Bengal Secretariat Press. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions p.4).
- KARIM, Abdul, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1919]; ex-inspector of schools; Assistant Secretary, Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee, August 1920. Class: non-cooperator. (ABP, 20/8/1920; E, 8/4/1919).
- KELLY, P.T., Travelling Secretary, Railway Workmen's Association, December 1919; convicted of defaming RWA leaders, January 1921. (ABP, 12/1/1921; S, 12/12/1919).
- KHALIQUE, S.A., Assistant Secretary, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, 1918-20; Joint Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; member, Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Class: nationalist. (ABP, 17/6/1920, 25/1/1921; Daud, n.d.: Appendix XIX, p.lxxxix, Appendix XX, p.xc).
- KHAN, Akram, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; spoke to Press Employees' Association meeting, August 1920; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; supporter of Baranagar Labour Association; editor, Muhammadi; arrested together with other non-cooperators, December 1921. Class: non-cooperator. (GB List of Labour Unions, pp.2,16; ABP, 28/4/1920, 19/8/1920; Indian Annual Register, 1922 (1st edition), p.60).
- KHAN, Amiruzzaman, Assistant Secretary, Bengal Civil Service Association, December 1920. (ABP, 29/12/1920).

KHAN, Manfar, Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1919]; Joint Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1920].

(E, 8/4/1919; Daud, n.d.: Appendix XX, p.xc).

KHAN, Mahsin, See Muhammed Mahsin.

KHAN, Samud, also known as Abdul Samud, and Abdul Samud Chaudhuri. Organizer, Indian Seamen's Anjuman (1908); assisted formation of the Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union (1918); Treasurer, Indian Seamen's Union [1919]; District Secretary, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, November 1919; General Secretary ISEU, June 1920; Joint Secretary, Indian National Seamen's Union, July 1920; delegate to the 1st AITUC session, October 1920; Joint Secretary, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; member, AITUC executive council, December 1921; of Messers Samud Khan & Co.

Class: businessman.

(AEP, 26/11/1919, 21/6/1920, 23/7/1920; E, 8/4/1919, 8/10/1920; Daud, n.d.:1,2,26,61).

LAHIRI, B.K., spoke to Government printing press strike meetings, August 1920; attended East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union inauguration, May 1921; Secretary, Bengal Civil Rights Committee, 1918-20; member, non-cooperation Publication Committee, May 1921.

(AEP, 6/3/1918, 4,27/8/1920; S, 15/1/1920, 4,6/5/1921).

LAL, Radha Kissen, Secretary, [Indian Standard Wagon Labour Association] November 1921.

(S, 27/11/1921).

MAHAPATRA, Haladhar, President, Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association, 1921.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

MAHSIN, Muhammed, also known as Mahsin Khan.

Attended meeting to form the Howrah Labour Association, November 1920 (see Howrah Labour Union); Secretary, Bengal Central Labour Federation, January 1921-April 1922; attended Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association meeting, January 1921; assisted formation of Calcutta Postal Peons' Union, January 1921; Secretary, Howrah Labour Union (1921); promoter, Central Jute Mills Workmen's Association; associated with the February-April 1921 Lilua railway workshop strike; attended Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union inauguration,



April 1921; associated with the re-settlement of Chandpur tea plantation labourers, May 1921; Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921; Secretary, Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee, August 1920 (but not on the new committee formed in August 1921); Secretary, Bengal Industrial and Commercial Conference, November 1920.

Class: nationalist.

(GoI Home Political, January 1921, Deposit 75; Confidential GB Political, File 333 (11-16), 1921, KWs; GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; ABP, 20/8/1920, 21,30/11/1920, 3,13/4/1921; E, 17,18/1/1921, 21/4/1921, 26/5/1921, 26/9/1921).

MAIGUM, President, Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association, Chittagong; carriage driver. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.12).

MAJAM, Shaik; also as Majam Mistri, Shaik Majam Sardar. Vice-President, United Labour Association, January 1920; contractor and head mason. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions p.5; S, 29/1/1920).

MAJID, M. Abdul, Secretary, Serangs' Association; Secretary, Inland Steamer and Flat Employees' Union; serang (marine sardar).

Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; Indian Annual Register, 1922, (1st edition), p.205).

MAJLES, Mahabab Ali Khan, Vice-President, Compounders' Association; spoke at Bengal Workers' Union meeting, May 1920; spoke at Government printing press strikers' meeting, August 1920; dismissed head constable. Class: miscellaneous outsider.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6; ABP, 20/5/1920, 4/8/1920).

MAJUMDAR, D.N., Secretary, Central Labourers' Union, April 1921; Managing Director, Labourers' Union Bank Ltd., February 1922.

(ABP, 13/4/1921; E, 16/2/1922).

MAJUMDAR, Durga Das, Secretary, Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association, May 1921.

(ABP, 10/5/1921).

MAJUMDAR, S.C., President, Bengal Police Association, January 1920; deputy superintendent of police; Rai Bahadur. Class: employee.

(ABP, 31/1/1920; E, 4/10/1920).

- MALIK, Man Mohan, Secretary, Employees' Association, 1919-20;  
Vice-President, EA, 1921; mercantile office clerk.  
Class: employee.  
(E, 31/8/1921; EA, 1st Annual Report, p.7; EA Memorandum of Association, p.3).
- MALIK, Dr. S.K., Vice-President, Compounders' Association; Secretary, Bengal Regiment Committee, 1918; member, British Indian Association anti-noncooperation Propaganda Committee, December 1921.  
Class: moderate politician.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; ABP, 20/3/1920; E, 12/3/1918; S, 2/12/1921).
- MALIK, Surendranath, supporter/promoter, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; spoke at Press Employees' Association meeting, February 1921; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920], 1921-2; wakil, MLC, municipal commissioner; signed moderates' letter in protest at the arrest of non-cooperators, December 1921.  
Class: moderate politician.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.2; ABP, 9/2/1921; E, 15/12/1921; Daud, n.d.: Appendix XX, p.xc; Saha, 1978: 218).
- MANDAL, Iswar Chandra, Secretary, Compounders' Association; compounder. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6; ABP, 11/11/1920).
- MARATHE, N.S., deputed by Gandhi; spoke at non-cooperation meeting, Kharagpur, September 1920.  
(ABP, 17/9/1920; S, 17/9/1920).
- MIA, Nazu, President, Carters' Association (Madarbari), Chittagong; non-cooperator. Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.12).
- MIA, Tamizuddin, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; employed in a Government printing press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- MIDDEY, Mujibar Rahman, also known as Mujibar Rahman.  
associated with engineering strikes at Burns and Jessops, January 1921; Secretary, Howrah Labour Union; President, Central Jute Mill Workmen's Association; attended East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union foundation; associated with Light Railways strike, June 1921; pleader. Class: lawyer.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14; GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1266; ABP, 28/1/1921, 4/5/1921, 6/11/1921; E, 27/6/1921).

- MISRA, R.N., Travelling Secretary, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association, Asansol (February 1922).  
(ABP, 22/3/1922).
- MISRA, Sundar Lal, spoke at Jamadars' Association meeting, July 1920; Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921; honorary magistrate, Calcutta.  
(ABP, 9/7/1920; E, 26/9/1921; GB List of Labour Unions, p.9).
- MISTRI, Chulhan, Secretary and organizer, Lohar's Association.  
Class: probably employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).
- MISTRI, Majam, See Majam.
- MITRA, Jamini Mohan, Rai Bahadur; Vice-President, Bengal Civil Service Association, December 1920.  
(ABP, 29/12/1920).
- MITRA, Rashamay, Rai Bahadur; Vice-President, All Bengal Teachers' Association; late headmaster, Hindu School, Calcutta (1921).  
Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).
- MORENO, H.W.B., Vice-President, Employees' Association, September 1919; spoke at Railway Workmen's Association meeting, August 1920; President, Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association, October 1920; presided, Bengal Public Health Association conference, September 1921; Vice-President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, September 1921; President, Reception Committee for the April 1922 Bengal Trade Unions Federation conference; proprietor, Central Press; editor, The Century Review; President, Anglo-Indian People's Association; Secretary, British Indian People's Association. Class: miscellaneous outsider.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.3; E, 15/9/1921, 26/9/1921; S, 21/9/1919, 3/8/1920, 16/10/1920, 14/3/1922; The Century Review, 14/6/1919).
- MUKHERJI, Ashutosh, Treasurer, Customs Union; clerk, Custom House.  
Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8).
- MUKHERJI, Bijay Bihari, Secretary, Bengal Civil Service Association, December 1920; personal assistant, Land Records department; Rai Sahib. Class: employee.  
(ABP, 14/1/1919, 29/12/1920).

MUKHERJI, Brajendranath, President, All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference; head clerk, Mymensingh police office.

Class: employee.

(ABP, 29/9/1920, 7/10/1920).

MUKHERJI, Girja Shankar, Joint Secretary, Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association, February 1922.

(E, 8/2/1922).

MUKHERJI, Sachindranath, Patron, Employees' Association, 1920-21; Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union, Vice-President, Indian National Seamen's Union; officer, Calcutta Carriage and Cart Drivers' Association, February 1922; sub-editor, Bengalee. Class: nationalist.

(ABP, 14/7/1920; E, 8/2/1922; EA 2nd Annual Report, p.17; Saha, 1978: 220).

MUKHERJI, Surendranath, Secretary, Bengal Bank Clerks' Association; attended the Bengal Trade Unions Federation conference, April 1922, from the Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association; clerk, Bank of Bengal. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; Century Review, 13/5/1922, p.6).

MUNNETALI, Syed, see Syed Mimmat Ali.

MUSTAFA, Golam, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; worked in a Government printing press. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

MUTU, Kashi Nath, trustee, Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur; Vice-President, IRLU branch, Kharagpur, November 1920; trustee, Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union, April 1921; clerk, Chief Mechanical Engineer's office, Kharagpur. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions p.15; ABP, 7/4/1921; Saha, 1978:76).

NAG, A.K., organized Shorthand Writers' Association; Secretary, Shorthand Writers' Association, July 1921.

(ABP, 2/6/1921, 15/7/1921; E, 23/7/1921).

NAZIMUDDIN, Vice-President, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association; motor car driver. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7).

PAL, Bipin Chandra, Vice-President, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association; Vice-President, Compounders' Association; presided, Press Employees' Association meeting, August 1920; spoke at Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union inauguration, and elected to the Advisory Committee; attended the Special Indian National Congress Session, September 1920, but increasingly critical of non-cooperation tactics. Class: nationalist.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.5; ABP, 17/3/1920, 19/8/1920, 9/9/1920, 18,19/11/1920, 29/3/1921).

PAL, Panchanan, Secretary, Compounders' Association; pleader. Class: outsider lawyer.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).

PATNAIK, Madhu Sudan, Assistant Secretary, Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association; mistri (mechanic). Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).

PATRA, Anath Nath, Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; printer, Statesman. Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).

PRASAD, Ajodhya, possibly active during the November-December 1918 Kharagpur railway workshop strike; Vice-President, Railway Workmen's Association Kharagpur branch, July 1920; Vice-President, Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union, November 1920; employed in the railway workshop electrical department; associated with the non-cooperation movement. Class: employee.

N.B. references to this individual are often indistinguishable from those to Ajodhya Prasad Rautji - see below.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.15; ABP, 11/11/1918, 27/9/1921; Saha, 1978: 75-6, 221).

PRASAD, Thakur, Secretary, Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union, April 1921.

(ABP, 13/4/1921).

PUNJABI, Ram Chandra, see Ram Chandra.

RAHEMTULLA, Assistant Secretary, Khansamas' Association, September 1921; khansama (servant). Class: employee.

(GB List of Labour Unions, p.10; S, 7/9/1921).

- RAHMAN, Madadur, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; bar-at-law; Muslim League member; signed moderates' letter protesting at arrests, December 1921. Class: moderate politician. (ABP, 28/4/1920, 5/5/1920; E, 22/5/1920, 16/12/1921).
- RAHMAN, Mandad, Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union; barrister. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.2).
- RAHMAN, Mujibar, see Mujibar Rahman Middey.
- RAM, Bhakat, Treasurer, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association; taxi owner. Class: businessman. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.7).
- RAO, C.S.R., President, Commercial Intelligence Office Union; chief ministerial officer, Commercial Intelligence office. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.8; ABP, 21/7/1920).
- RAUTJI, Ajodhya Prasad, also known as Ajodhya Prasad Rantye. Forwarded petitions for Kharagpur railway workshop strikers, November 1918; spoke to Railway Workmen's Association meeting, Kharagpur, November 1920; presided, Bengal Nagpur Railway Indian Labour Union meeting, March 1921; Vice-President BNRILU; pleader, Judges Court, Midnapur (1918).  
N.B.: references to this individual are often indistinguishable from those to Ajodhya Prasad - see above.  
(Confidential GoI Railway (Establishments), June 1919, File 1827E-18/1-21; ABP, 6/11/1920, 31/3/1921, 4/11/1921).
- RAY, Adhar Chandra, President, Mohurirs' (Clerks') Union, May 1921; moktar (lawyer, advocate). Class: lawyer. (S, 11/5/1921).
- RAY, Haridas, Vice-President, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association; headmaster. Class: employee. (Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).
- RAY, J.N., associated with Burns' clerks' strike, September 1905; supported East Indian railwaymen's strike, 1906; associated with the July-September 1920 Government printers' strike; President, Bengal Central Labour Federation; criminal lawyer and advocate; died October 1921. (ABP, 29/7/1920; E, 18/1/1921, 22/10/1921; Sarkar, 1973:200,217).

- RAY, Kamini Kumar, Secretary, Writers' Buildings Staff Association; head assistant, Bengal Police office. Class: employee. (ABP, 8/7/1920, 25/8/1921).
- RAY, Sir Prafulla Chandra, President, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association, March 1921; signed moderates' letter protesting against the arrest of non-cooperators, December 1921. Class: moderate politician. (Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32; E, 16/12/1921).
- RAY, Purushattam, Secretary, Jamadars' Association; Barabazar member of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, 1921-2. Class: non-cooperator. (ABP, 16/11/1920, 28/6/1921).
- RAY, Dr. S.K., Vice-President, Compounders' Association. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.6).
- RAY CHAUDHURI, Bipin Bihari, Vice-President, All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Association; presided, 2nd ABMOA Conference; office superintendent. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.3; Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference, p.1).
- RAY CHAUDHURI, Jyotirindranath, General Secretary, All Bengal Police Clerks' Conference. (S, 29/9/1920).
- RAY CHAUDHURI, K.C., (Krishna Chandra); also known as K.C. Chaudhuri; President, Employees' Association, October 1919; presided, Bengal Central Labour Federation meeting, January 1921; spoke at Press Employees' Association meeting, February 1921; attended 2nd All India Trade Union Congress sessions, November-December 1921; President, Bengal Paper Mill Workers' Association; President, Raniganj Central Labour Association; presided, East Indian Railway Indian Labour Association meeting, December 1921; Vice-President, Calcutta <sup>T</sup>ramway Employees' Union; associated with February-April 1922 East Indian Railway strike; spoke at Bengal Trade Unions Federation conference, April 1922; nominated Bengal Legislative Council member (labouring classes), January 1921; member, Committee on Industrial Unrest. Class: moderate politician. (GB Report of the Committee on Industrial Unrest, p.1184; Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary, 3/1/1921, p.9; ABP, 21/10/1919;

ABP, 2/3/1921, 3/1/1922; E, 18/1/1921, 13/1/1922, 20/3/1922, 10/4/1922; S, 16/11/1921, 2/12/1921, 10/1/1922; Karmi, 1 (9), May 1921, p.111).

RAY CHAUDHURI, P.K., (Prabhat Kusum); labour organizer, 1905-8; drafted and explained Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association rules, August 1920; President, CTE&PMDA, January 1921; presided, Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting, June 1921; died, August 1921; barrister; made a loyalist speech to a CTE&PMDA meeting, January 1921.

(ABP, 30/6/1921; E, 6/8/1920, 26/1/1921, 6/6/1921, 29/8/1921; Sarkar, 1973: 197-8, 241-2).

RICHMOND, L.E., Secretary, Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association; employed in the Port Commission. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.9; S, 31/10/1920).

ROSS, C.D., Secretary, Allahabad railwaymen's meeting, May 1919; Secretary, Howrah branch of the Railway Workmen's Association, (ABP, 22/1/1921; Pioneer, 19/5/1919).

SAHA, Sukhendra, Treasurer, Eastern Bengal Railway Indian Employees' Association.  
(ABP, 19/10/1920; Proceedings of the E.B. Railway Employees' Conference, p.7).

SALAAM, Abdus, Khan Bahadur; Vice-President, Indian National Seamen's Union; retired Presidency Magistrate; issued invitation for the Moderate Party Conference, March 1921. Class: moderate politician.  
(ABP, 14/7/1920, 23/3/1921).

SAMIR, Shaik, President, Indian Seamen's Association; assistant to a shipping broker (who supplied crews). Class: businessman.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.9; E, 6/11/1920).

SAMUD, Abdul, see Abdul Samud Khan.

SANYAL, S.C., President, [Indian Standard Wagon Labour Association], November 1921.  
(S, 27/11/1921).

SARDAR, Bakar, Secretary, Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union, April 1921.  
(ABP, 13/4/1921).

SARDAR, Shaik Majam, see Majam.



- SARKAR, Annada Prasad, Rai Bahadur; President, District Board Engineers' Association, April 1922; retired chief engineer.  
Class: employee.  
(E, 14/4/1922).
- SARKAR, Bhujendra Nath. Treasurer, Bengal Police Association, February 1920.  
(GB Political (Police), May 1920, B 1-2, actual file).
- SARKAR, Hemanta Kumar, associated with the Employees' Association, 1920-21; Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; associated with the Assam-Bengal Railway strike, June 1921; one of C.R. Das' private secretaries (1921); assistant editor, Banglar Katha. Class: non-cooperator.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4; S, 6/5/1921, 21/7/1921, 2/10/1921; EA 2nd Annual Report, p.10).
- SARKAR, Jyotirmoy, Auditor, Press Employees' Association; worked in a private printing press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- SARKAR, Trilochan, Assistant Secretary, Press Employees' Association; worked in a Government printing press. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.4).
- SASMAL, B.N., Advisory Board member, Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur; probably involved with settling the Kharagpur railway workshop strike, December 1918; non-cooperator.  
(ABP, 19/11/1920, 3/5/1921; S, 8/12/1918, 16/11/1921).
- SEN, I.B., promoter/supporter, Compounders' Association; presided, Bengal Workers' Union meeting, May 1920; associated with the July-September 1920 Government printing press strike; attended Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association meeting, August 1920; elected to the Advisory Committee, Indian Railway Labour Union, Kharagpur, November 1920; spoke to Press Employees' Association meeting, June 1921; Vice-President, Press Employees' Association; bar-at-law; spoke and wrote on non-cooperation.  
Class: nationalist.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, pp.4,6; ABP, 20/5/1920, 19/11/1920; 11/6/1921; 9/7/1921, 28/9/1921; E, 5,9/8/1920; S, 22/4/1921).

- SEN, Jogesh Chandra, Vice President, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association; teacher. Class: employee.  
(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).
- SEN, Jogesh Chandra, (also: Jogendranath); Secretary, Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.11; S, 25/6/1921).
- SEN, N.C., associated with tram strike, and gasworks' strike, October 1920; President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union, October 1920; President, Indian Railway Labour Union, November 1920; negotiated settlement of Barisal steamer workshop strike, November 1920; spoke to Press Employees' Association meeting February 1921; spoke to Indian Seamen's Union [1920] meeting, April 1921; attended the Bengal Central Labour Federation conference, April 1921; spoke at Saidpur railway workshop strike meeting, April 1921; attended East Indian Railway Indian Labour Union inauguration, May 1921; gave legal aid to the Kanchrapara railway workshop strikers; spoke at Poshak o Bastra Babshayi Karmachari Samiti meeting, June 1921; attempted to reach a settlement in the Assam-Bengal railway strike July 1921; President, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union (unity meeting); Secretary, Bangiya Jana Sabha, 1919-20; Vice-President, South Calcutta Congress Committee, April 1921. Class: nationalist.  
(ABP, 5,26/10/1920, 19,24,26/11/1920, 2/3/1921, 19,24/4/1921, 3/5/1921, 10,30/6/1921, 21/7/1921; S, 5/10/1919, 15/1/1920, 12/10/1920, 4/5/1921, 10/1/1922; Daud, n.d.:15).
- SEN, Upendra Nath, Joint Secretary, All Bengal High School Teachers' Association; teacher. Class: employee.  
(Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, p.32).
- SEN GUPTA, J.M. (Jatindra Mohan) associated with the October 1920 tram strike; elected to Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union managing committee, October 1920; associated with Burma Oil Company strike, April-May 1921; President, Chittagong Burma Oil Labour Union; Secretary and Treasurer, Chittagong Labour Association; President Assam-Bengal Railway Employees' Union, May 1921; leader of the July-September Assam-Bengal railway strike; bar-at-law; Chittagong non-cooperation leader.  
Class: non-cooperator.  
(ABP, 5,26/10/1920, 13,23,27/4/1921, 14/5/1921, 14,21/9/1921; Indian Annual Register, 1922 (1st edition), pp.45-6).

- SEN GUPTA, Nirmal Chandra, Secretary, Calcutta Postal Club, 1918;  
Secretary, Bengal Postal and Railway Mail Service Association,  
July 1920; pleader. Class: lawyer.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.1; ABP, 27/7/1920; S, 28/4/1918).
- SETHIA, D.D., associated with gas and tram strikes, October 1920;  
Secretary and Treasurer, Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union,  
October 1920; left Calcutta, December 1920; Gujarati merchant.  
(ABP, 26/10/1920, 10/12/1920; S, 5, 12/10/1920).
- SHARIFABADI, Abdul Hafiz, see Abdul Hafiz.
- SHARMA, Brindaban, Secretary, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers'  
Association; spoke at Press Employees' Association meeting  
February 1921, and Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting,  
March 1921; private car driver. Class: employee.  
(ABP, 21/1/1921, 24/2/1921, 2, 8/3/1921).
- SINGH, Basanta, member of a taxi drivers' delegation, August 1920;  
Secretary, Calcutta Taxi and Private Motor Drivers' Association  
(April 1921); Vice-President, CTE&PMDA, April 1921; President,  
CTE&PMDA (September 1921); attended Calcutta Tramway Employees'  
Union meeting, September 1921; spoke at tram strike meeting,  
November 1921; ex-taxi driver. Class: employee.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.7; ABP, 21/1/1921, 24/2/1921,  
2, 8/3/1921, 30/4/1921, 2/10/1921; E, 9/8/1920, 30/4/1921,  
2/11/1921).
- SINGH, Mohendar, Treasurer, Jagatdal Jute Mills Workmen's Union,  
April 1921.  
(ABP, 13/4/1921).
- SINGH, Ram Mohan, Vice-President, Mohurirs' (Clerks') Union;  
advocate. Class: lawyer.  
(S, 11/5/1921).
- SINGH, Talukdar, Vice-President, Central Jute Mill Workmen's  
Association.  
(GB List of Labour Unions, p.14).
- SIRAJUDDIN, see Sirajuddin Ahmed.
- SMITH, T., General Secretary, Railway Workmen's Association,  
November 1919.  
(E, 13/11/1919).
- SMRITITIRTHA, Krishna Bhusan, Vice-President, Journalists' and  
Press Employees' Association 1920; pandit.  
(Saha, 1978: 219).

- SORABJI, N.K., legal advisor to the Railway Workmen's Association, 1919; presided, December 1919 RWA inauguration; barrister. (E, 16/5/1919, 9/10/1919, 18/12/1919).
- SOW, Dadhi Charan, Vice-President, Oriya Pipe-Laying Mistris' Association; mistri (mechanic). Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.10).
- STANMORE, E.C., dismissed/resigned from the Calcutta Tram Company, September 1921; spoke at Calcutta Tramway Employees' Union meeting, September 1921; elected Auditor, CTEU, September 1921. (AEP, 6/9/1921; S, 27/9/1921).
- TRIVEDI, Privalal, Assistant Secretary, Bengal Subordinate Civil Service Association, May 1921. (AEP, 10/5/1921).
- UKIL, A.C., spoke at gasworks' strike meeting, October 1920; spoke at a students' non-cooperation meeting, January 1921; Secretary, Cooperative Union of India, August 1922. (AEP, 19/10/1920, 11/1/1921, 13/1/1921; Karmi, 1 (12), August 1922, p.136).
- UPADHYAY, Brahmabandhab, active nationalist from 1902; founder Secretary of the Press Workers' Union, 1905; Railwaymen's Union established in his journal office, 1906; died, 1907. (Sarkar, 1973: 209, 217, 369).
- VIDYANIDHI, Basanta Kumar, Vice-President, Journalists' and Press Employees' Association; a Sanscrit pandit. Class: miscellaneous. (Saha, 1978: 219).
- WILSON, H.J., Treasurer, Calcutta Port Trust Employees' Association; worked for Calcutta Port Commissioners. Class: employee. (GB List of Labour Unions, p.9; S, 16/10/1920).
- ZAHIRALA, Dr. A.H., Vice-President, Indian Seamen's Union [1920]; General Joint Secretary, Indian Seamen's Benevolent Union; Secretary, Indian Seamen's Association, November 1920. Class: miscellaneous outsider. (GB List of Labour Unions pp.2,9; AEP 28/4/1920; E, 6/11/1920).

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- Bakhale, R.R., 1925 (ed.) The Directory of Trade Unions, (Bombay).
- Daud, M., n.d. The Indian Seamen's Union - history and developments 1908-1924, (Calcutta).
- McPherson, K., 1974 The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta 1918 to 1935, (Wiesbaden).
- Proceedings of the All Bengal Ministerial Officers' Conference. Second Sessions 1920. 27th and 28th December 1920, (Calcutta, n.d.).
- Report of the All Bengal High School Teachers' Conference, held on the 27th and 28th March 1921 at Gaibandha, (Calcutta, n.d.).
- Saha, P., 1978 History of the Working Class Movement in Bengal, (New Delhi).
- Sarkar, S., 1973 The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908, (New Delhi).