Trade Unionism has grown up alongside of industrial development. Everywhere men are realising a new spirit which refuses to be content with old conditions. The author, who has made a study of textile trade unionism in Bombay, describes in this stimulating article its origin, growth and present strength. The argument set forth is an original attempt to reveal the drawbacks in our trade union movement, which prevent it from playing an important part in lifting the worker from his low economic level and improving his working conditions.

Mr. Kulkarni (TISS '46) is a research scholar of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

The tremendous wave of strikes that is sweeping over India, now, as it did after the First Great War, is once again focussing the attention of the public on trade unions. It is being realised, though gradually, that for good or bad trade unionism is going to play a very important role in the shaping of our national economy.

Considering its importance, it is rather tragic that the history of the Trade Union Movement in India is yet to be written, yet to be known! India has yet to find her Webbs who would undertake this vast and complicated subject of study. Want of clear, continuous and reliable trade union records in India, makes it still more difficult to obtain the required data. Moreover study of trade unionism is essentially a study in relationships; and because, social research has not developed, specially in India, to any appreciable extent, it is not possible to measure the degrees of consciousness, subtleties of attitudes and the nature of relationships with mathematical exactness or fool-proof objective standards. The present study, therefore, could not rise above the inevitable limitations.

Some fundamental principles of Trade Unionism can profitably be borne in mind while studying the Trade Union Movement in any country or industry. In their monumental work Sydney and Beatrice Webb have defined a trade union as ' a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives.'* That was in 1894. But today Milne-Bailey's definition that a ' trade union is an institution having as its purpose the advancement of the vocational interest of its members ' is perhaps more appropriate. By the vocational interests is meant their interests as persons following the specific vocation as distinct from their social, religious or political interests.

But it must be stated here that though an association of coal miners is a trade union, that of mine-owners cannot be. Their relation to the mine is neither vocational nor functional; it is only legal; *i.e.*, of ownership. It must also be noted here that the labour interests which the trade unions are supposed to champion are not necessarily merely class interests of the proletariat or the 'victims of capitalism.' Otherwise one cannot reconcile the continued existence of trade unions in Soviet Russia which is supposed to have abolished capitalism and the economic classes.

A trade union as a separate organization is only a part of a large group. It is an association of persons but it is in itself a member of a still larger association which

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may be termed the Trade Union Movement, and Milne-Bailey observes that 'the International Trade Unionism is the super-group of which the trade union movement of any particular country forms only a part.*

In origin, the trade unions in this country, even as in others, were spontaneous growths. They arose out of the common needs of the people for fellowship amongst craftsmen, for mutual aid, for improvement in the remuneration and the conditions of work, in short, for an increasing measure of control over the circumstances of daily work-life. There seems to be no historical continuity between the mediaeval guilds and the modern trade unions, though psychologically and even biologically the idea of collective resistance to insecurity is the same. For a correct understanding of the methods, policies and programmes of different unions, they have been classified on two bases—functional and structural.

**Functional Types.**—The first recognizable functionable type is termed as a Business Union. It resorts to (collective) bargaining in the pure commercial sense of the word. They are not concerned with the ownership of the means of production nor do they aim at establishing any 'ism.' They just bargain for better conditions of work and still better terms of employment. The various clerks' unions, staff unions and professional associations belong to this type. Uplift Unions are friendly unions. They may be trade-conscious or broadly class-conscious, and at times may even claim to think and act in the interests of the society as a whole.

Revolutionary Unions are distinctly class-conscious and believe in class-struggle, and aim at finally establishing the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' They assert the complete harmony of the interests of all wage-earners as against the owners, employers and their representatives. They tend to repudiate the existing order and mean to bring about revolution by precipitating class political action. Predatory Unions, finally, are known for their ruthless pursuit of the thing in hand by whatever means. They have two sub-types:—the Hold-up Unions and the Guerilla Unions. Both these types are practically unknown in India.

**Structural Types.**—The structural classification of trade unions is much simpler and is based on outward form, organization and the internal government. First came the Craft Unions which are associations of employees bound together by common employment, skill and interest in a relatively narrow occupation or a group of closely related occupations. The carpenters, the weavers, the smiths generally unite to form such unions. Secondly, there are the Industrial Unions composed of all workers in a particular industry regardless of crafts, occupations or degrees of skill. The Textile Trade Unions which are the subject of this article belong to this type. The broadest structural type of a labour organization is the Labour Union. Its membership is not confined to any single craft or industry but includes all wage earners of every description. It stresses the fundamental solidarity of the working class.

The structural and functional classification, discussed above, is neither rigid nor comprehensive. Types of unions can be formed and determined according to a common material used in allied trades such as wood, metal, etc., or according to the employment such as all railwaymen including all those of transport, workshop and offices. But it is worth noting here that

* Trade Unions and State, by Milne-Bailey.
certain structural types go with certain functional ones. Generally most of the craft unions are business types whereas the industrial or labour unions are revolutionary types. But unions can and do change both in structure and function as a response to the environmental stimuli.

Looked at from the point of view of social psychology the movement shows four stages of development. To begin with there is an emergence of an unfriendly environment. Then there is the consciousness of its hostile nature consequently resulting in discontent and, amongst the more aggressive, unrest. That naturally gives rise to disputes and strikes and collective bargaining starts. Thus begins the trade union movement.

Therefore to understand the trade union movement in India, specially in Bombay Textiles, the forces—international, national and industrial—which influenced it, demand more than a passing attention. Amongst the international forces there are three which stand out more prominently from the rest. They are the Russian Revolution, the International Labour Organization and the Textile Industry in Britain.

The Russian revolution and the communist ideology behind it was the one greatest single factor that has influenced the trade union leadership, and through them the movement in India, immensely. Actual and direct relations were established only when the Communist Party of India was attached to the Third International (Comintern). None can deny the importance of the part played by the Indian communists in awakening the Indian labour. Secondly, the annual conferences of the I.L.O. provided a good platform for ventilating the grievances of Indian labour, and it is on the strength of certain conventions ratified there that the Government of India was forced to enact some permissive or protective labour legislation. These periodical conferences also offered a good chance for Indian leaders to contact the trade union leaders of other countries. Lastly, the textile industry of Lancashire and Manchester saw a great competitor in its Indian counterpart and therefore the British industrialists persuaded the Government of India to enact certain pieces of legislation which adversely affected the textile industry and consequently the Indian textile labour.

**Industrial Background.**—The first textile mill in India was erected at Fort Gloster in Calcutta in 1818. But the real development of textile industry, based on the modern joint stock principle, started in this country in 1851 when the Bombay Spinning and Weaving Mills was established at Tardeo in Bombay by a Parsee gentleman, Mr. Davar. In the initial stages the industry was concentrated in Bombay owing to its advantageous geographical and climatic conditions. And even today out of 370 textile mills in India 223 are in the Bombay Presidency itself. From 1860 to 1865 progress was materially assisted by the wealth which accrued to Bombay commercial interests owing to the high prices at which Indian cotton was sold during the American Civil War. Another factor which contributed to the rapid growth of the industry was the establishment of a profitable yarn export trade with China. The first Swadeshi Movement also offered a fillip to the Indian textile industry in the years 1904 to 1907; and the boom of the First Great War proved a great boon for the industry.

Its development attracted thousands of workers from the rural areas. The typical factory conditions, and all the urban
problems they create, gradually prevailed. The Report of the British Trade Union Congress Delegation has recorded that the workers used to work for 14 to 16 hours and used to sleep in their respective departments. They were almost bought for the season and were treated like serfs. The level of wages was extremely low, not sufficient even for the barest needs of life. They were totally unprotected against the risks of sickness, accidents and death, the incidence of which was higher then.

D. H. Buchanan in his book *The Develop' merit of Capitalist Enterprise in India* observes that "between 1860 and 1890 there appears to have been very little increase in the real income of the Indian factory hands. Between 1890 and 1917 prices rose markedly and wages followed (though) with a lag for several years in spite of the war-time boom."

The Report of the Tariff Board Enquiry Committee giving a statement of the dividends accruing to the shareholders in textile industry mentions that "an examination of the balance sheets of the Bombay Mills shows that in 1920 thirty-three companies comprising 42 mills declared dividends of 40% and over ; of which 10 companies comprising 14 mills paid 100% and over and two mills paid over 200% ! Similarly, the souvenir booklet published on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Empress Mills Ltd., Nagpur, in 1927 proudly declared that in certain cases in war-time dividends as high as 365% were paid!"

The contrast of the wretched conditions of the workers with the prosperous flourish of the shareholders needs no comment. The cost of living had increased to 54% and the wages were disproportionately low. To secure only 5% increase, workers had to strike 45 times in the latter half of 1917, and after 52 strikes in different mills in the first half of 1918, they got only 15% increment.

Thus it is seen that in spite of the mounting profits being earned by the mill-owners, the workers had low wages, long hours of work, no protection against accidents and no housing in complex urban environment. It is these thousands living in such unfriendly environment that gradually became aware of the power of combination and collective bargaining. This is a very interesting history, and it dates back to 1884, one year before even the establishment of Indian National Congress. But its continuous history as an organized trade union movement begins only after the World War I.

To the hostile and complex industrial environment described above the workers gave spontaneous elemental responses by way of withdrawing their labour collectively, that is, concerted action in the form of strikes. The first recorded strike was in 1877 in Empress Mills Ltd. at Nagpur, over wage rates. Between 1882 and 1890 twenty-five strikes were recorded in Bombay and Madras Presidencies although there were no unions or even temporary strike committees. The first recorded claim of collective representation of the workers was in 1884. That is why, conventionally, 1884 is supposed to be the beginning of trade unionism in India. In that year a conference of Bombay millworkers was convened in the City by two leaders—Narayan Meghaji Lokhande and Sorabji Shapurji Bengalee, who represented the workers and demanded reduction in working hours and a weekly holiday. In 1890 a union known as the Bombay Mill-hands Association was organized by Mr. Lokhande. But this was a loose combination rather than a corporate body as it had neither a definite constitution nor a paying membership. Actually the first
regular trade union in India, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma, came into existence in 1897. It was registered under the Indian Companies Act. But this Union has played little part in the Indian Trade Union Movement, as, its membership was limited to the upper ranks of Europeans and Anglo-Indians.

Early in this century some isolated unions were started in several places, such as the Printers' Union in Calcutta in 1905 and the Postal Union in Bombay in 1907. A friendly Uplift Association was started in Bombay in 1910 under the title of Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha (Workers Welfare Association). Between 1905 and 1910 there was a notable advance in labour movement parallel to the militant national wave. The highest peak was reached when the workers went on a spontaneous voluntary six-day strike as a protest against the sentence of six year's imprisonment on Tilak in 1908. Yet, except some isolated unions outside the textile industry and some humanitarian welfare societies, there were no organized trade unions. Some temporary strike committees began to appear in the war-time period—1914-18.

As has already been mentioned, the cost of living had risen 54% above the pre-war level, but the wages were the same though the dividends were mounting high. Strange as it may seem, workers had to resort in 1917-18 to no less than 97 strikes in different mills in Bombay just for 20% rise in wages.

The cost of living yet being 34 to 39% higher on the 27th December, 1918, there was a strike in one mill in Bombay and on 11th January, 1919 there was a general strike in all the mills. It continued for eleven long days when at last 35% increase was granted. This wave of strikes reached its peak on 2nd of January, 1920 when a general strike in Bombay was organized by workers themselves which lasted for one full month. This time the demands were reduction in working hours from 12 to 10, annually one month holiday with pay and increment in wages proportionate to the cost of living. The memorandum putting forward these demands was drafted in a general meeting held in December 1919 in which workers of 75 mills were represented. On the 3rd of February, 1920 the till then largest and the widest general strike in Bombay textiles ended with the granting of 55% rise in wages.

All these strikes were organized by the workers themselves. The war-time struggle had taught the workers a lesson. Therefore, only when the frequency of war-time strikes became almost a continuity, did some strike-committees think of becoming permanent regular trade unions. Moreover, the necessity of having permanent unions was more keenly felt by some, for a central body, which could send workers' representatives as delegates to the periodical conferences of the International Labour Organization of the League of Nations which had come into being at this time, was considered for the essential purpose.

Therefore, in the post-war wave of labour unrest, the Textile Labour Union (founded by Mr. B. P. Wadia) at Madras, Clerks' and Postmens' Unions at Bombay and Seamens' Union at Calcutta were formed. The All India Trade Union Congress (a central federation) was established in 1919. Its first session was held in Bombay under the presidency of the political leader Lala Lajpatrai.

The A.I.T.U.C. has had a very chequered history. For 10 years it served
as a national platform for organized labour in India, and was the only body chosen to represent the interests of Indian labour in national and international matters. But at its tenth session held at Nagpur on the 30th November, 1929, a split occurred. Resolutions on boycott of the Royal Commission on Labour in India and on the severance of connection with the I.L.O. were adopted. The affiliated unions opposing these resolutions seceded and thereafter founded the Indian Trades Union Federation (I.T.U.F.)

The longest general strike in Bombay textiles in 1928-29 also gave rise to further differences and thus was responsible for one more split between the communists and non-communists at the eleventh session at Calcutta in July 1931, the seceding section later forming the Red Trade Union Congress. But happily at the fourteenth session at Calcutta in 1935 an agreement was reached between the Red Trade Union Congress and the A.I.T.U.C. on the fundamental principle of trade union unity. But the Indian Trades Union Federation which was formed in 1929 yet remained separate. It had a membership of 82,000 with 23 affiliated unions. At the end of 1929, there were 87 unions claiming membership. Of these 38 with 90,000 membership were registered in Bombay Presidency, whereas 60 unions from all over India joined the A.I.T.U.C. in the very year of its inception and 42 others showed willingness to join. By 1924 the affiliating membership was 5,000; by 1927 it rose to 97,000 and in 1929 it shot up to 190,000. In 1933 the I.T.U.F. amalgamated itself with another central organization, the National Federation of Labour, taking up the new name of National Trades Union Federation (N.T.U.F.). In 1936 Mr. V. V. Giri (now Minister for Labour in the Congress Ministry at Madras) submitted compromise proposals to the A.I.T.U.C. and the N.T.U.F. and, as a result, in 1938 at Nagpur the amalgamation took place.

But today the Indian Federation of Labour, another all-India labour organization, founded and led by Mr. M. N. Roy is competing with the A.I.T.U.C. This was organized during the World War II to keep up the morale of labour to produce more and thus help to defeat the fascist enemy. The I.F.L. had therefore the blessings of the Government of India and was receiving Rs. 13,000 per mensum. In spite of its being an infant organization, it enjoyed alternate or 50/50 representation in all the International Labour Conferences that have been held during the last one year, the reason being that the government was unable to decide during wartime the relative representative values of both of these organizations. Recently, Mr. S. C. Joshi, the Chief Labour Commissioner, who was appointed to find out the truth in the matter reported against the I.F.L.

It is against this background of the history of All-India Central and Federal Labour Organizations that the history of the Bombay Textile Labour Unionism must be studied. And it is interesting to note that right from 1887 to 1946 the Bombay textile labour and its leadership has been playing a very important role in the All-India Trade Union Movement. Actually it is no exaggeration to say that the Bombay textiles have been the pioneers, the leaders and the very main-stay of the trade union movement in India.

Position of Bombay Textile Trade Unions.—The working population of a cosmopolitan city like Bombay lacked that homogeneous character which is
wanted for any collective action. The Trade Unions in America experienced the same difficulty at the beginning but today that has been remarkably overcome. The provincial and communal differences therefore should not be a permanent difficulty in India. Secondly, as most of the workers keep their attachments with the villages, that stability, which is so essential for a healthy growth of Trade Unionism, was, and still is, to a great extent lacking in the industrial cities of India including Bombay. Therefore it has not been easy to organize regular fighting trade unions out of humanitarian associations or ephemeral strike committees. The two labour associations which existed before 1919 were the Bombay Millhands' Association and the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha (1910). The first real textile trade union organized in 1919 was the Girni Kamgar Sangh. But there was no legal recognition for any such unions.

In spite of all these difficulties, workers were undaunted, and in the absence of strong unions a resort to frequent lightning strikes was the only sanction they could think of to support their demands. But in spite of the fall of the cost of living index from 183 in 1920 to 173 in 1921 and to 164 in 1922, the workers were not satisfied with their wages. The wages were in fact 30% above the dearness level. Therefore, 72% of the strikes declared in 1922 were failures as against 54% in 1921. 278 strikes were recorded for the whole year (1922) and the total number of workpeople involved was 4,35,434 as against 6,00,351 in 1921. In January 1924 there was again a general strike in Bombay Textiles because the employers, due to fallen prices, were either unwilling or unable to pay the annual bonus. It ended on 25th of March after the Macleod Committee disapproved of the workers' demand. Over 1,60,000 operatives were involved and the working days lost were about 8 millions! Though no strong union conducted the strike, it was peaceful. In 1925 the Cotton Textile Industry was passing through a crisis of depression and therefore the dearness allowance was reduced by 20%. Thereupon Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas appealed to the Viceroy to suspend the cotton excise duty. Meanwhile the workers went on strike which was called off only in December, when the cuts were restored on the suspension of the excise duty. Till the 2nd of October all the mills were closed, about 1,51,986 workers were involved and 11,00,000 work-days were lost. This time the strike was accompanied by some violence also.

The Trade Unions Act came into being in 1926, and immediately unions began to be formed with some sense of security. The Girni Kamgar Sangh (Mill Workers Union), which was formed in 1919, changed
its name to Girni Kamgar Mahamandal (Mill Workers' Congress). In January 1926, Messrs. N. M. Joshi and R. R. Bakhale of the Servants of India Society started the Textile Labour Union with Mr. S. K. Bole of the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha as its Vice-President. The Bombay Millworkers' Union was established in March 1926 by Mr. S. H. Jhabwala with the co-operation of communist leaders like Mr. Dange and others. Any student of Trade Unionism is at a loss to understand the formation of so many trade unions in one industry in one area, unless he takes into consideration political and personal differences of the leaders. And of course it is difficult to justify the formation of so many unions in one industry at a place on those bases because it upsets the very vitals of trade unionism—'strength in unity.'

While the unions appeared on the scene, fresh trouble was also brewing. According to the recommendations of the Textile Tariff Board, the millowners in Bombay were thinking of introducing some new systems of work. This was disliked by the workers but there was a split amongst the unions on taking a joint step in the form of a general strike. The radicals amongst the union leaders, however, went ahead with their call for a general strike. The strike started on the 16th of April, 1928, with the Currimbhoy group of mills and spread throughout all the factories except the 'Colaba Land' and the 'Wadia'. The Fawcett Committee was appointed to investigate into the matter, but even while it sat there were about 70 strikes in the city. The committee gave their verdict mainly in favour of millowners saying that the new schemes were reasonable but recommended that the wage-rates, etc., should be fixed up in consultation with the union leaders. The Bombay Girni Kamgar Union insisted on the investigation of some grievances before they could think of considering the recommendations. Agreement, however, on the methods of finding out the truth in cases of victimization could not be reached. Therefore the union gave a call, once more, for a general strike on 26th of April, 1929. But as the sober Bombay Textile Labour Union refused to co-operate in the strike, it was not on the same large scale as it was in 1928. Yet again, according to the Indian Trade Disputes Act, 1929, the Pearson Committee was appointed to enquire into the matter. The Committee blamed the Girni Kamgar Union leaders for making inflammatory appeals to the workers, picketing and intimidation by strikers, and condemned the acts of violence committed on the non-strikers. Thus the 1929 strike proved an apparent failure, and the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union, which had built up its strength, completely broke down; its membership of about 50,000 dropping down to a bare hundred or so. In 1931 the Kandalkar-Deshpande controversy about the bona fides of representation was carried over to the A.I.T.U.C. Session at Calcutta and as a result a split came about even in the central body and the Red Trade Union Congress was formed.

As if this was not enough, various other labour associations were still cropping up. The Bombay Workers' Union, the Bombay Parsee Textile League, the Young Workers' Association are all the product of this period of intense trade union activity whose contribution in strengthening labour is of doubtful value. The Royal Commission on Labour in their report dealing with this subject observe: "At the bottom of the scale come those unions which represent little or nothing more than the one or two men (generally drawn from professional leaders) who fill the leading offices. A few such unions
can fairly be described as having had their main evidence of reality in notepaper headings. The object is to give a platform and a name to the leaders. The members, if not imaginary, are convened on the rare occasions when the endorsement of resolutions is required" (p. 319). "This type of valueless growth . . . . was stimulated by the belief that it would assist the leaders to secure nomination to local councils or international conferences."

This period of mushroom formation of trade unions was also marked by intense discontent and unrest. The textile industry was facing keen contest because of rationalisation in other countries. Therefore a 25% cut in wages were introduced, work was increased per worker and retrenchment and wide-spread unemployment was the result. In the course of a short period about 60,000 workers (70%) were thrown out of employment: out of 84 in 1931 only 50 mills kept working in 1933-34. Naturally, therefore, the strike-wave increased in 1933 as compared to 1932. In 1932 there were in all 11 strikes, involving 6,472 workers, losing 1,67,348 working days. Whereas in 1933 there were 35 strikes, involving 42,777 workers, losing 3,48,553 working days. Most of them, however, were failures because there were too many small and weak unions, a majority of the workers not being members at all. Moreover, there was too much of faultfinding and blaming amongst the union leaders themselves, the communist leaders charging the 'reformists' and vice versa.

The whole story was repeated in 1934 when the general strike in the textile industry all over India began on 23rd of April. After about a fortnight the strikes showed signs of breaking because of a quarrel over the inclusion (or non-inclusion) or Messrs. Joshi and Bakhale in the strike committee, between the communists on the one hand and non-communists on the other. There were also charges and counter-charges of misleading the workers to go back to work. Naturally, therefore, the strike failed and failed miserably. Between the rivalries of the leaders the workers were the worst sufferers.

In the 1935 elections the 'Bombay Girni Kamgar Union (Red flag)' was won over by the communists and therefore the defeated party started the 'Girni Kamgar Union, Bombay,' under the leadership of Kandalkar, the ex-Vice-President of the A.I.T.U.C. (1931). Since then till about 1940, the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union (Red flag) has been the strongest and the most active union in the city of Bombay. Other unions have a small following and their activities are limited to a few mills in which they have some following.

In 1938, when the Indian National Congress formed ministries in various provinces under provincial autonomy, the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act was passed. The Bombay Girni Kamgar Union (Red flag) was against it from the very-beginning for, to them, it was an onslaught on the fundamental right of the workers—the right to strike. They called it a 'black act' and arranged demonstrations and led strikes under protest. But before much could be done about it, the second World War began, and the Congress Ministries resigned.

At about this time one Rashtriya Girni Kamgar Sangh (National Mill-Workers' Union) was formed in Bombay on the lines of the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad. It believed in establishing just and harmonious industrial relations by peaceful and legitimate means on the basis of truth and non-violence. With it the national interests outweighed the
international ones, and therefore its policy came in direct conflict with the communist unions. For, when on 22nd of June, 1941, Germany attacked Russia, the communists thought that the 'Imperialistic War,' had suddenly changed into a 'Peoples' War.' Therefore, they urged upon the workers to make sacrifices, not to go on strike and produce more, thus keeping the civil and military supply constant especially when the Japanese Army (along with the Indian National Army) was marching towards India. It was, said the communist unions, the patriotic duty of the workers to keep the machines working.

On the other hand, in August 1942 when the national leaders were arrested, the Rashtriya Girni Kamgar Sangh appealed to the workers to protest against it by striking work. They appealed to the patriotism of the workers and said that they were soldiers in the fight for freedom first and workers next. As regards the Japanese danger, they maintained that it was more imaginary than real, at least not so serious as the communists would have the workers believe. The office-bearers of the Sangh were arrested and could start reorganizing only in 1944 when they were released. If the recent elections in the Textile Labour Constituency are any indication of the influence of the contesting parties, then it seems that the Sangh ideologies are gaining ground amongst the textile labour. Mr. Nurie, the Congress candidate, secured as many as 4,019 votes against the veteran communist leader Dange who got only a few more viz. 4,794. Though technically it was the defeat of the non-communist candidate, the very narrow majority by which Mr. Dange was elected is a pointer to the growing influence of the Sangh amongst the Bombay textile labour.

Of course, it is difficult to predict whose will be the ultimate victory. But it is certain that the trade unionism in Bombay is gradually being reduced to political differences between the national unions and the communist unions, as in the past it was between the liberals and the communists. Because of further differences between the rightists and leftists in the National Congress, between the Communists and the Radical Democrats and certain other communal and personal differences being reflected in trade unionism, the situation is complex enough, much to the detriment of workers.

In the light of this cursory survey of textile trade unionism in Bombay other aspects of trade unionism can be better examined in the following paragraphs.

DISTRIBUTION OF TRADE UNIONS (REGION WISE)*

POSITION OF BOMBAY TEXTILE UNIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total No. of Unions</th>
<th>No. of Unions in Textile Industry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British India</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay Presidency</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay City &amp; Suburbs</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>126</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Registered only 40)

*Labour Gazette (Bombay), August 1945.
Trade Union Government.—Before the passage of the Indian Trades Union Act in 1926 there were no regulations to control the internal government of the trade unions. All procedure and administration were subordinated to the will of the leaders who were mostly outsiders and all regulations were sacrificed at the frequent occurrences of the industrial disputes and strikes. Specially the ballot voting for calling a strike was not practised or regularized till very recently. There were, of course, some well-administered unions even before the said act was enforced. The Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad, the Girni Kamgar Sangh led by Mr. Alwe (who was a worker himself) and the All-India Trade Union Congress—all of these had already set examples of well-regulated unions.

After the enforcement of the Indian Trade Unions Act, however, it became obligatory upon the unions desiring to register themselves to have a regular constitution. But, for those who do not want to get registered, there are no regulations and no obligations. As registration under the Act does not necessarily mean recognition by the employer, they are not very enthusiastic about getting registered or even maintaining it once it is done. Out of the total 126 principal unions in Bombay (in different trades) only 40 are registered. The remaining 86 are not. Many of the registered unions do not submit their periodical returns and lose their registration. In 1943, for instance, only 489 out of 693 unions in the whole of India submitted their returns. In short, as far as the internal government of the trade unions is concerned, the Act has proved to be merely an optional and permissive measure.

After 25 years of existence the constitution of the trade unions under the Act has come to be based on a more or less uniform pattern.

Generally the constitutions provide for one managing committee, some centre committees and as many mill committees as there are mills under their influence. The management of the union is supposed to be vested in the managing committee which has according to rule 22 of the I. T. U. Act a limited number of honorary members or advisers, who are not textile workers. As has been pointed out because of the low standard of education amongst workers, because of the practice of victimization by the employers and because of the necessity for independent representatives, the presence of 'outsiders' has not only been found inevitable but also desirable to a certain extent. It is, however, a fact that because of the political controversies which these outsiders bring in, more harm than good is done to the Trade Union Movement.

The mill and the centre committees of the union which are represented on the managing committee work for collecting the subscriptions, for getting information about the grievances of the workers in that mill or centre and represent the matter to the managing committee or the employers directly as the situation may warrant. Sometimes it has been found, as in 1929, that the mill committees arrogate to themselves the right of the managing committee viz. declaring or calling off a strike.

Thus it has been discovered that though the constitution provides for a democratic machinery there are many irregularities in practice. The controversy between Mr. S. V. Deshpande and Mr. Kandalkar in 1931 about the real representation of the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union, the question of the inclusion of Messrs. Joshi and Bakhale in the strike
committee of 1934, the point about the constitutional nature or otherwise of the meetings held in July 1934 and the glaring case of two rival and parallel managing committees existing simultaneously in a single union are all solid examples of the unconstitutional, irregular, undemocratic management of the Trade Unions.

How far these irregularities are due to the personal, political or other differences amongst the leaders and how far due to the ignorance of the workers, it is difficult to judge.

Office-bearers.—Due to the lack of time and education, the Bombay Trade Union Official compares unfavourably in the matter of efficiency with the officials of unions in the western countries. In the various annual reports on the working of the Indian Trade Unions Act it has been repeatedly pointed out that many union officials do not understand the working of the law and the procedure laid down therein, thus resulting in wrong or incomplete returns. Due to lack of finance the unions have not been able to employ the services of educated and specially trained ex-workers as recommended by the Royal Commission on Labour in India. It must be pointed out, however, that those who employed the services of trained persons have been more than amply compensated in terms of better organization.

Leadership within the unions has been acting through the offices of presidents, general secretaries, etc., but since the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, came into being, at least in the registered unions it has been acting mainly through the advisers and honorary members. The history of the movement shows that but for the non-vocational bias and immature radicalism of certain union leaders, the trade union movement would have been one strong progressive force instead of of the house divided against itself that it is today.

Membership and Finance.—There is nothing more elusive in the study of trade unionism in India than its membership. Membership is still often not defined. There is no system of checking the figures of membership. The Royal Commission on Labour and the I.L.O. both have charged the unions for maintaining the names of those who have long ceased to pay the subscription. And this charge has not been contradicted. Moreover, usually the membership does not give the correct idea of the strength of the unions. Because there are more than one trade unions in one industry the workers may join or follow any one of them in times of difficulty or crisis. That, however, depends upon their evaluation of the benefits that may accrue to them as a result of joining ranks with a particular union. There are many workers who are trade union conscious but do not participate in the usual activities either because of lack of time or fear of victimization. Others, on the other hand, calculate that the gains won by the union will naturally be theirs even without their participation.

Membership of Trade Unions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Region</th>
<th>Total Figure of Membership</th>
<th>Membership in Textile Unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>British India</td>
<td>6,85,299</td>
<td>1,61,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bombay Presidency</td>
<td>3,14,580</td>
<td>1,27,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bombay City</td>
<td>99,701</td>
<td>39,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bombay G.K.U</td>
<td></td>
<td>26,099</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Labour Gazette (Bombay), August 1945.
The unions have a general fund made up of monthly subscriptions which are very small because of the low income of the workers. That is the reason, perhaps, why the unions cannot undertake any long-term constructive welfare programme for the workers. Most of the funds are spent as salaries that are meagre and on offices that are poorly equipped. They can also utilize this amount on maintaining their elected members to the legislature. The accounts in most of the unions unfortunately are not kept as efficiently as are done in any commercial firm. Political and strike funds are separately collected on a voluntary basis.

This matter of finances, of income and expenditure directly leads to the question of the various activities over which this money is spent and can possibly be spent.

The study, however, reveals that the unions in point could not launch any long or short term programme because the day-to-day problems of labour have not yet been solved, thus providing a lot of day-to-day spade work to the unions. Therefore the professed and actual functions and the extent and nature of activities is the only thing that can be studied.

The constitutions of Bombay Textile Trade Unions generally have laid down the following as their functions:

1. To organize all the workers in the industry;
2. To strive for the realization of all the immediate demands of the workers regarding the conditions of their employment by all available means of legislation, collective bargaining and 'direct action';
3. To ameliorate the economic and social conditions of the working class;
4. To help the worker in case of sickness, unemployment and his family in case of his death, etc.;
5. To provide legal aid to the workers in case of compensation benefits, etc.
6. To give relief to the workers in times of strikes;
7. To collect all possible information on Indian and foreign labour and industry.

The A.I.T.U.C. includes in its functions the removal of untouchability in India.

In actual practice, however, it has been found that except for the immediate grievances of the workers there is not much that the unions could give attention to. But even this work is pretty heavy and should not be under-estimated. Even after twenty-five years of trade unionism workers have not been granted even the minimum wages and minimum housing, fair conditions of work and just terms of employment.

There have been some attempts by the Bombay Girni Kamgar Union and the Rastriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh to conduct night classes, libraries and reading rooms. Lack of enthusiasm on the part of both the organizers and the workers has been responsible for the lack of progress in that line. The wage-minded workers, the politically-inclined leaders and the profit-minded employers-all show a singular apathy towards adult education, recreation, health and housing and even the family life of the workers.

That is why there are no labour schools, labour hospitals, labour clubs and labour libraries in Bombay organized by the trade unions. The benefit schemes, the social insurance and other similar measures are too progressive to be adopted by
unions at this stage under the present circumstances.

And of course there are strong reasons for this 'sorry scheme of things entire.'

Firstly, because in the twenty years between 1920 and 1940 there have been 3,500 disputes in the whole of India (Bombay contributing a large share). That means there were 175 disputes every year or working it out it comes to 14 disputes a month or a dispute every two days! Under such circumstances there is not peace enough to undertake any constructive programme. Since, of course, the labour legislation came in vogue, some unions have provided very regular and expert legal aid to their members in their day to day troubles.

In short, lack of enough funds, lack of proper and enough personnel, the constant displeasure of the Government, the constant attack of the employers and the political motives of the leaders all together have prevented the trade unions from doing their rightful bit for the welfare of the workers as the full-fledged, healthy and progressive trade unions in the West do.

This is not, however, to under-estimate the achievement of textile trade unions in Bombay as the last quarter of the century. Specially in Bombay one finds a great change (for the better) between the labour conditions at the time of the First Great War and the Second. But considering how much more can be done it seems that our unionism has yet to go a long way before it attains that level.

In the matter of labour legislation, no doubt various trade unions' leaders have fought in the assemblies—provincial and central—year in and year out and some of them are responsible for bringing about the enactment of certain permissive and partially protective pieces of legislation. While expressing his views on this subject one Union leader said that there is no relation between the trade union movement and the labour legislation in India even as there is no relation between the national movement and the present constitution of India. It was only when the I.L.O. started functioning that certain conventions passed at their periodical conferences had to be ratified by the Government of India and some labour legislation was enacted. But again there is a wide gap between the enactment and the actual efficient enforcement. That holds good for all sorts of acts right from Factory Acts upto the Disputes Acts.

No other acts have influenced the textile trade unions in Bombay as the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Indian Trade Disputes Act, 1929, and the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act, 1938.

The Indian Trade Unions Act came into being as a result of an old standing demand put forth by leaders like Messrs. Saklatwala, Joshi and Wadia. It gave a legal status and certain immunities to the registered trade unions but registration itself was optional. It therefore could not prevent the mushroom growth of "bogus" unions. Moreover, the restrictions which the registration put on the unions were not compensated by recognition from the employers. Consequently, it did not prove a complete success. Further, the Act could not work efficiently because most of the union officials did not understand the working of the Act thoroughly. The industrial disputes legislation, however, has evolved gradually and has not been arbitrarily fixed like the trade union legislation. The Trade Disputes Act of 1929 did not affect the trade unions so directly as the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act did. For, it sought to create
three types of unions, defined and fixed the nature of representation, and sought to regularize the collective bargaining. But it made the procedure so long and complicated that it took months before any redress could be expected. Therefore in the case of urgent demands the workers had to resort to strikes which were illegal according to the Act. Moreover, it also left scope for the employers to influence five per cent of their employees and put up a qualified registered and recognized union as a rival union against a genuine one. Twenty-five per cent membership was also too much to be expected to make the union representative. Of course, most of these defects are sought to be remedied in the recently proposed amendments. It can be suggested here that the Canadian and the New Zealand models of the industrial disputes legislation can be profitably adopted for our purposes, without hampering healthy growth of trade unions. For trade unions need not thrive on strikes and disputes; that is merely the negative aspect of trade unionism. But the trade unions will have no choice except to declare strike if even the primary demands of the workers such as normal day, minimum and standardized wages, fair terms of employment and humane conditions of work are not satisfied. It is high time our Government and employers conceded these demands. Then alone the trade union movement can assume its proper positive and constructive role thriving on genuine industrial peace. Real industrial peace cannot be obtained by merely suppressing or postponing the strikes but by establishing favourable conditions in industries and allowing a considerable hand for labour in the management of industries and through it in the Government of the country as a whole.