A case study is an intensive study of a case in all its relevant aspects. The case may be an individual, a group, an institution or even a phenomenon. Here it is a phenomenon — the 40 days' general strike by the textile workers of Bombay. As a tool of qualitative analysis, the case study method has a purely non-statistical approach, with a flexible, non-structured research methodology. The textile strike was studied, when the actual event was on and hence no preparatory period was available to fashion the tools of data collection like observation aids, schedules and questionnaires. The primary aim at that time was to collect all possible material, relevant to the strike, without any preconceived notion about the analysis or processing of this material. There could not be any definite formulation of a problem or a hypothesis or any research design, detailing the various stages of the research undertaken. The situation was fluid and rapidly changing and the future was unpredictable and uncontrollable. Emphasis was laid on collection of relevant material by discussion with the "actors" in the event and by supplementing it with documents, including the press reports.

TEXTILE STRIKES

Bombay has a long history of strikes in its textile industry, since October 1892, when 2,800 workers in three mills struck work. They were followed next year by 8,000 workers of eight other mills. The post-war economic discontent led in January 1919 the first industry-wide general strike, when 75 out of 85 mills were affected; one and half lakhs of workers were on strike for 18 days. Exactly a year later, another general strike of Bombay textile workers took place; it started on 1st January, 1920 and continued till 2nd February. Both the strikes were on the issue of "bonus" to compensate the high rise in prices. There were two strikes — one in 1924 (on discontinuance of the annual bonus) and the other in 1925 (because of 11½ per cent wage cut). The biggest textile strike was in 1928 from 16th April to 6th October, i.e. almost for half a year; though economic causes like indirect wage reduction were given, it was sponsored by the Communist ideology. The next strike was in 1934 on the issues of wage reduction and introduction of labour-saving devices; it lasted for about two months — from 23rd April to 20th June. On 3rd March, 1940, another general strike started for dearness allowance; but it ended in a failure on 13th April. The second longest strike in the Bombay textiles was in 1950 on the issue of bonus; it was conducted by the Mill Mazdoor Sabha and lasted for 63 days (14th August — 16th October). The losses were: mandays — 9.2 million; wages Rs. 3½ crores; production — 192.3...
million yards of cloth and 55 million pounds of yarn valued at Rs. 22 crores. The President and Secretaries of the Sabha were convicted and sentenced and six important office-bearers were victimised. Last in the series was the general strike of 1966 on the demands of bonus and dearness allowance and was in action from 28th February to 11th March. It may be stated here that one of the objectives of the last two strikes (1950 and 1966) was to challenge and disprove the representative character of the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS), not by enrolment of members but by a long-drawn out strike. Similar motive can be seen in the 1974 general strike.

INTER-UNION RIVALRY

Just as in the two earlier strikes (1950 and 1966), the opposition to the RMMS appears to be the main underlying cause of the 1974 strike. The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946, grants to the "representative" union the sole bargaining right to negotiate with the employers. The RMMS has got it in the cotton textile industry in Bombay since 1948. The Communists argue that their union (the Girni Kamgar Union) was suppressed at that time, because of the anti-Communist programme of the Government. The representative union also gets a few privileges such as collection of union subscription in the mill premises, using the notice board in the mill, submission of grievances of members to management and appearance before the Labour Court; other unions are denied these privileges. Before and during the course of the strike, the problem of recognition of the RMMS as the (only) representative union was always in the background. Agreements reached by the RMMS with the Millowners' Association (MOA) were disputed by the other unions, which also forced the MOA to deal with them.

PARTIES TO THE DISPUTE

The strike was waged by six textile unions — (i) the Mumbai Girni Kamgar Union (GKU) of the CPI; (ii) the Lal Bavta Mill Mazdoor Union (MMU) of the CPM; (iii) Lal Nishan Kapad Kamgar Sanghatana (KMS); (iv) Mumbai Mill Mazdoor Sangh (MMS), a dissident group from the RMMS; (v) Suti Mill Mazdoor Sabha (SMMS) of the Akhil Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh; and (vi) the Textile Clerks' Union. They pitted themselves against the representative union (RMMS) and the MOA, which recognised it as the sole bargaining agent for negotiations in respect of Bombay textile workers. The State Government (Labour Commissioner's Office) was in the picture but proved helpless, at least in the initial stage, because of the legal limitations.

CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The genesis of the 1974 textile strike can be traced to the "seven day-week" agreement, signed by the RMMS and MOA on 6th July 1973. This was itself a culmination of the staggering weekly holidays in practice in view of the power shortage since December 1972. However, the agreement induced the leftist unions to demand the re-introduction of the normal Sunday offs. The seven-day agreement was not properly explained to the workers, who were made to believe that they were to work more for the same wages. The subsequent events can conveniently be stated in a chronological manner:

1973

6th July — Seven-day agreement was signed between the RMMS and the MOA.
12th July — Call by the leftist unions to observe Sunday (22nd July) as the common weekly off.
18th July — State Labour Minister appealed to workers to accept 7 day week.
20th July — Appeal repeated by the Central Finance Minister.
22nd July — In spite of these appeals, workers observed this common holiday, Shiva Sena also supported this move.
29th July — Staggering (7 day week) was cancelled for the month of August.
15th August — A Charter of Demands, demanding a new wage standard, was passed by three leftist unions in a Conference.
16th September — Observed as the Demands Day by demonstrating at the mill gates.
30th September — GKU gave a call for strike on its own and hence it was a failure.
27th October — Some Neo-Buddhist workers were not allowed to work in the Jupiter Mills (possible origin of clash between Dalit Panthers and Caste Hindus)
31st October — RMMS gave notice to MOA terminating all previous agreements, with a view to adopting new wage scales.
1st November — Podar Mills adopted the seven day week.
9th November — RMMS and MMU organised two separate meetings to demand new wage scales.
11th November — Three day strike in INDU mills but it did not spread.
17th November — MMU collected signatures of workers for the Charter of Demands; the move was not supported by the GKU.
24th November — The leftist unions decided in a meeting to go on strike from 30th December 1973.
16th December — One day strike was observed, apparently to find out the workers' response. The strike was a complete success.
17th December — The RMMS gave a notice of change to the MOA under the B.I.R. Act, demanding new minimum basic wage, etc.
27th December — The MOA replied in negative to the RMMS.
28th December — A new agreement was signed between the MOA and the RMMS on a new wage standard. It was declared as "black agreement" by the leftist unions.
30th December — The strike, as originally decided, commenced.

1974
1st January — Appeal by the State Labour Minister to withdraw the strike.
5th January — Shiva Sena, which had supported the MMS (dissidents from the RMMS), withdraw its support.
10th January — Prime Minister's visit to Bombay was cancelled.
13th January — The Communist candidate (Dange's daughter — Mrs. Rosa Deshpande) was elected to the Lok Sabha.
8th February — Four point formula arrived at between the State Labour Minister and GKU office-bearers.
9th February — End of the strike.

STRIKE STRATEGY

These chronological events reveal many aspects of the strike waged. The sponsors, particularly the GKU, skillfully used the strategy of the strike. On the other hand,
the RMMS, with the MOA and the State Government, showed throughout a defeatist mentality, often agreeing to the dictates of the leftist unions. Their first failure was the abandonment of the seven day week, after so much publicity given to it. Workers were assured of 4 per cent rise in earnings and 25,000 additional jobs; at the same time, there would be increase in production by utilising the machinery to a fuller extent. However, as the seven-day week was not properly explained to the workers, the leftist unions took the advantage of equating it with extra work for workers and additional profits to employers. Strangely, the Communists, who vehemently opposed the seven day week in Bombay, had agreed to work it in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh.

**UNION DEMANDS**

The RMMS failure on the point of seven day week encouraged the leftist unions to bring out a Charter of Demands on 15th August 1973 and to observe a Demands Day on 16th September. The RMMS again meekly followed the leftists by making similar demands in its notice of change on 17th December 1973. A comparative study of the two sets of demands is interesting.

**Charter of Demands**

*(Leftist Unions)*

1. Minimum monthly earnings of Rs. 425/- (including d.a.) with a basic wage of Rs. 52; increment of 8% for first 7 years and 10% thereafter; guaranteed fall back wage for piece rate workers
2. 100% neutralisation of dearness, with a new scale (slab system)
3. 20% bonus for 1972
4. Common weekly holiday on Sunday; cancellation of seven-day week
5. In a year, one month's privilege leave, 14 days' casual leave and 14 paid holidays
6. Badlis, with one year's continuous service, should be permanent; assurance of 20 days' work in a month to Badlis
7. Ten per cent of jobs reserved for women
8. Right to work in all departments for Neo-Buddhists and Harijans.
9. No contract work in the mill premises

**Demands by the RMMS**

1. New minimum basic wages at CPI No. 200 (with 1960 = 100), which comes to about Rs. 500/- p.m. and a new standardisation of wages; annual increments of Rs. 5 (minimum) and Rs. 18 (maximum) for first five years.
2. D.A. for working class CP.I. No. above 200.
3. One month's privilege leave, 10 days' casual leave and 14 paid holidays in a year
4. Uniform for workers
Charter of Demands
(Leftist Unions)

10. Gratuity — 21 days' pay for each year for 10 years service and 30 days' pay for 20 years service.

11. Cancellation of recognition to the RMMS and elections by secret ballot

RMMS — MOA AGREEMENT

At this stage, it may be useful to find out what the textile workers got by the agreement reached between the RMMS and the MOA on 28th December, 1973, (see Table on p. 252).

Thus the workers were benefited to the tune of Rs. 22/- p.m. in case of the least paid worker and Rs. 49/- for the highest paid. This increase was not appreciated for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it fell far short of the expectations or of the amount demanded, even by the RMMS, which asked for Rs. 500/- p.m. as the minimum earnings. Secondly, both the RMMS and MOA failed to explain the agreement to the workers; the MOA came out with an advertisement, explaining the increase, long after the strike was launched. Lastly, the workers were not in a mood to listen to any reason in the surcharged atmosphere of the strike.

DELAYED ACTION

The chronological events show that the RMMS first took action on 17th December i.e. hardly 12 days before the strike date. The negotiations between the RMMS and the MOA broke down on 27th December but were resumed to reach an agreement on 28th, presumably under Government pressure. Despite this agreement, workers went on strike on 30th December.

Demands by the RMMS

After the strike, both the RMMS and the MOA again remained inactive. The peculiar provisions of the BIR Act made the other parties helpless, because negotiations could take place only between the employer (MOA) and the representative union (RMMS). The force of circumstances later brought, the State Government to intervene by having negotiations with a non-recognised union (GKU).

FOUR-POINT FORMULA

The strike dragged on for 40 days. During this period, hardly any attempt was made to settle the issues. Most of the parties (the State and Central Governments, the RMMS and the MOA) treated the strike as a prestige issue and remained adamant. In the first week of February, the GKU took an initiative and started negotiations with the State Labour Minister and arrived on 6th February what is known as the four-point formula for settlement of the strike. These four points were:

1. Over and above the previous agreement, the MOA is to offer additional Rs. one crore, involving an average increment of Rs. 4/- per worker from 1st April, 1974.

2. The workers of the Government-run mills would get 50 per cent of the benefits provided under the agreement. The question of extending all
benefits under the agreement to these mills would be reviewed after these mills were nationalised.

3. Sunday working of the mills would be resorted to only if a majority of workers of individual mills made a petition to this effect.

4. To decide the matter of casual leave, privilege leave and common holidays, a tripartite committee would be appointed which would submit its recommendations in three months.

The Government also assured speedy implementation of the Committee appointed for Badlis and women workers in industry. The workers, who were on strike, got an ad-hoc advance of Rs. 120/-, recoverable in eight monthly instalments. There would not be any victimisation. Police cases not involving violence, assault, loot and arson were to be withdrawn. For workers, who left Bombay during the strike, ten days' time to resume work was given.

GAINS AND LOSSES

After the strike was over, its credit and debit sides were calculated by experts. As a result of the agreement and the formula, the two lakhs of textile workers would get an additional payment of Rs. 22/- per month plus an annual increment of Rs. 4/- from 1st April 1974. The other gains were: an advance of Rs. 120/-; involvement of the Government in the strike, and its negotiations with a non-recognised union, thus indicating the failure of the B.I.R. Act; and capturing the Lok Sabha seat by the daughter of GKU President.

As against these gains, the losses, material and otherwise, appear to be substan-

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* The variable dia. is calculated by multiplying the extra points above 200 by 0.444 and that much percentage of the total basic (No. 5 + 7) would be the new d.a.
potential. Nearly 80 to 85 per cent of the normal output of 128 million square meters of cloth, expected from the mills during this period had been irretrievably lost; in terms of value, the loss was of over Rs. 35 crores. To this may be added the loss suffered by the decentralised sector as a result of non-supply of over 16 million kgs. of yarn during this period. Bombay mills account for slightly less than a third of the total monthly cloth production in the country and for 45 per cent of the cloth exports. U.S.A. had ordered for about 4 million square yards of cloth over and above the last year's quantity (152 million sq. yds.). Similar were the orders from the U.S.S.R. The country lost Rs. 6 crores by way of foreign exchange (because of loss of exports). According to the MOA, it would take several years to recover these losses.

The workers' monetary loss is calculated at Rs. 8.14 crores for 155,000 workers on the following basis — an average loss of Rs. 15/- per day per worker or a loss of Rs. 600 during the strike period. The economic impact of the strike on workers' families was heavy. When some of the families were interviewed, they were bitter about the strike leaders. The morale of the average worker was at a low ebb in the latter part of the strike. This may be partly due to the high prices and difficult conditions of living.

With about two lakhs of workers remaining idle, there was the threat to law and order; this threat was all the more because of the Dalit Panther trouble and the parliamentary election. On the whole, however, the strike was conducted in a peaceful manner.

One ostensible gain may be the possible peace in the mill area during the next few years.

ATTITUDE OF UNIONS

Seven trade unions were directly involved in this strike; six of them, with different colours, were opposed to the representative union (RMMS). They formed a co-ordinating committee for conducting the strike and also for dethroning the RMMS. Though they succeeded in proving that a large majority of workers defied the RMMS-MOA agreement by going on strike, they could not dislodge the RMMS from its unique position. In fact, in January 1974 (the strike period), 60,000 workers paid their membership dues to the RMMS.

Though the six unions co-ordinated for the purpose of strike, there were instances of inter-union rivalry. The strike organised by the GKU on 30th September was a failure, because other unions did not cooperate. Similarly, the collection of signatures by the MMU for the Charter of Demands on 17th November was not given any importance by the GKU. When the Four Point Formula was agreed between the Labour Minister and the GKU, other unions were not consulted and they felt bitter. They even asked the strikers in Government-run mills to continue the strike for a day more to register their protest. However, it cannot be denied that this strike brought a number of unions together.

CONCLUSION

The strike is one more in a series of general strikes of Bombay textile workers. It has its gains and losses (more losses than gains), its usual tactics and the usual conclusion. The main object of the strike appeared to be to challenge the representative character of the RMMS and to dislodge it from its position. Its success may be in taking a majority of workers on strike, against the
specific orders of the RMMS. However, in India taking the workers on strike or to courts need not be a proof of leadership. Workers unfortunately are now fond of strikes and litigation. A minority union can take the workers on strike and a majority union cannot stop it. Similarly, the law (in this case the BIR Act) cannot be changed because of the strike. The unions should rather draw the workers through active membership within their fold, than resort to such destructive tactics.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

MOA  The Bombay Millowners' Association
RMMS  The Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh
GKU  The Bombay Girni Kamgar Union
MMU  Lal Bavta Mill Mazdoor Union
MMS  Mumbai Mill Mazdoor Sangh
BIR  The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946