

**DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG**

*Marcel van der Linden, Anna Sailer
and Ravi Ahuja*

“THE DISTRESS IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONVEY”

**BRITISH AND GERMAN TRADE-UNION REPORTS
ON LABOUR IN INDIA (1926–1928)**



WORK IN GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Work in Global and Historical Perspective

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Volume 10

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Convey"**

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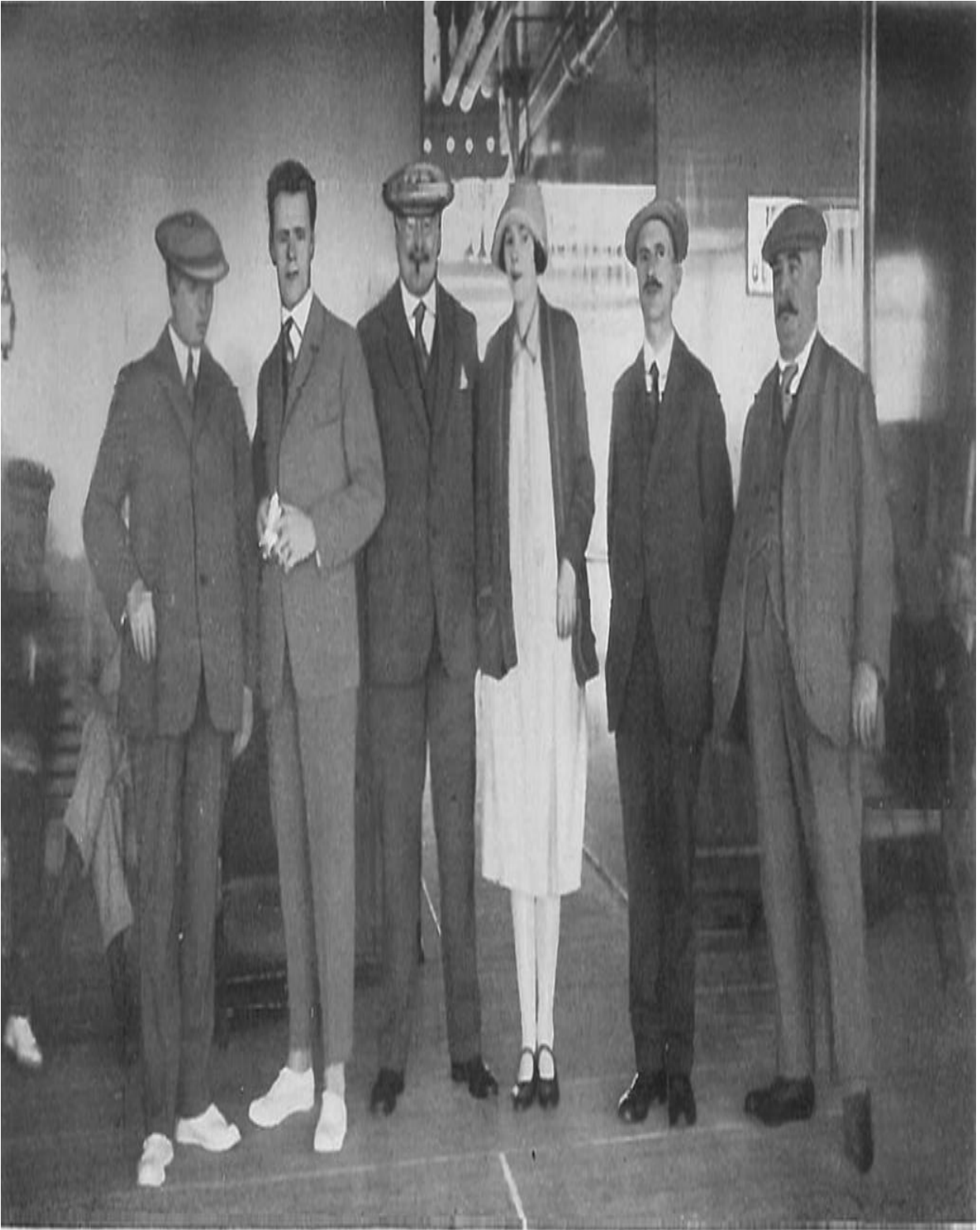
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Glossary

Babu	<i>here:</i> title used for office clerks; in colloquial language also an expression of respect
Bustee	see <i>chawl</i>
Chawl	Slum
Crore	ten million
Dhotis	piece of clothing for men
Kabulis	see <i>Pathans</i>
Lakh	one hundred thousand
Pathans	<i>here:</i> Pashtun moneylenders
Purdah	practice of screening women from strangers
Salami	bribe, premium
Swarajists	supporters of the Indian independence movement



K. Schrader, F. J. Furtwängler, T. Shaw, Miss Shaw, M. Brothers, J. Hindle
Die Delegation bei der Abfahrt an Bord des Dampfers in Marseille

The delegation on board the steamer outward bound from Marseille.
[K. Schrader and F. J. Furtwängler: *Das werktätige Indien*, foll. p. 16]

Introduction: Indian Textile Industries and European Trade Union Delegations in the 1920s

Marcel van der Linden

Anna Sailer

In the 1920s European trade-unionists “discovered” British India. Increasing competition made textile workers in Britain and Germany aware of the major social and economic changes that were taking place in South Asia. Several fact-finding missions were sent to the east. The present volume documents three reports of two of these delegations. Not only do they provide insight into the political and cultural worldviews of European workers, including their diverging attitudes towards colonialism – they are also a treasure trove of information on the working and living conditions of the Indian industrial proletariat.

Until World War I, India had figured rarely in the debates of European labour movements. Indian news occasionally made it into trade union newspapers and journals, in the form of reports on the introduction of factory legislation, new restrictions of child labour, or restrictions in the hours of work in Indian industries.¹

British interest in India as a colony was for obvious reasons widespread, and British trade unionists in the late nineteenth century certainly partook of it, albeit within a limited compass that tended to exclude labour matters in India. The condition of British-ruled India was discussed as was the general poverty of the Indian people. In Britain, this led to a focus on peasant life and famines under colonialism. When Keir Hardie, for example, visited the Indian colony as the first British Labour Party MP in 1907 – 1908, he paid special

attention to the poor peasants and the colonial administration in his travelogues. He said practically nothing about the industrial proletariat. Illustrative of this absence is an episode that he reported on when visiting Calcutta: he wrote that several jute “workers”, from Dundee, Arbroath, and Manchester, had met him to talk about the old days back in the United Kingdom.² These people were working as overseers in the jute mills that were situated along the river Hooghly, in the industrial hinterland of Calcutta.³ The next step of Hardie’s journey was a trip along the river. Instead of reporting on the industries that were crowded to the north and south of Calcutta, however, Hardie focused his attention on the villages and the peasant life that he observed between the chimneys when travelling from Calcutta on the Hooghly.⁴

Cracks in this indifference did not become visible until after the First World War. Initially, the idea of sending a delegation of trade unionists to India came up at the 1922 annual meeting of the Scottish Trades Union Congress in Edinburgh. K.S. Bhat, an Indian trade unionist, addressed the meeting as a guest speaker. He talked about the need to create a union of Indian and Scottish workers. He stressed his point by highlighting the shared interest of Scottish and Indian workers in fair wages and proper restrictions of hours of work.⁵

The idea found widespread support at the meeting. The jute industry in particular was the bedrock of one of Scotland’s major industrial cities, Dundee, where about half the city’s industrial workforce was employed in jute mills.⁶ The jute industry in Bengal had become the most important competitor to the Dundee industry. At the annual conference of the TUC later in 1922, the Scottish representatives brought forward a resolution that called for a delegation of British trade unionists to be sent to the Indian subcontinent.⁷

In short succession three delegations travelled to India from the United Kingdom. First, in 1925, the Labour MP and trade unionist Thomas Johnston and the trade unionist John Sime were sent to

Calcutta by the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union to investigate the conditions of work in the colonial jute industry.⁸ Their task was rather specific, as they exclusively studied the conditions of work in the industry most relevant for their membership.⁹

One year later, in 1926, a delegation of the International Federation of Textile Workers' Associations (IFTWA) visited India. This delegation was a British-German effort. The Labour MP Tom Shaw went as a British representative. Shaw had briefly been a minister under the short-lived Labour government in 1924, and he was also active as a trade unionist. In 1926 he was the president of the IFTWA.¹⁰ He was joined by two German delegates: Franz Josef Furtwängler and Karl Schrader. Furtwängler was a secretary of the German Federation of Trade Unions and Schrader was deputy chairman of the German Textile Workers' Union. While not being a member of the latter trade union at the time of travel, Furtwängler had previous links to the union of textile workers.¹¹

While initially sent to India to investigate conditions of work in textile industries, they explored conditions of work more generally – both in terms of industries examined and in terms of areas travelled, as they went from colonial India to various princely states. The joint delegation, however, soon ran into disagreements when trying to interpret what they saw. Eventually, they published two different reports.¹²

Finally, in November 1927, the British Labour MP and trade unionist A.A. Purcell and the trade unionist Joseph Hallsworth arrived in India as official delegates of the British Trades Union Congress. Their task was to explore conditions of work in industries in British India. However, just like their contemporaries they moved beyond strictly imperial boundaries, and reported on work in princely states as well.¹³ Purcell and Hallsworth's delegation was sent off in a rush. When Shaw was planning his trip in 1926, he was addressed by the TUC, and asked to conduct his journey as official delegate of the TUC. Shaw, however, declined. He argued that his trade union was

already involved in the organization. He, further, insisted that he wanted to lead an international delegation of textile workers, whereas a cooperation with the TUC would have compelled him to organize the commission as a national delegation of British industrial workers more generally.¹⁴

Purcell and Hallsworth arrived in India in November 1927, just in time for the annual meeting of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), where they delivered a message of solidarity. In preparation for this event, the TUC informed the AITUC and its members on several occasions that Purcell and Hallsworth were the only representatives of the British trade union movement. Another group of trade unionists, they warned, might claim to speak on behalf of the British labour movement. But they should be dismissed, and not listened to.¹⁵

This series of warnings indicates the reason for finally sending an official delegation of the TUC to India: the “false” representatives of British Labour were presumably the communist trade unionists Ben Bradley and Philip Spratt, one of whom had already arrived in India, while the other was on his way.¹⁶ The fear that communist trade unionists could establish networks with Indian trade unions, and, thus, increase their influence on the subcontinent, seems to have provided a new incentive for the TUC to send official envoys.

In their investigation, Purcell and Hallsworth focused largely on industries which were of relevance to British trade unionists. In contrast to Shaw, they were more positive about the possibilities of trade union cooperation between Britain and India, and insisted that such cooperation had substantial merits. They concluded their report by stating that:

Our view is that we must take the mighty step of linking-up the British and Indian Trade Union Movements for the purpose of positive and sustained organising work, followed by joint action wherever conceivable [...]. If this organising work can be arranged, we believe that the response would be such as would amply repay the British Movement for a great effort as well as place in

the mosaic of World Trade Unionism a big-hearted, full-souled mass of workers who, by reason of their emergence from the existing slavish and degenerate state, would be a wonderful example to the whole world of labour, to say nothing of the salutary effect that would be made on the employing class everywhere.¹⁷

However, this vision of expanded cooperation did not have much impact.¹⁸ By the late 1920s, the interest in Indian labour in general, and the proposition of improved cooperation specifically, lost its importance for British trade unions.¹⁹ The enthusiastic support for more engagement, in other words, was also the concluding episode of engagement by British trade unionists with colonial India.

Three reports, produced by two of these delegations, are assembled here. The most extensive one is the report by the German trade unionists. Furtwängler and Schrader, in fact, published a comprehensive book on their observations, titled “Das Werktätige Indien” (Working India). For the present volume lengthy sections of this book have been translated, and for the first time published in English. Shaw’s report, which was the result of the same journey to India, has also been printed in this volume. In addition, the report of the other textile workers’ union, Johnston and Simes’ “Exploitation in India”, has been reproduced here.

By the end of the 1920s the British and German trade union movements had begun the acquisition of systematic knowledge about industrial work and workers in India, and a process of transnational exchanges within the imperial context seemed to have begun. However, this sudden spur in gathering information on the colony is remarkable from another perspective as well: the engagement ended nearly as suddenly as it had begun. The end of World War I opened up a short-term window of engagements. This proved true for all German trade unions without exception, since the onset of Nazi rule brought this brief period to a close. In Britain, it was true as far as mainstream social-democratic trade unionism was concerned. In the 1930s, in general we find the talk of India in British trade union

literature returning to the themes of colonialism and the burgeoning struggle for independence, and the interest in Indian trade unions visible a decade earlier appears to have diminished considerably. As the 1930s proceeded and fascism and Nazism cast a longer shadow over European affairs, this inevitably reshaped the priorities of European labour movements: in Britain it led to a re-Europeanization of international interests, whereas in Germany, of course, Nazism swallowed the labour movement as a whole for over a decade.

Contexts: Politics

What we see in the context of the 1920s is a very specific broadening of the scope of interest of European labour movements in the “Indian question”, in a climate defined by a set of diverse contexts, namely the intensification of colonial economic competition, the dynamics of trade union internationalism in the wake of the foundation of the International Labour Organisation, the rise of the Labour Party in Britain, the rise of both trade unionism and anti-colonial nationalism in India, and the growth of interest in the colonial question among significant factions of German socialists. For a brief moment, then, it looked as though the question of industrial labour, East and West, and the prospects of international cooperation between trade unions located in Europe and the colonies, might take centre-stage in the construction of a new internationalism. Events, however, would soon overtake this moment with its in-built possibilities.

For the present volume, two contexts seem particularly relevant. The first are the debates and conflicts over the position of India specifically, and the situation of colonies in general, in the United Kingdom and Germany. In other words: the immediate political contexts in which these delegations were sent to India, and in which the reports were circulated. The second context is the growing competition from non-European countries and resulting fears of industrial and job losses in Europe.

The frequency of European trade unionists reporting from India was unprecedented. This can be seen as a brief moment in which the engagement of European trade unions with India took a distinct form of interaction, which was both new and confined to the 1920s. The British trade union movement had already shown a strong interest in the Indian trade union movement in 1922 by sending a delegation to the India House.²⁰ The TUC, meanwhile, started collecting information on Indian labour, and, more specifically, on labour conflicts in Indian industries, on a regular basis. Thus, dossiers were created on the Bombay textile strike in 1925, or the Lilloah railway strike in 1928. In addition, annual reports of the AITUC became regular items in the collections of the TUC.²¹

It was in the midst of this rising demand for information that the idea of sending delegations to India was raised. While these specific British trade union engagements with Indian industrial workforces have not received much attention from historians, there is of course a fairly long-established body of work on the relationship between imperialism, anti-colonialism, and the British labour movement and Labour Party in the interwar years. Partha Sarathi Gupta's classic *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement* tried to show that active investment in imperialism on the part of British Labour was more contingent and less organic than often supposed: British social democracy may have frequently flirted with or been equivocal about the colonial project, but its interests and the interests of Empire were ultimately only thinly tied together.²² More recently, Nicholas Owen has examined the patterns of exchange and correspondence between the British Left and India, underscoring a long tradition of contacts between Indian nationalists and British socialists.²³ These insights may well chime with those in David Edgerton's work *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, where he emphasizes the centrality of Labourism to the construction of a viable post-imperial British national identity, founded on the post-war welfare state.²⁴

On the other hand, ideologically, matters were of course often more complicated. Consider this 1907 quote from Ramsay MacDonald:

The greatest difficulty in our relations with our self-governing colonies which I, as a member of the Labour Party, can foresee, is whether it is possible for the States in the Empire each to develop true to British traditions and towards ends sufficiently similar to prevent irritating interference from within. Is there to be an Imperial tradition and destiny, or is there only to be a State tradition and destiny?²⁵

This effectively underscores one of the several “Labourist” visions available in the early twentieth century: the British Empire as, somewhat improbably, the incubator and curator of a more “enlightened” labour internationalism, led in comradely but firm fashion by the British. Such fantasies were by no means negligible in the British labour movement.

From the 1920s onward, it might be added, the Labour Party increasingly assumed the stance of a government-in-waiting. The party right and centre, therefore, found themselves saddled with the construction of a “better” imperialism.²⁶ Shaw, it will be remembered, had been a member of the short-lived Labour government of 1924. On the left wing of the party and in Communist and independent socialist circles outside it, by contrast, more critical perspectives on Empire gained weight in the interwar period.²⁷ Thus, colonialism and anti-colonialism were both part of the heritage of (different sections of) the British labour movement.

When we look at the German reports, matters are ideologically even more tangled. Ravi Ahuja’s chapter in this volume examines their complexities and complicities at length. For the purposes of this Introduction, it is worth noting that while Furtwängler and Schrader’s often deeply perceptive account was much franker about the connections between the colonial, national and labour questions, it also contained an opening to racialized perspectives which would

nurture the authors' subsequent connections to the German extreme right.

The reports published in this volume articulate debates about the international involvements of workers' movements, as well as about the merits or pitfalls of colonialism. They fit into a general pattern of trade union internationalism – as a practice of connections and correspondence between national trade union traditions in the 1920s. They also elaborate, each in their own way, evolving labour movement discourses in Europe about colonial rule. However, they do so within distinctly different, and nationally specific, frameworks of comprehension and evaluation.

From within the British trade union and labour movement, the vision of India's position towards its metropole was not one of equal engagement – or, at the least, this question was much more contested. Johnston and Shaw were prominently involved in trade union work in England and Scotland, and both were leading members of the Labour Commonwealth Group of MPs. They, as Tony Cox pointed out, “[d]eprecated what they viewed as tiresome communist tub-thumping on the issue of colonialism. For them, the Empire was a reality that could not be removed”.²⁸ Rather, the potential break-up of the empire would lead to anarchy and wars. Furtwängler's report, meanwhile, reflects certain influential German strands of thinking of the time about England. Ravi Ahuja's chapter outlines this less well-known German perspective.

The diverging approaches become immediately apparent, when the authors of the reports describe their own tasks. The British representatives of the delegation systematically tried to separate the task of investigating working conditions in India from “political” questions – which, in this case, meant to exclude questions of colonialism and of the growing national movement. Shaw wrote:

From the very beginning of the delegation I personally declined to discuss Indian politics, not because of any lack of interest, but because I had been sent

out to do special work which I felt would be hindered if I attempted to graft on to it anything in the nature of political propaganda.²⁹

The absence of what Shaw dismisses as the political here is reflected in his report. It is noteworthy that he only makes an exception when writing about the Princely States, and when noting that labour conditions were similarly bad – if not worse – there. Colonialism, in this account, was not the cause for the conditions of Indian workers.³⁰

Furtwängler and Schrader – coming from a country that had lost its colonies in 1919 – followed a different approach. Furtwängler wrote:

that the political emancipation struggle of this country is even less separable from trade union aspirations than anywhere else. Too great are the political obstacles to the free development of the economic labour movement, and too little is the interest of the government and its organs in enforcing even the sparse social legislation that exists. ³¹

Political independence would not automatically lead to “peaceful” labour relations in the subcontinent. As Furtwängler explained:

Rather, he [the Indian proletarian] will then all the more have to wage a heavy social struggle, but he will at least clear the field and have his hands free for this purely social struggle. ³²

In the report by Furtwängler and Schrader, the Princely States become a marker of the importance of colonialism, too. Unlike Shaw, however, they focused on the question of education, as a major tool to enable workers to improve their own situation. They observed that the system of education was better in some of the Princely States, while British colonialism did not provide enough to help workers educate themselves.³³

The various ways in which Shaw and Furtwängler interpret their interactions with people in India, too, gives us crucial insights into the

distinctions in their approaches. The publisher of Shaw reported:

The meetings which [the delegation] attended were often reminiscent of the Arabian Nights. A platform arranged very primitively, a table draped with coloured cloth, coloured streamers in gay profusion, and an audience consisting of thousands of people sitting on the bare ground, were daily experiences of ours. It is very difficult indeed to describe one's feelings when looking down on thousands of men squatting on the ground, with faces that seem to express an infinite patience and resignation, quite different from the expressions seen on the faces of a European audience.³⁴

The image of Indian workers here bears similarities to the images that colonial officials, as well as British capitalists, often presented: the bad conditions of Indian workers were supposed to have been caused by premodern habits and infinite lethargy.

Furtwängler and Schrader looked at the same meetings differently. They wrote:

If the small numbers of members and the weak finances of the young Indian trade unions could give cause for despondency, these meetings, which are always well attended, show that there is also enough interest and discipline in this working class to justify good hopes for the further prosperity of the movement. We had meetings of two thousand and three thousand heads. Such meetings do not take place in public places like the smaller ones, but in the open air. Not in an open field, but in a specially cordoned off street. Then the whole street is covered with carpets, on which the Indians squat with their legs crossed. What has no place on the street occupies the wooden verandas of the three- to five-storey houses. Strings are stretched across the houses, tightly hung with pennants.³⁵

This description gives us the image of a young labour movement, capable of rousing considerable enthusiasm, whilst hobbled by the absence of resources. It further underlines that this is not a movement caught in a timeless realm of the "pre-modern", but one that is indeed part of history.

In the course of the further description of the scene, Furtwängler and Schrader, too, note the patience of Indian workers. They

speculate that this might be one of the habits of Indian workers.³⁶ Or, in other words, that patience may be a general Indian attribute. Unlike Shaw they don't treat this apparent characteristic as a hindrance in engaging with the modern world of industries, which needs to be overcome. Instead, they treat it as a genuine trait that Indians have – or that members of the Indian “races” share.

Contexts: Economy

A second context that is of particular interest when considering the reasons for trade union delegations to India brings us to the development of capitalism after World War I. Capitalism in Asian countries such as India or China began to jeopardize jobs and incomes in the North Atlantic region.³⁷ It is from this perspective not surprising that the European textile workers started to show a new interest in labour conditions in British India. It was, after all, in this area that the changes in global competition became visible.

In contrast to the conflicting views on the political position of India and the colonies, economically driven concerns – and, along with them, fears of competition over jobs with the “East” – were shared unambiguously by all the members of the two delegations. Johnston and Sime rather explicitly began their report by stating that

[W]e have made an exhaustive study of the labour conditions under which the jute manufacturing industry, is carried on in India, the possible developments of that industry, and its consequent effects upon employment in Dundee.³⁸

The German trade union leader Hermann Jäckel's foreword, meanwhile, introduced Furtwängler and Schrader's report by pointing to the growth of industries in non-European countries and regions during World War I. He explained that this development posed the question:

[B]y which means and measures such conditions can be created that enable us to prevail in the conflict on the world markets, that make it possible to regain lost markets and to retain those that persist.³⁹

Illustrating the scale of the development, Jäckel further elaborated that:

Today there are millions of spindles [for cotton] running in In China, India, Japan and also in Egypt; there are hundreds of thousands of weaving looms, all serviced by a new industrial proletariat. The workers of the occident cannot even begin to imagine their wage levels, conditions of living and productivity.⁴⁰

Shaw, while not placing the problem of competition at the beginning of his investigation, raised the issue throughout his report at various points. He warned workers in the United Kingdom that

when European employers tell us that low wages and long hours in India make it impossible for them to compete, we must accept their allegations with the greatest reserve, and decline to accept as a fact the statement that long hours and low wages in India make it necessary that lower wages should be paid and longer hours worked on the continent of Europe.⁴¹

All authors agreed that competition from non-European areas made it necessary to understand working conditions in India. But they agreed as well that Indian competition was not a serious threat to European workers – even though the reasons for this assessment differed, as we have seen. This absence of meaningful competition, however, was not to be taken for granted, and developments in India might change in the future.⁴²

Illustrative of the urgency that the authors of the three reports gave to the growing economic competition outside Europe was also their work as trade unionists, and, in the case of Shaw and Johnston, their work as Labour MPs as well. The latter two regularly raised the issue of labour conditions and economic competition in the colonies in parliament. Johnston, for instance, talked about labour conditions

in Kenya, Argentina, India, Japan and China, while also raising concerns about global competition in the cotton industry more generally.⁴³ Tom Shaw and A.A. Purcell had been among the members of a delegation investigating working conditions in China in 1920.⁴⁴ Furtwängler, meanwhile, had just returned from a trip to the United States of America when he was asked to join the delegation to India.⁴⁵

The concerns expressed by the members of the delegations were not uncommon. Fears that Asian industries would push European competitors out of the market were not new. Shortly after the First World War, British textile entrepreneurs worried about increasing competition from the East. These concerns were not unfounded. The textile industry – once the leading sector of the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom – quickly lost market shares in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶

India's role in the global production of jute goods, too, changed during World War I. The growing importance of jute cloths produced in Bengal in international trade was, in principle, not a new development. Since its early days, the industry in Bengal had been in competition with the industry in Dundee. In the 1870s, and again in the 1890s, the mills on the Hooghly increased their range of production and began to produce jute goods that had previously been exclusively sold by Dundee-based companies on the world markets.⁴⁷

In the course of World War I, the dominant position of the mills on the Hooghly expanded further. The export of jute goods from Scotland to vital markets in Northern and Southern America came to be blocked. The mills in Bengal, meanwhile, managed to sell their products in this period. In this process, they managed to gain not only a temporary, but also, more importantly, a sustained access to markets that had previously been served by Dundee mills. By the early 1920s, the Bengal jute industry had established a virtual

monopoly over the global production of certain categories of jute goods.⁴⁸

However, Johnston and Sime noted in their report that the mills in Dundee still manufactured a type of finer jute cloth that the mills in Bengal were not able to produce. Thus, they concluded, that

The Indian Jute Mills are not engaged in the manufacture of the same class of goods as are the Jute mills of Dundee, and Indian Jute labour is not now, and so far as we can see, is not likely to be, in active competition with Dundee labour for many years to come, unless, as we have said, the whole situation is suddenly changed by any set of circumstances which would compel the mill owners on the Hooghly at whatever cost to discard their present manufactures.⁴⁹

Their conclusion, however, proved to be short-lived. In the early 1930s, the Bengal mills started to introduce the production of the type of fabrics that were manufactured in Dundee. The Great Depression and an ongoing change in the process of production proved sufficient to “change” the circumstances.⁵⁰

While the fear of competition with regard to textile industries was motivated by shifts in global trading patterns, the anxieties of European trade unionists about the condition of their national industries were also driven by anticipated further-reaching developments. The steel industry is a good illustration of this. Briefly, after World War I, a number of new steel mills opened their gates in colonial India, as well as in Princely states such as Mysore. The older steel plant in Jamshedpur, meanwhile, was in the process of expansion.⁵¹

Most of the new mills were not successful and had to close their gates soon. Indian steel mills produced mostly cheaper pig iron, which was sold on the Indian market, and was more prone to fluctuations in global prices. Nonetheless, plans to (re-)open new mills at a later time were afloat, giving rise to anticipations that British steel mills could be pushed out of the Indian market.⁵² Making

matters worse, the Princely State of Mysore planned to introduce the production of refined steel as well. This could be sold on a global market.⁵³

The steel industry in India, which was apparently on the verge of emerging on a larger scale, had several advantages vis-à-vis the steel industries in Europe. The machines erected in the mills were newer – a matter that was particularly significant given the technological advances that had been made during World War I.⁵⁴ The industry, further, had access to ore of a high quality and at low costs.

Furthermore, labour costs in India were cheaper, thus making Indian steel potentially even more competitive. A newspaper clipping that was collected by the TUC, thus, concluded that India was on the verge of “producing the cheapest steel in the world”⁵⁵, or, as another paper pointed out:

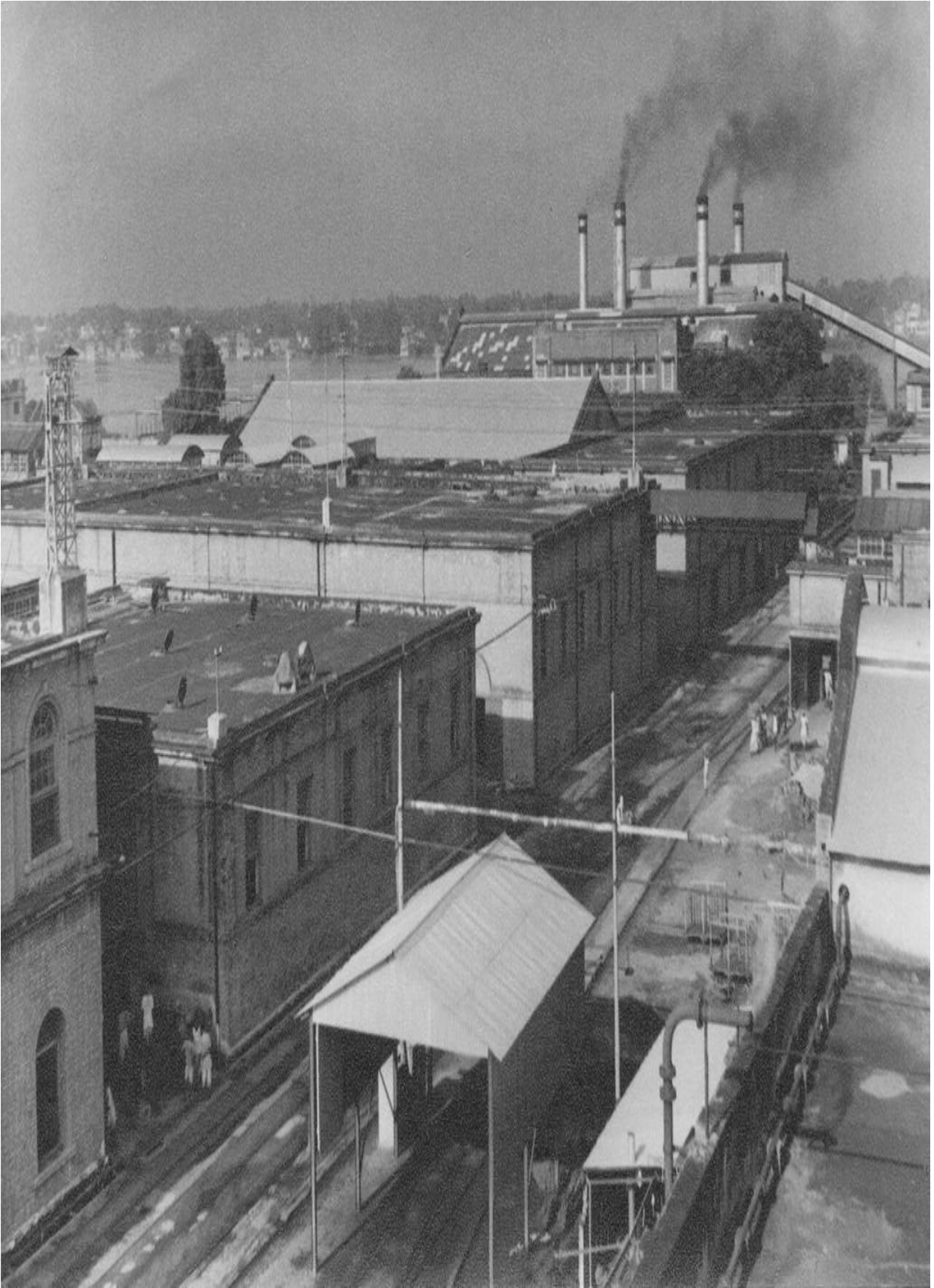
Within the last ten years India has been coming forward as a rival to the United States in the matter of cost of producing iron and steel and eventually she may challenge all other countries but America in the matter of output.⁵⁶

The anticipated development of the steel industry, arguably, influenced the itinerary of Shaw, Furtwängler, and Schrader. Whilst conducting their delegation as representatives of textile workers, they ended up investigating working conditions beyond the textile industry, and beyond colonial India. The anticipated growth of industries on the subcontinent was not limited to particular industries anymore, nor, for that matter, to the colony itself.

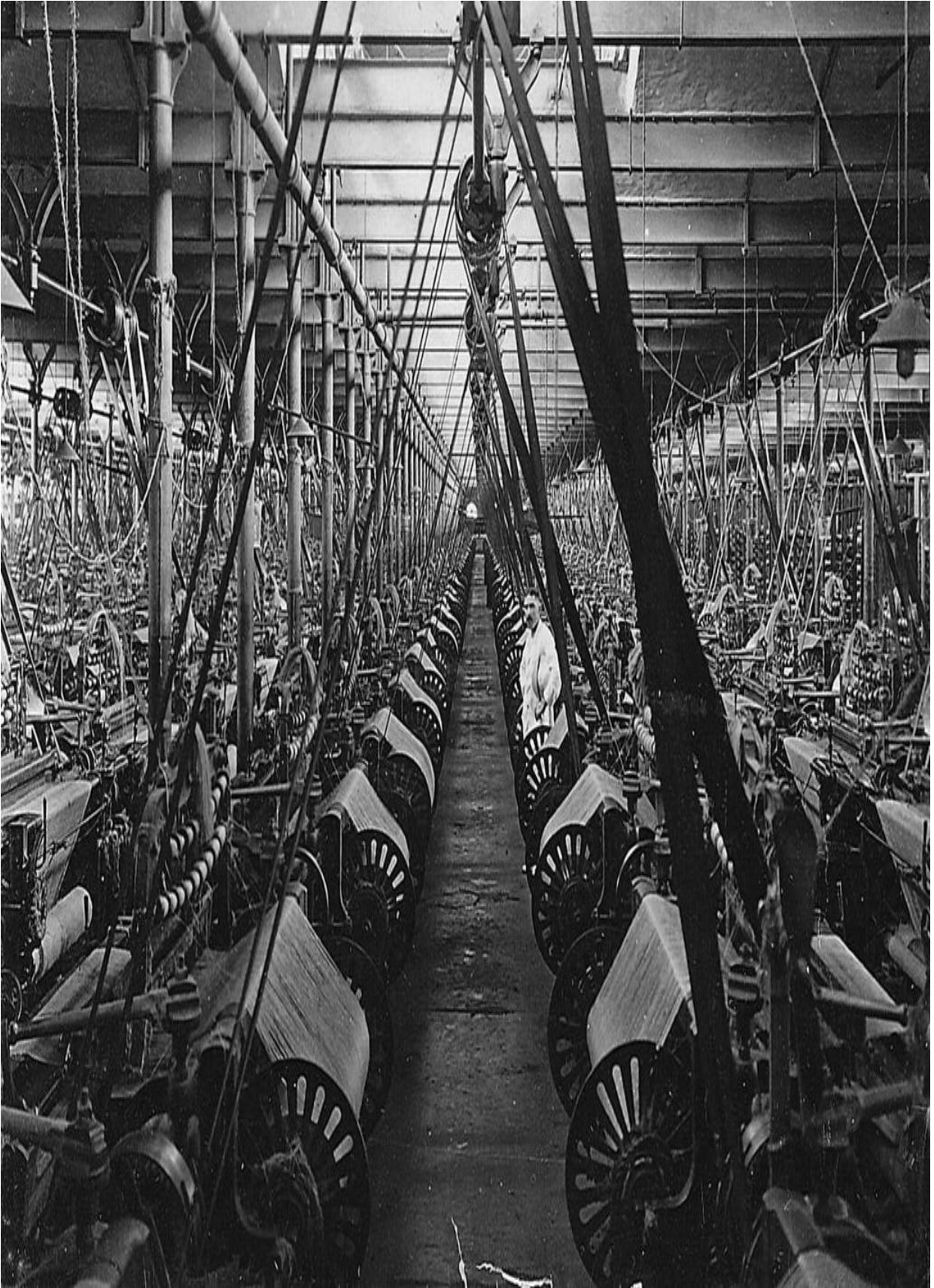
The following images of jute factories along the Hooghly River near Kolkata are reproduced courtesy of the Dundee Heritage Trust. Most are not dated but would have been taken between the 1930s and the 1950s.



Jute Mill Buildings along the Hooghly River (aerial photograph of: Samnuggur South Mill, Samnuggur North Mill, Titaghur No 1 Mill, Titaghur No 2 Mill, Victoria Mill, Angus Mill), undated. [Dundee Heritage Trust, DUNIH 2008.42]



“View of Gourepore Jute Mills”, undated [Dundee Heritage Trust,
DUNIH 200.2]



“Weaving Department of Indian Mill”, undated [Dundee Heritage Trust, DUNIH 2015.3.4]



Three workers in spinning department of Megna Jute Mill, 1949
[Dundee Heritage Trust, DUNIH 2018.23]

Notes

- 1 For the growing interest of British trade unionists in Indian labour conditions after World War I, see: Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-imperialism, 1885–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 152; for occasional articles in German labour-movement journals, see: n.a., “Das neue Fabrikgesetz für Indien”, *Die Neue Zeit*, 9, 2, 30 (1891), 119–123; Max Schippel, “Indien und die Silberkrise”, *Die Neue Zeit*, 11, 2 (1893), pp. 235–238; Hans Fehlinger, “Die wirtschaftliche Struktur Britisch Indiens”, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 20, 6 (1914), pp. 357–362; Max Schippel, “Indiens Streben nach wirtschaftlicher Unabhängigkeit und England”, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31, 5 (1925), pp. 269–273.
- 2 Keir Hardie’s book about India is based on travel reports he sent to the *Labour Leader* in 1907. The journey through India was part of a journey around the world. Thirteen weekly articles about India were published. Keir Hardie, *India. Impressions and Suggestions*, 2nd Edition (London: Home Rule for India League (British Auxiliary), 1917), p. 8.
- 3 The liberal MP John Leng visited the jute belt in 1898, indicating the impression of an industrial area already in the title of his book: “the Manchester of India”. John Leng, *Letters from India and Ceylon, Including the Manchester of India, the Indian Dundee, and Calcutta Jute Mills. Reprinted from the Dundee Advertiser* (Dundee: John Leng & Co., 1895).
- 4 Hardie, *India*, 8.
- 5 Anthony Cox, *Empire, Industry and Class. The Imperial Nexus of Jute, 1840–1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 133. Bhat was a member of the Workers’

Welfare League of India. The league had been founded in 1919 in London by Shapurji Saklatvala. Establishing links between British and Indian trade unionists was a central objective of the Workers' Welfare League. British trade unions should, more specifically, guide, teach, and support the emerging trade union movement in India. Saklatvala elaborated in a pamphlet in 1920 that: "The future of Trade Unionism in India will depend in its early stages upon the close-cooperation of British Labour. [...] The interests of Indian and British Labour are bound up by their economic relations." See Shapurji Saklatvala, *India in the Labour World* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1922), 8.

- 6 William M. Walker, *Juteopolis Dundee and its Textile Workers, 1885 – 1923* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979); Stewart Howe, *Dundee Textiles Industry 1960 – 1977. Decline and Diversification* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982), 122.
- 7 Owen, *The British Left and India*, 153.
- 8 On Johnston (1881 – 1965), see his *Memories* (London: Collins, 1952). In chapter 12 he discusses the Indian journey. See also Gerard Douds, "Tom Johnston in India", *Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society* 19 (1984): 6 – 21. John F. Sime (? – 1943) was the first president of the Dundee-based Jute and Flax Workers Union (1906 – 08) and from 1908 until 1940 its General Secretary. *The Courier and Advertiser* [Dundee], April 8 1943; Christopher A. Whatley, David B. Swinfen and Annette M. Smith, *The Life and Times of Dundee* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1993), 154.
- 9 Thomas Johnston and John F. Sime, *Exploitation in India* (Dundee: Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, 1926).
- 10 Shaw (1872 – 1938) was since 1911 the president of the International Federation of Textile Workers' Associations.

Indicative of his focus on questions of international labour organisation is also that, as a Labour MP, Shaw had been involved in the creation of the Labour and Socialist International. Geert van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International. The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913 – 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 129.

On Furtwängler (1894 – 1965): Willy Buschak, *Franz Josef Furtwängler: Gewerkschafter, Indien-Reisender, Widerstandskämpfer. Eine politische Biographie* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2012); and Ravi Ahuja's chapter in this volume. The Social Democrat Karl Schrader (1868–?) was Vice-President of the German Textile Workers' Association (DTV) since 1921, and became its President in 1928. See Willy Buschak, "Deutsche und britische Gewerkschafter reisen 1926/27 durch Indien", *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 22, no. 1 (2011): 87 – 111, at 105.

11 Franz Josef Furtwängler and Karl Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien. Sein Werden und sein Kampf* (Berlin: Verlagsgesellschaft des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes, 1928), 8.

12 Tom Shaw, *Report of Investigations into the Conditions of Indian Textile Workers* (Ashton-under-Lyne: "The Cotton Factory Times" Office, 1927); Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*.

13 A.A. Purcell and Joseph Hallsworth, *Report on Labour Conditions in India* (London: The Trades Union Congress General Council, 1928). Albert Arthur Purcell (1872 – 1935) was President of the International Federation of Trade Unions from 1924 to 1928, and sat in the House of Commons in two separate periods between 1923 and 1929. [Sir] Joseph Hallsworth (1884 – 1974) was elected to the

General Council of the TUC in 1926 and became President of this organization in 1939.

- 14 Letter from TUC General Secretary to Tom Shaw, October 29 1926; Trades Union Congress, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick [hereafter MRC] (MSS.292/950/5).
- 15 All India Trade Union Congress. Eighth Session, Cawnpore, 1927. Report & Congress Constitution (Bombay: N.M. Joshi, 1928).
- 16 Philip Spratt, *Blowing Up India. Reminiscences and Reflections of a former Comintern Emissary* (Calcutta: Prachi Prakashan, 1955), 35.
- 17 Purcell and Hallsworth, *Report on Labour Conditions in India*, 43.
- 18 The Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union, however, several times donated money to their Bengal colleagues. See Dundee City Archive, John Sime Papers [hereafter DCA], letterbox 1926, sheets 14, 31 and 32. Its General Secretary John Sime stressed the necessity to (re)organize the Bengal jute workers' union along the lines of his own organization. In a letter to Kalidas Bhattacharyi, February 10 1926 (DCA, letterbox sheet 1) he wrote: "From my short experience I think a European must spend six months to a year on the Hooghly Jute area. If he is a real live man he would find oceans of work to do; and in the doing of it, he would lay the foundations of a permanent strong, virile and aggressive Union, provided he had the services of at least half a dozen men such as yourself, or women to attend to the detail work and acting under his guidance and instruction. These officials to be appointed as the work developed." Three months later, in another letter to Bhattacharyi (dated April 14 1926; DCA, letterbox sheet 15) he repeated this: "The question of organisation in Bengal Jute trade is one that has to be faced on this side. I am

convinced it is desirable, if not necessary, that a European, a Dundee man, should devote some considerable time to the job.”

- 19** Purcell and Hallsworth had suggested sending two British trade unionists to India, in order to train local trade unionists. This suggestion seems to have been dropped soon after. In the mid-1930s, the principle idea of training trade unionists was revisited. However, the intended direction of cooperation had changed, and the several trade unions discussed the merits of inviting an Indian trainee to Britain. Eventually, in 1938, one trainee was invited. He, however, could not finish his training programme, as he returned to India when World War II broke out. See India: Labour advisors, 1928 – 1940, Trades Union Congress, MRC (MSS.292/954/14a).
- 20** “Deputation of the British Trade Union Congress”, *Labour Gazette*[a] (Bombay), I, 6 (February 1922), 40.
- 21** India: Bombay textile strike, 1925 – 1929, Trades Union Congress, MRC (MSS.292/954/16); India: Railway strikes, 1928 – 1932, Trades Union Congress, MRC (MSS.292/954/19); India: Textile industry, 1926 – 1933, Trades Union Congress, MRC (MSS.292/954/20); Jamshedpur [India] branch, 1917 – 1928, Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association (BISAKTA) and predecessors, MRC (Mss.36/J8).
- 22** Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914 – 1964* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publication, 1975).
- 23** Owen, *The British Left and India*.
- 24** David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation. A Twentieth Century History* (London: Penguin, 2018).

- 25 J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Labour and the Empire* (London: George Allen, 1907), 37 f.
- 26 Owen, *The British Left and India*, 152.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Cox, *Empire, Industry and Class*, 143.
- 29 Shaw, *Report of Investigations*, 4.
- 30 Ibid., 8.
- 31 Franz Josef Furtwängler, *Indien. Das Brahmanenland im Frühlicht* (Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1931), 40.
- 32 Ibid., 115.
- 33 Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*, 209.
- 34 Shaw, *Report of Investigations*, 17.
- 35 Furtwängler, *Indien*, 38.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 In particular Britain was hit by these developments. Between 1900 and 1930, Britain's global share of mechanical spindles sank from 43 % to 34 %, while shipments to Asia collapsed. See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 381.
- 38 Johnston and Sime, *Exploitation in India*, 3.
- 39 Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*, 7.
- 40 Ibid., 8.
- 41 Shaw, *Report of Investigations*, 30.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 The Hansard Society lists, among others, the following speeches by Johnston in parliament: Kenya (Colonel Bell), May 14 1925; China (Disturbances), June 15 1925; British Mills, Shanghai (Child Labour), June 18 1925; Cotton (Imports from China and Japan), June 22 1925; Cotton Manufacture (China, Japan, India), June 22 1925; Mill Strike, Rishra, June 22 1925; India (State Railways), March 24 1926; Kenya (Masai Tribe), March 24 1926;

Cotton Mills (Japanese Competition), June 16 1927; India (State-Owned Coal Mines), April 26 1928; Empire Cotton, March 27 1928. For Johnston's speeches in 1925, see <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-thomas-johnston/1925>; for 1926 see <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-thomas-johnston/1926>; for 1927, see <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-thomas-johnston/1927>; for 1928, see <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/people/mr-thomas-johnston/1928>, all accessed December 21 2019.

- 44 Bertrand Russell, *Uncertain Paths to Freedom. Russia and China, 1919 – 1922*, Richard Rempel and Beryl Haslam (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 2000), xxxiv.
- 45 Buschak, *Franz Josef Furtwängler*, 55.
- 46 *Committee on Industry and Trade, Survey of Textile Industries* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), 64; R. Robson, *The Cotton Industry in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 4, 22.
- 47 For the development in the 1870s, see D.R. Wallace, *The Romance of Jute. A Short History of the Calcutta Jute Mill Industry 1855 – 1909* (London: London, W. Thacker & co., 1909), 23; for the development in the 1890s, see Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900 – 1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 79.
- 48 Omkar Goswami, *Industry, Trade, and Peasant Society: The Jute Economy of Eastern India, 1900 – 1947* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 100; Gordon T. Stewart, *Jute and Empire. The Calcutta Jute Wallahs and the Landscapes of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 96.
- 49 Johnston and Sime, *Exploitation in India*, 5.

- 50** Anna Sailer, *Workplace Matters. The Bengal Jute Industry between the 1870s and the 1930s*, unpublished PhD, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen 2015, 120.
- 51** Indian Competition in Iron and Steel, *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, October 25 1921; Charcoal Blast Furnace and Wood Distillation Plant of the Mysore Distillation and Iron Works, *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, April 13 1923.
- 52** Steel-Making in India, *The Ironmonger*, March 27 1920; India's Iron and Steel Industry, *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, June 27 1924.
- 53** Charcoal Blast Furnace and Wood Distillation Plant of the Mysore Distillation and Iron Works, *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, April 13 1923.
- 54** Extract from *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, 4 November 1921, 656; Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association (BISAKTA) and predecessors, MRC (Mss.36/I3).
- 55** News clipping "Cheapest Steel in the World", Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association (BISAKTA) and predecessors, MRC(Mss.36/I3).
- 56** Indian Competition in Iron and Steel, *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, October 25 1921.

Exploitation in India. Report of the deputation sent to India by the Joint Committee of Dundee Jute Trade Unions (1926)

Thomas Johnston

John F. Sime

The text has been edited as follows: 1) Minor grammatical and spelling mistakes have been corrected. 2) The spelling of names of names of persons and places has been homogenized throughout the document. 3) Tables have been homogenized throughout the document. 4) Comments have been added in footnotes. Footnotes appearing in CAPITALS are part of the original document.

To the jute workers of Dundee.

In accordance with the request transmitted to us through the Joint Committee of the Jute Trade Unions, we have made an exhaustive study of the labour conditions under which the jute manufacturing industry, is carried on in India, the possible developments of that industry, and its consequent effects upon employment in Dundee. Our enquiries were made in every quarter likely to be in a position to assist us. We interviewed workers, both individually and through their committees. We went to many villages and addressed mass meetings under Trade Union auspices. We had conversations with many European managers and assistants (of whom, by the way, about 900 hail from Dundee!). We interviewed proprietors, managing agents, missionaries, political leaders of all schools of thought, and Government officials; we went on his visits with the Factory Inspector; we ourselves paid surprise visits to mills; we inspected balance-sheets and shareholders' lists, and through the courtesy of Mr. R.N. Band, the chairman

of the Indian Jute Mills Association, we were enabled to check our figures by an actual inspection of employers' wages books.

Practically the entire jute crop of the world is grown in Bengal, the alluvial soil, the intense heat, and the monsoon rains making in combination the necessary conditions for the production of the raw fibre, and here, for eighty miles up and down the river Hooghly, are scattered some 79 mills, operating between them 49,399 looms, of which 31,055 are on narrow width Hessian and 18,344 on sacking.² These looms consume nearly two-thirds of the total jute crop, and only one-third remains to be exported to Germany, Scotland, the United States, and other countries.

The companies owning the Indian Jute Mills are, with very few exceptions, members of the Manufacturers' Association, which since April 1921, has adopted the policy of short time working in order to limit "over-production" and keep up prices. The hours of labour, though sixty per week under the Factory Act, have, therefore, since that period, been limited by voluntary agreement among the owners to 54 per week, though, as we shall explain later on, there is grave reason to believe that many mills habitually break this arrangement, and we caught one actually working over 60 hours! However, so impressed are the manufacturers in general with the necessity of restricting production that in March 1924, they agreed to a rule prohibiting any extension of looms. They are afraid of the attempts being made by grain shippers, for example, to discard jute bags altogether and substitute bulk cargoes, and they say that they are already producing sufficient [quantities] to meet all the world's requirements in narrow width Hessian and sacking, and that any further production would simply mean a period of useless cut-throat competition and a collapse in prices – and profits.

From our own observation, and from all we could learn, a very small part of the output (if we except two American-owned mills) competes in the markets of the world with the finer qualities of jute manufactured goods turned out in Dundee. It is true that during the war some of the mills were put upon the finer qualities, but the labour efficiency was so low and there was so much bad work that the real costs of production became alarmingly high, and the owners went back promptly to the simpler forms of production, which were within the scope and power of their workers. This is not to say that Indian jute mills will never under any circumstances become serious competitors with the Dundee mills in the finer qualities. On the contrary,

should the trade in Indian sacks diminish for any reason – e. g., the discovery or cultivation of cheaper substitutes elsewhere in the world, or the discarding of sacks for bulk handling – then we may take it that the mills on the Hooghly, most of them splendidly built and equipped on the shed principle,³ will not be allowed to rot and decay as historical monuments, but will be turned on to a savage competition with Dundee for the markets in finer goods.

Today such a competition, in our judgment, is impossible for several reasons: (1) the Indian Jute Mill Owners are making fabulous profits out of their present manufacture of narrow width Hessian and sacking; and (2) while the wages rates are scandalously low, the relative efficiency of the Dundee mill-worker to the Indian mill-worker is at least three to one, and we have heard competent authorities place the ratio very much higher; the Indian mill-worker suffers from the disadvantages of an exceedingly hot climate, which makes sustained, intensive work at certain periods of the day and year physically impossible; he has not had even a primary education; about 70 or 75 per cent of the Indian mill-workers are agriculturists who are only recruited for the mills at such seasons of the year as they can leave their small farms; they do not permanently settle in the mill areas, but come, some of them, from a distance of 1,000 miles for temporary employment and wages to enable them to pay the moneylender and landlord at home. That they fall among moneylenders and other sharks in the mill areas, that they are unorganised, and that they waste a large part of their earnings upon alcohol and upon marriage customs, where, for example, even the poorest will cheerfully borrow a sum equal to four months' wages at a ruinously high rate of interest – sometimes 300 per cent – for the nuptial festivities of his daughter, only adds to the difficulty of increasing the *status*, efficiency, and purchasing power of the Indian mill-worker.

The Indian jute mills are not engaged in the manufacture of the same class of goods as are the jute mills of Dundee, and Indian jute labour is not now, and so far as we can see, is not likely to be, in active competition with Dundee labour for many years to come, unless, as we have said, the whole situation is suddenly changed by any set of circumstances which would compel the mill-owners on the Hooghly at whatever cost to discard their present manufactures.

Enormous profits

The profits made by the jute mills on the Hooghly are simply staggering. Mr. K.C. Roy Chowdhury, who is a Government nominee on the Bengal Legislative Council, and who has made a special study of the finance of the industry, gave us the following figures, which have been admitted by other authorities to be substantially accurate:

Year	Looms	Capital and Debentures in Rs.	Profits in Rs.
1915	38,000	36,000,000	60,000,000
1920	40,000	42,000,000	40,000,000
1924	50,000	52,000,000	25,000,000

One and a half crores of rupees at the normal rate of exchange is equal to £1,000,000 sterling.

In 1925 the Reserve Funds which have come out of profits amounted to 22 crores (£16 ½ millions) and when Reserve Funds and Profits are added together the total gain to the shareholders in the ten years (1915 – 1924) reached the enormous total of £300 millions sterling, or 90 per cent per annum on the capital.

There are from 300,000 to 327,000 workers employed at an average wage today of £12 10/- per annum.

A profit of £300 millions taken from 300,000 workers in ten years means £1,000 per head.

That means £100 a year from each worker.

And as the average wage is about £12 10/- per head, it means that the average annual profit is eight times the wages bill.

And not only that, but the land and the buildings in most cases are worth from ten to 15 times the sums at which they stand in the companies' balance-sheets.

Let us examine the balance-sheets of some of the best paying companies.

Mill	Dividends for year/ Percentage distributed to shareholders								
	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924
Fort Gloster	115	117 ½	165	150	200	62 ½	120	120	165
Gourrepore	90	190	250	220	250	20	70	80	120
Kelvin	80	100	150	225	300	102 ½	70	85	110
Kinnison	110	200	250	250	400	135	160	120	160

There are many more mills with equally amazing profiteering records, but the figures already given and the fact that the average dividend for all the companies over a period of ten years, is 90 per cent, will give you some idea of the incentives which encourage the owners of the Indian jute mills to continue on their present processes, and make it exceedingly unlikely that they will embark upon a competition in qualities which they are presently unable to handle.

In addition to the Company profits, many of the firms of managing agents are reaping enormous dividends. Thus, for example, the firm of Andrew Yule & Co., on March 4 1925, capitalised a portion of their undivided profits to the extent of 65 lakhs of rupees (one lakh equals £7,500); in other words the shareholders received a free gift of 13 shares for every 18 they had previously held, and each share was worth 100 rupees (£7 10/-). About 60 per cent of the shares in the jute mills are now held by Indians, but the effective management still rests in the hands of British capitalists, mostly Scotsmen.

There are many thousands of shareholders, but the identity of large numbers is difficult to establish owing to the practice of the dividends not being remitted to a home address, but [in the] care of a bank. We were, however, interested to observe that Lord Inchcape is a large shareholder.⁴ In the Gourrepore shareholders' list alone we found 3,465 shares held "for MacKay & Co., Ltd., a/c, Lord Inchcape."

Wages rates

There is no standard rate of wages. Each mill owner pays what he likes. The wages vary from mill to mill, but the following figures which we set down as the normal rates earned by large numbers of workers, may be taken as pretty near the average.

[Kind of work]	[Wages] per week of four days (38 hours of actual work)					
	<i>Workers' Wages including 50 per cent War Bonus, General Bonus, and Khoraki (or food allowance granted to compensate the workers for compulsory idleness upon two days per week, due to the employers' policy of restricting production).</i>					
	Rs.	A.	P.	£	s.	d.
Batchers (women and girls)	2	4	0	0	3	4
Preparers (women and girls)	2	4	0	0	3	4
Rovers (men and women)	2	12	0	0	4	0
Spinners (males)	4	4	0	0	6	4
Winders (males)	5	0	0	0	7	6
Beamers and Dressers (males)	4	4	0	0	6	4
Weavers from six Rupees to 11 Rupees (very few at latter figure) (males)				0 to	9 15	0 0
Hemmers and Sewers (males)	4	12	0	0	7	0
Balers (males)	5	8	0	0	8	2
Jute Bale Carriers (males)	6	0	0	0	9	0
Coolies (males)	3	0	0	0	4	6
Durwans (Gatekeepers) (males)	4	0	0	0	6	0

Line <i>sardar</i> or Tenter (males)	8	0	0	0	12	0
Children in Roving Dept. (boys)	1	8	0	0	2	2
Children in Spinning Dept. (boys)	2	8	0	0	3	8
Twisters (males)	3	3	0	0	4	9
Bobbin Cleaners (old men) (males)	1	8	0	0	2	2

While these miserable wages are given as for 38 hours actual work, there are many instances where longer hours are worked. As a matter of fact the mill machinery begins at 5.30 a.m. and goes on uninterruptedly until 7 p.m., or 13½ hours a day. But most mills run a complicated shift system, which renders discovery by the Factory Inspector of the actual hours worked a matter of considerable difficulty. In some mills there are four or five shifts with varying interludes of rest during the day, with the result that while a worker may not be employed more than 11 hours permitted under the Factory Act (60 hours per week), he is, including his rest periods, actually tied to the mill from 5.30 a.m. to 7 p.m., or 13½ hours per day, and he or she may live some considerable distance from the mill gate. In addition to that, time cribbing is not uncommon, and Mr. Sime actually caught one mill by an unexpected raid working over 60 hours. This case we reported to the Factory Inspector, both for a breach of the clause in the Factory Act limiting the working hours to 60 and also because overtime rates had been refused.

Deductions

Miserably low as these wages are, they are subject to considerable deductions.

1. ***Salami***: Every worker is compelled to pay an initial bribe for permission to be employed in the mills. There is no fixed tariff, but every foreman or *sardar* simply screws what he can out of his applicants. We have heard of weavers paying as high as 75 rupees (two or three months' wages), but the general average of the first stage in the robbery appears to be about ten rupees. Every worker – man, woman and child – is held up for this tribute by the *sardars*; none may escape; and we have testimony of two cases, where assistant *sardars* were asked for extraordinary bribes by their

superiors. One had a demand made upon him for 1,500 rupees, and another for 500 rupees. In addition to this first toll there is a regular weekly or monthly compulsory *backsheesh* after that, usually amounting to a penny or two pence per week. Little wonder we had pointed out to us one *sardar* who having worked for 22 years on an average wage of 15 rupees per week, had amassed a fortune out of this robbery system amounting to 2 lakhs of rupees (about £13,000).

2. The **Kabulis**: When a worker starts in a mill it is very rarely the case that he possesses the bribe-money. He (or she) is usually an impoverished agricultural worker driven to seek temporary employment in the mills to meet the exactions and extortions of moneylenders and landlords in the home village. And so when a cash down *salami* is demanded from the employee, he has no recourse but to go to a moneylender. He has no security to offer, and the interest charged upon the loan is therefore very high indeed. All up and down the mill area we came upon hordes of these moneylenders, called *Kabulis*, who were carrying on this profitable usury business at an interest rate of 300 per cent per annum.⁵ So that to the graft of *salami* has to be added the imposition of 300 per cent usury.

3. **Fines**: Fines in the Indian Jute mills are not so common as in the Indian cotton industry, but they exist. In one mill we found during a single week 21 workers out of 478 who had fines of small amounts deducted from their wages. At the Nuddea Mill, in September 1925, there was a strike of 6,000 workers for four days against the heavy fines being imposed upon the weavers – declared to be as high in some instances as 80 per cent to 90 per cent of their wages. The workers alleged that they were receiving bad yarn, and that consequently any bad work turned out was not their fault.

Fines are quite arbitrarily fixed by the management, and may be for any cause – good, bad or indifferent – just as the management chooses. Sometimes the fines are deducted from the week's lying time, which the management retains as security against the workers' possible elopement without notice.

When all these deductions are made from the workers' wages, it will be seen that there is little left for riotous living. Yet we were amazed to see that the authorities had planted cheap alcohol and opium shops all over the mill area, whence they derive revenue out of the added miseries of a semi-starved people. We know full well that the mill-owners have hunted out

elaborate statistics about the numbers of postal orders sent home to the agricultural areas – evidence, they say, of the abounding prosperity of their workers. But these postal orders are really the monies sent home to the wives and children. If the wives and children all came to live in the mill area, then the expenditure for their maintenance would require to be made in the mill area and not in the agricultural area. That is about all the postal order statistics mean.

We do not allege that the mill-owners deliberately encourage this *salami* system by which their employees are cheated and robbed. Nor could we find any evidence to substantiate the charge sometimes made that any of the European managers or assistants themselves took bribes from the *sardars*. But the Employers' professions of inability to stop the robbery are sheer hypocrisy and nonsense. The thing has been stopped elsewhere. Mr. Addyman, the manager of the Bombay woollen mills has stopped it, with the thankful assistance of his workers who backed him in his struggle with the foremen bribe takers.⁶ And we are convinced that the *salami* system only flourishes where a Trade Union is not, and that the jute mill-owners are so anxious not to recognise a Trade Union, but only to deal with the workers through the *sardars* or foremen, that these *sardars* have the poor workers in the hollow of their hands.

Co-operation

Again, the workers in the mill areas are grievously exploited through high prices of food and other necessities. While we cannot say that no co-operative societies have been permitted, we can safely say that they have not been encouraged. In one mill (Gourrepore) the Company owns the bazaar, and one of the directors showed us round it with justifiable pride. It was the cleanest food market we had seen; it was inspected every day by the mill doctor; and although the market was let out to a contractor, his prices were rigidly controlled, and foodstuffs were cheaper there than in any other mill area, sometimes by from 33^{1/3} to 50 per cent.

But distributive co-operative societies are not encouraged. While in the whole province of Bengal there are 11,000 agricultural co-operative societies doing splendid work, doubling the yield of milk and insuring its purity (the Co-operatives have just entered into a huge contract with the

Calcutta Corporation to supply pure milk to the citizens!), and reducing the rate of interest on loans to farmers by no less than 25 per cent, there are only 20 distributive societies, and the registrar of co-operative societies, though with large funds at his disposal, cannot get a foothold in the jute mill areas at all. The only reason we have heard suggested why the mill-owners do not provide facilities or otherwise encourage distributive societies is because round these societies would grow a class cohesion and self-reliance, a capacity for administration, and out of the surplus funds, probably village halls where economic grievances might be discussed. Yet, be that as it may, through co-operation hundreds of villages have freed themselves from the toils of moneylender and middleman, and there is no reason why a definite effort cannot be made to secure suitable land in the mill areas for the erection of co-operative shops, wherein the rupees of the poor will purchase larger quantities of the necessities of life, and, what is even more important, provide training grounds and rallying centres for the spirit of working-class solidarity, without which labour on the Hooghly will remain dumb and oppressed and a menace to the workers everywhere else. We are informed that some jute mill-owners have entered into agreements with neighbouring landowners *not* to provide land for co-operative markets in competition with the existing private enterprise monopolies. If that be so, the Government of Bengal ought to decree such food monopoly agreements null and void.

Housing

Two-thirds of the workers in this industry, which makes ninety per cent dividends for the shareholders, are housed in vile, filthy, disease-ridden hovels called *bustees*. These *bustees* are one-storey blocks of mud plaster on wicker and matting, with thatched roofs [and] no windows or chimneys or fireplaces; the smoke simply oozes through the thatch if it cannot get out of the doorway, which is so low that one has to go down almost on hands and knees to enter. The *bustees* have neither light nor water supply; the floors are earthen; sanitary arrangements there are none; and usually access to groups of *bustees* can only be had along a narrow tunnel of filth where myriads of mosquitoes and flies breed, and the stench is such that one fears to strike a match lest the atmosphere, being combustible, should explode.

Inside the *bustee* there is space for three or four people to sleep – if they are not smoked out by the cooking fire – but we were assured that frequently two families lived in a *bustee*, though how that is physically possible we could not guess. One old man informed us that half the babies born in the *bustee* died, though we for our part could not understand how any lived. The director of Public Health for Bengal, in his Annual Report for 1923 declares that half the children die before they reach ten years of age, but precise estimates are difficult, as there is no compulsory registration of births, and fortunately most women mill-workers have the sense to go home to the *mofussil*, or agricultural village, when they are going to give birth to babies.

The rents charged for these foul ant-heaps of pestilence run about one shilling to one shilling and four pence a month. Often, they are owned by the *sardars* in the mill; sometimes they are owned by the Company.

The remaining third of the workers are housed in mill-lines or compounds. Some of these cement rows are a vast improvement upon the *bustees*, but the best of them are nothing to write home about. They are single room cement houses without light or water or sanitary arrangements in the house. The rooms are usually ten feet by eight feet by nine feet high and possess a window. Frequently they are built so closely facing one another in rows that there is little privacy, and many men refuse to take their families to live there. The rents vary, but usually run about four dimes a week, [with] no taxes, and water supply free at the end of the “row”. We found large numbers of these houses overcrowded with four or five men.

But with all their drawbacks these company mill-lines were sought after and certainly were an improvement upon the *bustees*. Still, taken as a whole, the houses of these unfortunate mill-workers (even though they only regard themselves as agriculturalists who are temporarily engaged in the jute industry) are a standing disgrace to the Government, the local authorities, the mill-owners and everybody who has the slightest responsibility for them.

Refused an education

But worse, perhaps, than the terrible housing conditions is the fact that the mill-worker’s child is refused that birthright among civilised peoples –

a primary education. We know, of course, all about the few toy mill schools, where a dozen *sardars* children may be seen on the benches, but for the hundreds of thousands of workers' children there is not the slightest provision, or pretence of provision, of educational facilities. In other parts of India an attempt is at least being made. At Lyallpur,⁷ Shahapur, and other parts of the Punjab a primary education is now compulsory; in two large wards of Bombay it is now compulsory and free; in the native state of Jaipur education is free right up to university, and over 20 per cent of the boys of educable age are now at school. In the native state of Baroda a lead is given which ought to make the British Government thoroughly ashamed of the – all but eight per cent – illiteracy in which the childhood of India under its control is steeped. In Baroda 91 per cent of the boys and 52 per cent of the girls receive a primary education. But in the prosperous jute mill area of Bengal, with its fabulous dividends and fortunes, the children of the workers are unable to read or write.

Child labour

The Indian Factory Act of 1922 prohibited child labour under the age of 12, and from age 12 to age 15 only half-time labour, or six hours a day, is permitted. But we are satisfied that these prohibitions are more honoured in the breach than in the observance. To begin with, there can be no home life, as we understand it, when father, mother, sons, and daughters are all working in the mill; and there being no schools, there is literally nowhere else for the younger children to pass the time than in the mill beside their parents. We saw infants of a few weeks old lying upon piles of jute waste, sleeping amid the noise of the machinery, while the mothers were working in the batching or preparing departments;⁸ children of four or five years of age were toddling about, and the Factory Inspector periodically makes raids on the preparing and spinning departments, where he catches children of eight, nine, and ten years of age employed as wage-earners for a few coppers a week. Even as it is the Factory Inspectorate, though manifestly understaffed, is engaged in about one prosecution per week of jute mill-owners for flagrant violation of the Act. The owners plead that without registration of births they have no means of knowing a child's age beyond the report of a doctor who examines the teeth and the armpits in an

endeavour to see that none but children who may be legally employed are passed on to the firm's books. But doctor or no doctor the intentions of the Act are being frustrated wholesale and retail. When we entered a mill there was generally a scurry of child labourers, who ran out of sight under the belief that we were Factory Inspectors, and there have been cases of accidents which disclosed the fact that a child's name did not appear in the mill wages book at all. Probably the *sardar* had some private books of his own.

On one occasion the Factory Inspector herded a whole staff of child labourers into the manager's office and discovered that among them there were 15 children under age whose names were not on the mill books, and, finally, the *babu* in charge admitted that he kept another set of books. In this case the manager was fined 1,400 rupees.

In another instance the Factory Inspector caught the management employing children in two shifts – one in each of the two mills under his control – clearly child labour for twelve hours per day. That this evasion of the Act by the double-shift employment of children is not uncommon was the opinion of Miss Kelman, who, in her recently published volume, "Labour in India"⁹ (page 230), says:

In Bengal the proportion of children working in at least two mills was said to be sixty-five per cent of the total number of half-timers There seems little doubt that the double employment of children is continued under the amended Act. ... Later information confirms this surmise.

In another case a boy at a public meeting complained to us that he had lost a forefinger by a mill accident, but had got no compensation, and had been refused re-employment after his hand had healed. Upon inquiry we discovered that although a notification of the accident had been sent to the Factory Inspector, the boy's name did not appear on the list of employees.

One or two of the mills have, after several prosecutions, discarded child labour altogether, but the great majority are swelling their dividends out of the employment and underpayment of children, not only in defiance of the laws in India, but in defiance of the ordinary dictates of humanity. The multiple shift system is only a "blind", an ingenious device to make detection difficult, and until it is supplanted by a single shift system the Factory

Inspectors will find it difficult to put a stop to the shameless and cruel exploitation we have just described.¹⁰

Trade unions

There are, on paper, some three or four Unions among the jute workers, but with one exception they are quite useless, have no paying membership and serve no purpose unless to advertise some politician as honorary president. The honorary presidents, we believe, pay for the notepaper headings, and that is all there is to the Unions. But there is one exception, the Bengal Jute Workers' Association, which has been largely financed and inspired for the past two years by an interesting and self-sacrificing little lady, Mrs. Santosh Kumari Gupta.¹¹ This Association, though its nominal membership is only 3,000 and its paying membership 400 to 500, is definitely making an effort to remedy workers' grievances, and was not merely a political stunt. We were particularly impressed by the organiser, Mr. Kali Das [Bhattacharya], an able, intelligent workman, who had been victimised for his trade union proclivities.¹² Mr. Das, we are confident, has the root of the matter in him.

The Union fees are only from one dime to four dimes per month, but, despite monetary limitations, it carries on a persistent work in fighting compensation cases, notifying the Factory Inspector of breaches of the Factory Act, etc.

We addressed many public meetings of workmen and advised them to join this organisation and make it one big union for the industry in India. Our efforts met with considerable success, and we have strongly urged Mr. Joshi, the secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress, to follow up our work. We have the assurance from many sources that ours was the first definite attempt on the part of the British workers to assist the Indian workers to organise themselves into an effective trade union, and if some organiser of Mr. Joshi's character, experience, disinterestedness, and authority could make the most of the results of our visit [then] one big union may be the outcome.

If the union develops, as we hope and believe it will, its first effort must be to secure recognition by the mill-owners. There are literally thousands of grievances, many of which, we believe, would be promptly remedied if representatives of the mill-owners would meet regularly with the union

officials. We got many of these grievances at public meetings – unjust dismissals, withholding and retention of lying time, wages cutting, time cribbing, vexatious and irritating opposition in compensation cases, and so on. And by dealing directly with the employers the union would succeed in smashing the *sardar*-bribery and usury system which keeps the workers enslaved and impoverished.

There is little hope meanwhile of organising the white assistants. We tried a publicly advertised meeting but met with poor results. The hour of meeting was actually altered in the press advertisement without our knowledge or consent to the impossible one of 9 p.m. And as we discovered later the press was instructed to make the alteration in an advertisement (which we had paid for) after the hall authorities had privately discussed the matter with a prominent jute mill owner.¹³

But there are some mill-owners who have assured us that so far from obstructing an effective union among their Indian employees, they would welcome it. We believe that Mr. R.N. Band, the President of the Association, is himself sympathetic, and if the other progressive owners who agree that in the jute industry in India as in every other big industry in the world, trade unionism is at once inevitable and essential, would assert themselves, there would be speedy recognition of an effective union, and the beginning of better days for the workers.

But the union must be a trade union for the purpose of dealing with workers' grievances. Any attempt to use it as a personal aggrandisement or profitable field of operations for some climber or as a political stunt, will ruin the union and throw the workers back farther into despair. The All India Trade Union Congress knows the danger. We trust Mr. Joshi will take in hand the business of organising the jute workers, and we have ventured to promise him, in that event, the active sympathy and encouragement of the British workers, who have everything to gain and nothing to lose by raising the *status* and purchasing power of their Indian brethren.

Strikes

Though there is as yet no effective trade union for the industry, the workers have frequently been driven in sheer desperation to strike without strike pay, and while subject to eviction and every other conceivable form of

compulsion and terrorism. In the nine months, June 1920, to March 1921, there were no fewer than 29 separate strikes, most of them, however, of only a few days' duration, though the Wellington Jute Mill at Serampore was closed for three weeks as a result of a strike over the alleged unjust dismissal of five men, and work was not resumed until the head *sardar*, fearing assault, had left the district.

During the past two years the Bengal Jute Workers' Association has conducted nine strikes, one at Gourrepore Mill lasting over three months. The cause of the strike was an alleged assault upon a workmen by an under manager, who is said to have used a knife. The workers demanded the dismissal of the under manager, who was finally sent home to Scotland. During this strike 3,000 evicted labourers had to be fed with rice and housed on Mrs. Santosh [Kumari] Gupta's mother's estate. Two hundred men made a dramatic march of 32 miles to and from Calcutta to lay their grievances before the mill agents at the head office. Since the strike, Gourrepore is declared to have the best working conditions, and to pay the highest scale of wages.

Most of the recent strikes, however, appear to have been against time-cribbing.

The Ryot

The *ryot* is the grower of Jute. He is miserably paid for his crop, and between him and the jute manufacturer there are several layers of quite unnecessary middlemen who take toll upon the raw material. The *ryot* sells to the *faria*, who in turn sells to the *bepari*, who in turn sells to the *arathdar*, who in turn sells to the *baler*.¹⁴ Besides that there is great financial speculation on the jute crop, with the result that not only is the *ryot* frequently underpaid (so that in the succeeding year he limits his jute crop and grows something else, thereby creating a shortage and high prices), but the supplies of the raw material at a reasonable price are uncertain.

When the price rises there is at once an attempt made to reduce the wages of the workers in Dundee; the Dundee worker has, therefore, a vital and urgent interest in securing a regular supply of raw jute at reasonable and steady prices.

We discussed this part of the problem with Mr. Mitra, the registrar of co-operative societies under the Bengal Government. He would be delighted to organise a co-operative society of jute growers to dispense with the middlemen and speculators if he could assure the *ryots* of a guaranteed market at a reasonable price, which he declares would be lower than present prices. Indeed, we have a definite offer from him, which we will transmit to the proper quarters, to organise a co-operative guaranteed supply if the manufacturers in Dundee will make the necessary arrangements in time.

Conclusions

We have sought, as briefly as possible, to present a faithful and accurate account of the labour conditions in the jute industry in India, and we conclude our report by summarising the conclusions we have arrived at:

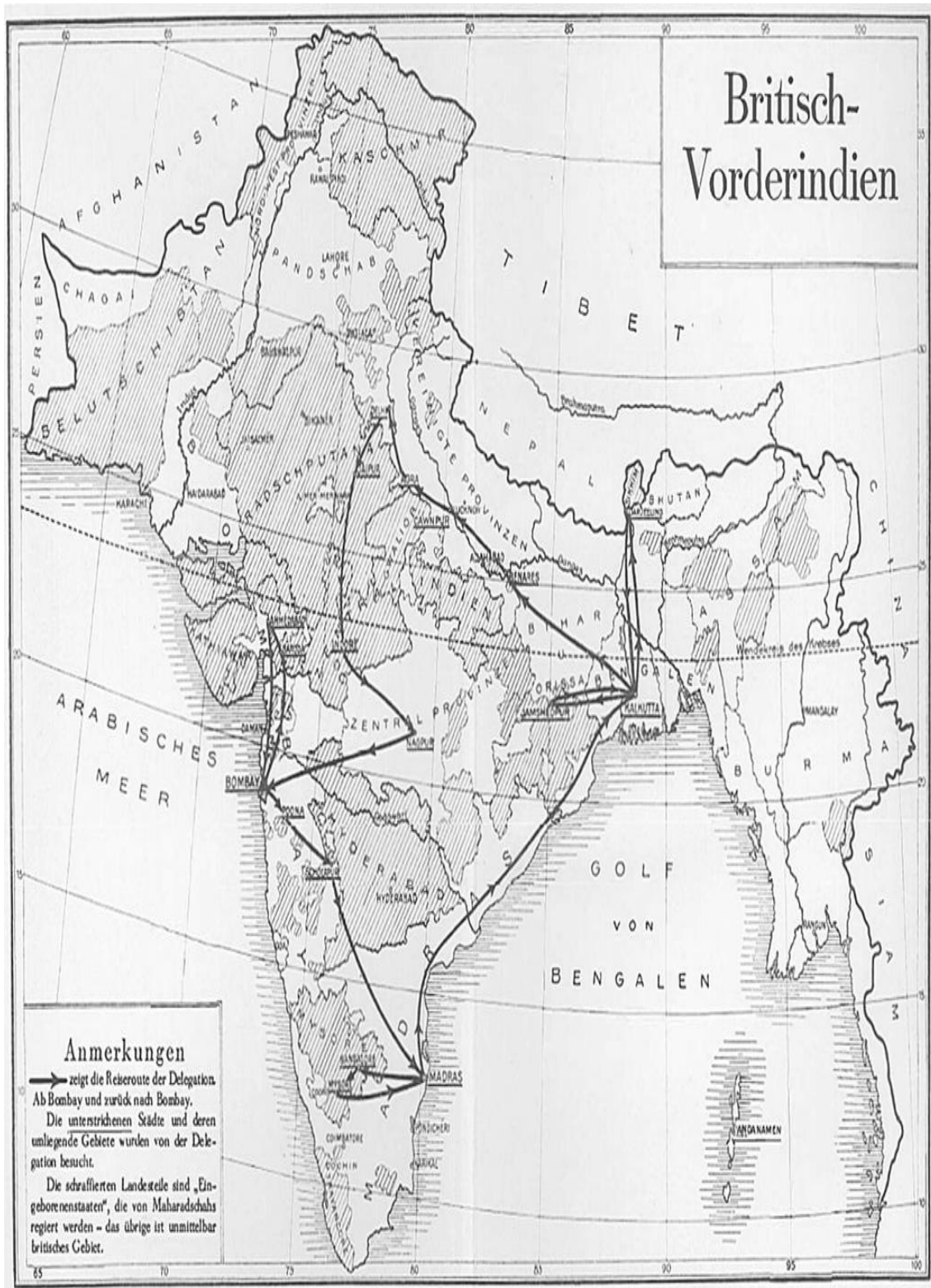
1. It is not the case that the jute goods manufactured in India are either in direct or indirect competition with the main classes of goods now manufactured in Dundee, though under certain circumstances it is not impossible that such a competition may at some future time develop. At the present time our greatest competitors are the United States (where higher wages are paid), Germany and Checko-Slovakia. We have figures from the Overseas Trade Department showing that the last named country is greatly increasing its production of jute manufactures; this year its purchases of raw jute are 100 per cent over its last year's figures, and it is exporting large quantities of manufactured goods, notably to Argentina.
2. The profits in the jute industry in India are enormous, and the wages and living conditions of the workers miserable.
3. The low wages and semi-serf conditions are, of course, an inducement to British and foreign capitalist adventurers to extend and develop [production] as far as they can production on the Hooghly.
4. It is therefore essential in the interests not only of the workers in India, but in the interests of the workers in Dundee, that the remuneration and *status* of the Indian worker should not remain at its present low level. What competition there may one day be should not be of

international starvation or based upon the misery and degradation of the workers. The late Lord Curzon estimated the average annual income of the Indian people to be two pounds per head. More recent estimates place it at from £3,15/- to five pounds (Bombay Labour Office estimate). Probably four pounds is pretty near the actual amount for all of India and for an average family of five persons; that means £20 per annum, or a weekly family income of eight pounds, which clearly means inability to purchase the barest necessities of life. No fewer than forty million people in India are said to “lie down having eaten only one meal a day.”

5. To protect the Indian worker and to raise his *status* and purchasing power (which in turn will benefit the producers of export goods in Britain), a strong trade union is necessary; a primary education is necessary; co-operative societies are necessary; and in the first of these three essentials at least the British workers can and ought to render material assistance in the formative stages to their Indian brethren.
6. Every effort ought to be made to stop the speculation in raw jute, and co-operative societies should be encouraged among the growers with a view to the abolition of unnecessary middlemen, and to the stabilising of the market.

Thomas Johnston, M.P.

John F. Sime



Itinerary map of the delegation of the International Textile Workers' Association in 1926/27. [K. Schrader and F. J. Furtwängler: *Das werktätige Indien*, end of volume]

Notes

- 2 Jute manufactures may be divided into four main classes: (i) Gunny bags, used for packing rice, wheat, oilseeds, etc., and during the war as sand-bags; (ii) gunny cloth, or “Hessians” used for baling cotton, wool and other fibres; (iii) coarse carpets and rugs, of the showy and cheap variety; and (iv) cordage. See Vera Anstey, *The Economic Development of India* (London [etc.]: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 280.
- 3 Jute mills in Dundee were built in two-storey buildings. In contrast, most mills in Bengal were single-story buildings. The mill machinery, thus, was assembled on one floor, and the production line was not interrupted by having to manually transport material from one floor to another. This arrangement came to be known as the shed principle. W.A. Graham Clark, *Linen, Jute, and Hemp Industries in the United Kingdom. With Notes on the Growing and Manufacture of Jute in India*, ed. Department of Commerce [United States of America], Vol. Special Agents Series No. 74 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 160.
- 4 Lord Inchcape: James Lyle Mackay (1852 – 1932), director and chair of numerous British shipping and banking concerns.
- 5 “... we saw these *Kabulis* at the jute factory gates, large hefty fellows with turbans and beards and big sticks, engaged in collecting their dues.” Thomas Johnston, *Memories* (London: Collins, 1952), 73.
- 6 In his autobiography, Johnston says Addyman eliminated the “*sardar* robbery system” by sacking the bribe takers. Johnston, *Memories*, 73.

- 7 The city is today known as Faisalabad.
- 8 The production of jute proceeded in six steps: (1) batching; (2) preparing; (3) spinning; (4) winding; (5) weaving; (6) finishing. Batching is the selection and softening of the jute with a view to the type of cloth to be woven. Preparing is arranging the fiber for spinning by homogenizing it through carding and drawing.
- 9 Janet Harvey Kelman, *Labour in India. A Study of the Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923).
- 10 WE FOUND NOTHING IN THE JUTE AREA IN ANYWAY ANALOGOUS TO THE ABOMINABLE *SATHI* SYSTEM OF RECRUITING CHILD LABOUR WHICH IS IN OPERATION IN THE *AHMEDABAD* COTTON MILLS. UNDER THIS *SATHI* OR COMPANION SYSTEM LABOUR RECRUITERS AND JOBBERS GO AROUND THE VILLAGES OFFERING POOR MEN SUMS OF MONEY RANGING FROM 30 TO 40 RUPEES (SAY THREE POUNDS) FOR EACH BOY WHO IS APPRENTICED TO THEM FOR A PERIOD OF FOUR OR FIVE YEARS. THE APPRENTICED BOY IS TAKEN AWAY TO THE COTTON MILL AREA, AND, ACCORDING TO THE *ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TEXTILE LABOUR UNIONS OF AHMEDABAD* FOR 1924, IS “OFTEN RESOLD AT A PROFIT AND FORCED TO WORK FOR 10 HOURS DAILY AGAINST PROVISIONS OF THE FACTORY LAW, MORNING TIME IN ONE MILL AND THE AFTERNOON IN ANOTHER.” THE WAGES EARNED BY THESE BOYS “GO INTO THE POCKETS OF THEIR OWNERS. THEY ARE COMPELLED TO GROW UP WITHOUT EDUCATION, TO LIVE IN SEMI-STARVED CONDITIONS IN THE WORST MORAL AND PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS.” OF THIS FORM OF CHATTEL SLAVERY WE COULD FIND NO TRACE IN THE *CALCUTTA* JUTE MILLS.
- 11 The authors refer to Santosh Kumari Gupta. In the early 1920s, Gupta founded the Gouripore Works Employees Association. See Parimal Ghosh, *Colonialism, Class and a History of the Calcutta Jute Millhands 1880 – 1930* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000), 227 – 231.

- 12** The authors refer to Kalidas (or Kali Das) Bhattacharya. Along with Santosh Kumari Gupta, he had been a vice-president of the Gouripur Works Employees Association. Bhattacharya was an active figure in the formation of the two other unions in the same year, Nuddea Mill Labour Union and Reliance Mill Labour Union in the Bhatpara area. He turned out to be a major labour organizer. These three unions have been the nucleus of the Bhatpara-based Bengal Jute Workers Association (later renamed Union) formed in February 1925 at the initiative of Sibnath Banerji, Santosh Kumari Gupta, Kalidas Bhattacharya and Siddeshwar Chatterji. See Ranajit Das Gupta, *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India. Studies in Colonial History* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1994), 444.
- 13** “There were about 800 to 900 Dundee white assistants in the Bengal jute factories”. Johnston, *Memories*, 74.
- 14** A detailed overview of this complex brokering is provided by Omkar Goswami, *Industry, Trade, and Peasant Society. The Jute Economy of Eastern India 1900 – 1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) – 51.

Report of Investigations into the Conditions of Indian Textile Workers, Presented to the International Federation of Textile Workers by the Secretary, The Right Hon. T. Shaw. M.P. (1927)

Tom Shaw

The text has been edited as follows: 1) Minor grammatical and spelling mistakes have been corrected. 2) The spelling of names of persons and places has been homogenized throughout the document. 3) Tables have been homogenized throughout the document.

Report Section 1

General introduction

The delegation of Textile Workers which sailed to India from Marseilles on November 5 1926, and set sail back from Bombay on February 26 1927, consisted of myself, representing the International Federation of Textile Workers' Association; my daughter, Marie, as shorthand writer and secretary; Messrs. Hindle and Brothers, representing the English Cotton Workers;² and Messrs. Furtwängler and Schrader, representing the German Textile Workers.

Our plan of work

We fixed for ourselves a rather ambitious programme, perhaps far too ambitious to be realised thoroughly.

We desired to find out what were the hours of labour and the wages of the workers, what the workers did for their wages, how many machines they tended, and what was their efficiency. We tried to discover what were the conditions in factories, whether accidents were frequent, whether compensation was paid, and how the organisation of the workers in trade unions was proceeding. We desired to know what was the status of the workers, whether there was any obstacle, either on the part of the Government or the employers, to their becoming members of a trade union, whether there was anything in the nature of pensions or payment during periods of sickness, how workers were found for the factories, what was the general health of the textile workers, and how they compared with other workers. We investigated the relations which exist between employers and such trade union organisations as exist. We tried to discover how conditions, in that part of India which is under British rule, compared with the conditions in native or Indian

States. We were interested in the housing of textile workers. We tried to find out what were the chief hindrances to organisation, how the caste system was operating amongst the workers, and which were the most backward areas. We desired also to know the extent of the textile trade in India, if possible, to find some rough statistics as to the production of textile goods and the kind of textile goods. We were anxious to learn what direct bearing the conditions of the workers in India might be said to have on the conditions of workers in Europe. Generally speaking, we desired to make a complete survey of the economic and political position of the workers, to contrast them with the conditions in Europe and, if possible, to find some way of helping – either by advice or otherwise – in the organisation of the Indian worker. We were, of course, keenly desirous of finding a way of linking up Indian textile workers with our International [Federation of Textile Workers' Association].

My daughter and I, unfortunately, fell ill of a tropical fever when the work was half completed, and the full tragedy was played out when we had to land at Gibraltar, as my daughter, after recovering from fever, had contracted smallpox on the return journey. It will be known to members of the Committee that she died at Gibraltar and is buried there. The rest of the delegation, however, completed the work which had been mapped out for them, and altogether travelled many thousands of miles in so doing.

At a rough estimate, some 10,000 miles of travelling was done in India, a very large number of factories were examined, agricultural villages and workshops of other industrial workers were visited for purposes of comparison, and every source of information was sought which would help us in our task. From the very beginning of the delegation I personally declined to discuss Indian politics, not because of any lack of interest, but because I had been sent out to do special work which I felt would be hindered if I attempted to graft on to it anything in the nature of political propaganda. It will be understood that a British Member of Parliament in a country like

India is asked many questions by keen political students and workers. We had to get our information from three main sources: firstly, the trade union organisations that exist; secondly, the employers' associations; thirdly, the Government offices. For that reason, it seemed – as it still seems – to me best not to talk general politics, but to get on with the work we had been sent to do, and I am glad that, generally speaking, the other members of the delegation followed that rule.

Indian hospitality

We were met with the most extraordinary kindness on all sides. Mr. N.M. Joshi and Mr. Bakhale, of the Servants of India Society, the two men who are perhaps more responsible than any other two men in Bombay for the organisation of textile workers that exists there, drew up an elaborate programme of places to visit, and spared neither time nor energy in helping us. From the organised workers in all the centres visited we received the same self-sacrificing help; the employers' associations in every place we visited willingly put at our disposal information concerning wages and conditions; Government officials were found willing to place all their time and their information at our disposal. From beginning to end of the delegation, it is safe to say that we were never refused access to any mill we wanted to visit, never refused information with regard to wages, hours, and conditions, and were always given, with the greatest courtesy, all the statistical and other information in the possession of all Government Departments.

Vastly different conditions

It will be understood that all of the members of the delegation were Europeans, acquainted more or less with industrial conditions and the methods of living of European workers, and with a general

knowledge of the conditions and habits of life of the European textile workers. It is a comparatively easy thing to contrast, for example, the conditions of German, Danish, Belgian, or French textile workers with those, say, of their English colleagues. After all, in European countries, where the textile industry is developed, workers approximate to the same method of living, and have almost the same habits and amusements. In India, comparison is not so easy. The part of the country which may be said to be under British protection is split into several presidencies or provinces, and there are no less than 562 Indian or Native States which make their own regulations regarding industrial law.

Not only is that the case, but the method of working in the factories varies so widely from European conditions that it is almost impossible to make accurate – or even approximately accurate – comparisons. If we take, for instance, the Indian cotton industry, we should have to try to compare it with the conditions in England. Formerly, 80 per cent of the exported production of the Lancashire cotton trade worker was sent to India. The Indian cotton mills are equipped almost exclusively with Lancashire machinery, and the technical direction is almost wholly English too. So, in order to get a comparison between Europe and India in the cotton trade, one inevitably is bound to compare English conditions with Indian conditions. The very machinery in Indian cotton mills is made to compete with English products.

This is easily stated, but comparison is exceptionally difficult. To begin with, in the cardroom, for instance, we found three, four, and five times the number of workers employed to do the work which would have been done in Lancashire on the same machinery. So, it is evident that, in making an economic comparison, wages alone could not be accepted as a basis. This proportion of workers is almost the same in other departments. It was freely alleged by employers and their managers that, although the mill engines ran ten hours per day, the custom the workers had of taking their food when

they wanted it, and excessive loitering in the mill compounds – or yards – reduced the actual working hours considerably, below ten a day. Whilst not accepting these statements at their full-face value, there does seem to be ground for assuming that century-old traditions make the somewhat rigid discipline of Europe not easily realisable in India.

Our difficulties in drawing a comparison as to the standard of life were just as great. Indian workers have for centuries abstained from certain expensive foods which European workers purchase when they are able to do so. By tradition and religion, the Indian confines himself willingly to an expenditure on food which is very much smaller than is incurred by the English cotton worker, with whom, for the moment, I am comparing him. It is alleged on the workers' side that in spite of the Indian worker's custom of living on much less food than European workers are accustomed to, and of being satisfied to live on cheap foods, he does not even get enough of the latter. What is incontrovertible is that the Indian worker, even when able to buy a sufficiency of food, lives much more sparingly and cheaply than his European colleague. The wages of the Indian worker are shamefully low, but I am anxious that the full picture shall be shown without distortion, and that a due sense of proportion should be observed.

Hovels – but no homes

The most shocking of all the differences is that which exists in housing. The English textile worker, generally, when he marries, has a house of at least four rooms. We have seen Indian textile and other workers with even two families in one small, covered space, which only by the widest stretch of imagination could be called a room, and which it would be a mockery to call a home. We have seen people actually sleeping in the streets in preference to sleeping in the disgraceful and infamous *chawls* which exist in Bombay. It is mere justice to say of the employers that over and over again we

saw *chawls*, *bustees*, or “lines” built by them, in close proximity to their factories, which were superior in every way to the *chawls* that were let by private owners to the workers who were unfortunate enough to have to rent them. The Development Department of the Bombay Government also had erected huge blocks of houses, very similar in outward appearance to the externally extremely solidly built and many-storied houses in cities like Berlin, but the interior of these buildings is on strongly orthodox traditional Indian lines. One room for a family, no private sanitary arrangements, a common tap for washing – these things exist even in the municipal buildings. My poor girl and I were horror-struck, driving back from the first meeting of workers we attended, when we almost ran over a child who was asleep on a rug in the street, evidently intended to sleep there all night.

That will give some idea of the terrible housing of the people. There were scores of people sleeping on the ground with, apparently, a very thin mattress for bed and a thin rug for covering. Words fail me to picture the squalor, the darkness, and the misery of some of the *chawls* we saw. There again, however, comparisons are difficult. I saw with my own eyes that many workers themselves apparently try to close out all fresh air and light from their dwellings, thus making even worse the vile conditions which exist. I had constantly to remind myself that it is not always possible to measure Eastern conditions with Western measures, but, even when every allowance is made for differences of climate, habits, tradition and religion, the housing of Indian workers is a disgrace and a blot on the record of any Government, whether British or Indian.

It is my intention to give, at the end of this general survey, detailed statements showing the wages of the workers and the number of hours worked per day. In this part of the general statement I desire to deal with the comparison between mills run, either wholly or partly, by British capital and managed by British technical experts and those which are definitely Indian in

capitalisation and – so far as possible – Indian in technical staff. I desire also to call attention to the relative position, as it appears in provinces or presidencies under what might be termed British rule, and purely Indian or Native States.

European and Indian employers

We certainly saw nothing which proved that Indian employers or Indian States gave better wages, conditions, or hours than European employers in British-administered territory. It is fairly safe to say that hours are longer and wages – as a general rule – are lower in Indian States than in the so-called British part of India. From my own observation, I should say that, generally speaking, the Indian capitalist does not err in the direction either of being more generous or kinder to the workers than the European employer. That is putting the case very mildly indeed. I want to stress this matter, because, in the present state of India, when so many people are fighting – and quite justifiably fighting – for the day when an Indian administration will be possible in India, the workers may be led to think that only political freedom is necessary in order to redress their grievances. That would indeed be a fatal error. A powerful trade union organisation is even more necessary, if anything, in Indian states and in Indian mills, than in ordinary British states and British or European mills. This, of course, is a general statement to which there are exceptions. The delegation saw Indian mills and met Indian employers quite equal, in every way, to British mills or employers.

So far as the cotton trade is concerned, in its aggregation in Bombay, it was impossible for us to find what part of the capital could be called foreign, and what part could be called Indian. There is little doubt, however, that so far as an overwhelming proportion of capital is concerned, it is not held by non-Indians at all, but is held by Indians themselves. From the factories I saw I should say also that the general conditions are certainly no better in purely Indian

concerns than they are where part of the capital or the technical management is in British, or other non-Indian hands. Rather the contrary is the case and the tendency – generally speaking – where purely Indian administration exists, is for the conditions to be worse.

Illiteracy a stumbling block to organisation

So far as the organisation is concerned, we found that the greatest difficulty that exists is in the lack of education amongst the workers themselves. The shameful neglect of the British and Native Governments to provide for the education of the people is responsible for the fact that it is practically impossible in India today to find a textile trade union organisation administered and controlled by the workers in the industry. One of the principal difficulties existing in one of the largest textile centres in India is that it is impossible to find collectors of contributions and members of the committee with the rudiments of education necessary to enter names and figures in a book and to read circulars which are issued. Until this state of things is altered, it is idle for either employers or anyone else to make too much of “outsiders” becoming officials of trade unions. How, indeed, can it be otherwise, when the poor worker himself has had absolutely no chance of getting the slightest education in order to fit him to manage his own affairs?

Good work of textile employers

In order that the truth may be spoken, and credit rendered where it is due, let me mention an extraordinary fact. It is precisely the great employers of labour in the textile trade who appear to be doing more for the education of the masses than either national or local governments. Over and over again, in the huge concerns that we saw in different parts of India, we noticed in the mill grounds, or compounds, schools that were being maintained by the employers

for the purpose of giving instruction, first to the young persons – boys and girls – who were employed in the mills, and secondly, in many cases, to the younger children of the workers employed. The same thing applied to the provision of sickness benefit and medical treatment. Over and over again we found that there seemed to be absolutely no provision – or very meagre provision indeed – made by the authorities, but, judged by Indian standards, a remarkably good provision made by the employers. This state of things, of course, must be taken into account in trying to draw conclusions on purely economic matters. When one has found, for instance, what is being paid to a worker for a specific piece of work and can contrast the actual money paid for the same work in another country, one is still only at the beginning of the economic calculation.

There are many other factors to be taken into consideration, one of the principal being the very heavy expenditure incurred by some great firms in sickness and hospital provision, educational facilities, and the provision of social amenities in a way quite unknown in England, which, for almost every reason, is the country with which a comparison with India might be attempted, even if it be difficult to make.

The economic aspect

The lack of education to which I have referred is, in my opinion, the greatest of all obstacles against a strong trade union movement amongst the textile workers of India, although the wages, which I shall give as a separate section, may appear scandalously low in comparison with European standards. When everything is taken into account – the method of living to which the workers are accustomed and the cost of food – there is really no economic reason why powerful organisations should not grow up. Certainly, there are no economic circumstances which are stronger against the workers forming organisations than the economic conditions which obtained

in Europe at the beginnings of the trade union movement in this country. Neither, so far as one can judge, is there any inherent difficulty caused by the attitude of the employers' associations in the places we visited. As a matter of fact, generally speaking, one can say with confidence that if the Indian workers possess the desire to organise, neither their economic circumstances nor the opposition of the employers will prevent them. On behalf of the Government it is fairly safe to say that no exceptional measures are likely to be taken against the formation of trade unions which are definitely formed for the purpose of increasing wages, shortening hours, and working for the full economic and political freedom of their members.

Colossal difficulties

The obstacles, however, which confront the men of good intentions who are trying to organise the Indian workers are tremendous. It is foolish not to see that differences of caste and religion and the lack of education are barriers that need lion-hearted men to surmount. The distances in India between centre and centre, too, are so enormous that I came to the conclusion that a national centralised textile workers' organisation in that country will need many, many years indeed to build. As a matter of fact, what is growing is a chain of quite independent organisations, officered and administered by non-textile workers of the educated classes, and in which it is often alleged that merely political and not economic interests are the main-spring of the actions of the founders of the unions. However much truth there may be in these allegations, I can but repeat that in the present state of lamentable ignorance of the Indian workers, due to the fact that Governments have never faced their responsibilities, there is no other way of organisation possible than by the help of good-intentioned men and women who possess the education necessary to deal with organisational tasks.

Politicians and the labour organisations

It is practically certain that anyone belonging to the educated and leisured classes, who is keenly interested enough to give his or her time to the building of labour organisations, will almost certainly be a politician. There may even be cases where the politician will try to get an entry into the workers' movement for the purpose of furthering his own political ambition, rather than doing the work of the union to which he attaches himself. It would indeed be vain to expect that there will never be cases of that nature. One thing is certain, that I saw nothing which would cause me to believe anything but the very best of those Indians of culture and education who are giving their time, and spending their energies, in helping the workers to develop strong organisations. In a very highly technical industry like ours, it will be inevitable that men of the type I have mentioned, knowing little or nothing of the technicalities of the trade, will make blunders in details and even serious mistakes in negotiations with employers. But even these defects are as dust in the balance compared with the workers remaining absolutely unorganised, without anybody to focus their grievances, and individually, of course, unable to secure redress in any grievance where the employer does not voluntarily accede to requests made.

Crying need for education

Again, at a danger of incurring censure for continual reiteration, may I draw attention to the fact that the difficulties I have been speaking of would not exist if the workers themselves possessed the necessary education to administer their own affairs. Whatever may be the course of India and its working-people during the next few years, one thing seems to me absolutely certain: that is that the biggest boon that can be given to the Indian people at the present time is compulsory education for all children. In the course of a

generation this would probably have a wonderful effect in improving the condition of the Indian workers. Only an infinitesimal number of them can read or write, and 60 million of them are so-called “untouchables”. Fancy 60 million people who are not considered worthy even of being touched by their own countrymen! This outstanding fact alone will show what a herculean task awaits those who in India are trying to form unions of the workers, so that the latter may advance themselves economically, physically, and morally. So long as present conditions exist, the workers will always be in danger of being used merely as pawns. Their only real guarantee will be found when they are able themselves to manage their own organisations and determine their own policy.

Amazing figures

From figures supplied to us, it appears that less than three per cent of the 247,000,000 people in British India are receiving elementary education. What this figure actually means if applied as a proportion to children and young persons I am unable to say, but it is fairly safe to assume that only an infinitesimal percentage of the children of parents who work for wages receive any education at all. In the Indian States of Baroda and Indore, great attempts have been made to carry through universal and compulsory education of children. It is true that there are many difficulties in the way even of native princes who desire compulsory education, in spite of their great powers over their peoples. In Baroda, for instance, there appears to be a huge deadweight of apathy and lethargy on the part of the people which is hampering the State authorities. It is a fact, however, that we saw in Baroda an “untouchable” child sitting on the same bench with children of other castes in an elementary school. Whether outside the schoolroom “untouchable” children are permitted to have the usual friendly intercourse of childhood or not I cannot say. What is evident, however, is that Baroda and Indore in particular are showing

an example of progress in the educational field that British-administered areas might well emulate. The fact that only three per cent of 247 million are receiving elementary education is the greatest condemnation of any responsible Government. It is idle to say that things are better under British rule than they were previously under native rule. The real question is:

Are they as good as they might be? Good government, surely, consists in raising the intellectual, the moral, and physical standards of the people; so long as the people are allowed to remain in ignorance of the printed word, the responsible Government, whether native or British, cannot be absolved from blame.

Human beings too cheap

To put it bluntly, the fact of the matter is that human beings are too cheap in India. Wherever one goes one sees things done that show how criminally cheap is human flesh and blood. Whether in mills, private houses, or the public streets, the same thing is to be seen. Just a little example will show what I mean. The very first day of our arrival in Bombay I saw six men carrying a piano on their heads, as if there were no wheels in the city and no more scientific way of working than to make men literally beasts of burden. One sees relatively huge staffs of servants kept in private houses because they are so cheap, [who] will live on a few pence worth of cheap grain, and be satisfied with very little to wear. The textile mills are no exception. There again you find thousands of men doing, for very low wages, the work that much lesser numbers do in Europe for considerably higher wages.

I know that it may be urged on the part of many Indians that climatic conditions, the stamina of the workers, and the traditions and the habits of the people generally, make European methods of work impossible. I agree that the heat of India will probably prevent the individual worker from ever doing quite as much work as his

European bother. I am also prepared to admit that you cannot apply the same standards absolutely in Europe and in India, but with the most generous allowance made for climate, traditions, and habits, the fact still stands out sharp and clear that precisely because the Indian can be purchased so cheaply in the market do the present conditions exist.

Judging from a rather limited inspection, much reading, and some calculation, I am extremely doubtful whether Indian labour is much more economical – if even it be any more economical – from the employer's point of view than European labour. I frankly admit that I was unable to get definite and precise information on the point; it is, however, very doubtful as to whether cheap Indian labour, working long hours, badly fed, badly housed, badly educated, and weak physically, is, even as a mere economic and money proposition, better value than the more highly paid, better educated, and stronger European textile worker. In cases where we were able to find precisely what was paid for a given piece of work we did not find the Indian rates sensationally below English rates.

Employers clamour for protection

It is a significant fact that Indian employers, not only in the textile industry, but in other industries as well, are becoming more and more insistent on protective taxes, in order to safeguard their industry against the "foreigner". It is certain that the fabulous profits of years ago are not being realised today in the textile industry, but it may also be true that the traditions of the employers, being a tradition of fantastic profits, causes them to cry out, not because the industry is not a paying proposition, but because they are only making in the shape of real profits slightly more than is being made in other parts of the world. Wherever one goes in India one hears stories of fierce Japanese competition in the cotton trade. How much of this complaint is well founded, and how much in order that higher

prices may be charged to the public, I am not in a position to say. I am inclined, however, to the belief that Indian mills, well-managed and administered, and capitalised at their real value, are not at all bad profit-making institutions, even in these days of so-called trade depression.

Rival unions

Speaking generally of organisation in India, we found a very regrettable state of affairs. In Bombay, in spite of the fact that the recent great dispute brought the workers together, there are still two Textile Workers' Organisations competing against each other. Madras is another example, and outside the textile workers' movements the same state of things is everywhere to be seen.

At the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, Madras, there was a separate union, apparently run with the consent, if not with the active support, of the employers, and which was said to be managed and officered by the actual workers themselves. Side by side with this there was an independent organisation containing textile workers, which was officered by what are termed "outsiders", that is to say, highly educated young men with no knowledge of the textile trade gained in the factory, and in which, owing to alleged dangers of victimisation, there was no free and open election of members of the committee. As a matter of fact, it was evident that the principal officers themselves selected the committee. The members of the delegation were confronted here with a very real difficulty. The organisation which was formed inside the two factories said that it was quite willing to join with the other organisation, but on certain well-defined conditions. The principal of these conditions was that the chief offices should be filled by men belonging to the trade, and whatever "outsiders" were brought in they should be brought in as advisers only and not as officials. It was evidently the opinion of the other union that the union formed inside the mills was not

independent in action, but was run with the full consent and approval of the employers themselves, and it was doubtful whether in case of opposition on the part of the employers [that] the action taken by the union would be firm enough.

We could not, of course, take sides in these matters; there was a great deal to be said for the arguments put forth by both sides. A suggestion was made to both bodies that they should meet together without any preliminary conditions being laid down and talk matters over freely. I do not know the latest developments, but at the moment of our leaving Madras there seemed to be no possibility of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills' Union receding from its demand that the principal officers of the combined union should be men who knew the textile trade, or of the other union receding from its intention to have as its president Mr. Shiva Rao, an educated man who had never been, of course, a textile worker. Seething with political feeling as India is, particularly amongst its young men, it is quite possible that this kind of difference of opinion will take some time to surmount.

Trade union contributions

The unions that are formed in the textile trade fix the contributions of the members at such a low rate that real effective fighting organisations cannot be built up. I have already expressed the opinion that, economically, the difficulties of organisation in India are not greater than, if as great as, they were in Europe at the commencement of trade union organisations. Indeed, the history of much of the trade unionism of Europe is very strikingly similar to what is now going on in India. At the beginnings of our movement in Europe merely nominal payments were expected, and propaganda and reason were far more relied upon than provision for the financial support of the members in case of struggles with the employers. The highest contribution I found for any textile workers' trade union in

India was about 4/6 a year, and the lowest about four pence. No more than Europe, can India escape from a perfectly evident, even if cynical, fact. It is, that cheap trade unionism, that is to say trade unionism that tries to do its work on a few pence a year, will be “cheap” in its results. Reason, argument, propaganda, good-will, and enthusiasm are all very well in their way. Unfortunately, in the present state of society the worker’s capacity to defend himself during a long stoppage counts often for far more.

Freedom of meeting and press

We had absolute ocular proof that there is perfect freedom of meeting and press, and that, whatever the political conditions may be, no restriction of liberty prevents the growth of trade unions. It would be a mistake, however, to apply European views of the twentieth century too absolutely to conditions in India. Fifty years ago, in our own continent, there were very striking analogies to the present Indian conditions. Our people were badly educated, downtrodden, and oppressed both by employers and Governments. From the point of view of Government and employers’ opposition, European workers were infinitely worse placed 60 years ago than the workers of India now are. On the other hand, differences of custom, religion, caste, and race in India offer difficulties against which Europeans have not got to fight. It may safely be said also that, 50 or 60 years ago, regrettable as the state of development of the workers in Europe was, there was a higher standard of education and of hygiene than now exists amongst the workers of India. It is also well to remember that, when a people has been kept in ignorance, when it is uneducated, badly housed, badly clothed, and badly fed, its individual members have a tendency to become suspicious of each other.

Other hindrances to organisation

Difference of religion played a great part in hindering the growth of our movement even in Europe. European differences, however, paled in comparison with the difficulties in India.³ Over and over again we saw that even the dining accommodation for the different sects had to be kept separate; one caste will not even eat with another. How, then, can it be expected that all differences will be composed quickly, and an organisation, powerful, not only in solidarity of spirit, but in financial respects, will grow up?

Yet, in spite of the difficulties, the Indian worker has shown over and over again that, when he really feels an injustice, he is prepared to fight, and fight very bravely, to get what he considers to be justice. The great Bombay strike is merely one of a number in which Indian workers have shown a revulsion against tyranny and a determination to insist on better conditions which are indeed praiseworthy.

Arabian nights' reminiscences

It was deeply touching to find the implicit trust the workers generally seemed to have in the delegation, and the hope that our visit would lead to developments which would help them. The meetings which they attended were often reminiscent of the Arabian Nights. A platform arranged very primitively, a table draped with coloured cloth, coloured streamers in gay profusion, and an audience sometimes consisting of thousands of people sitting on the bare ground were daily experiences of ours. It is very difficult indeed to describe one's feelings when looking down on thousands of men squatting on the ground, with faces that seem to express an infinite patience and resignation, quite different from the expressions seen on the faces of a European audience.

In almost all these meetings there was a total absence of women. That, indeed, is a mark of Indian life generally; the woman – particularly if she is a working woman – appears to be almost confined to her work and her home. One of the special duties of the

delegation that I entrusted to my daughter was to get the utmost possible information as to the working woman's point of view, but alas, the investigations she was able to conduct were soon stopped, and the information she was able to obtain was never put down on paper. It is fairly safe to say, however, that whatever the life of the Indian worker may be, that of his wife is indeed very circumscribed. I speak with very great reserve about Indian conditions, because I am not at all certain that the Indian point of view may not be too difficult for a European to understand. When I think, however, of the position of the *pardah* woman, she who must never come from behind the curtain, and must live her life, day and night, week after week, month after month, and year after year, in the few feet of space allowed in an Indian workman's home, it appears to me to be terrible.

Is it any wonder that fevers, plague, and infectious diseases play havoc, not only with the Indian population, but with the Europeans who go out to India? He would indeed be a benefactor who would teach the Indian people, not only to desire more room, more air, and pure water, but would fill them with a determination to insist on having these things.

Laudable efforts in housing

I have already referred to the fact that in many cases the employers themselves are doing more to educate the people and to deal with evil conditions than the authorities whose work it ought to be. I now desire to enlarge on what I said about the housing of the people. Wherever the great employers of labour, either companies or individuals, have built houses in connection with their firms, there appears to have been a laudable attempt to give greater cleanliness, more air space, and better conditions than are found outside. Some of the textile firms, indeed, are small towns, not only in extent but in actual population.

Land seems to be relatively cheaper in India than in Europe, and in mere superficial area alone, mill compounds are much larger than is generally the case in Europe. The Sholapur mills and the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras, to mention no others, have to be seen to be realised. Small theatres, meeting rooms, concert halls, crèches, hospitals and schools are all found within the grounds of the mills. In the case of benevolent companies and generous individual employers, these institutions may become really pleasant, instructive, and helpful. It is easily seen, however, that in the case of employers who are not benevolent, the worker who lives in a house belonging to his employer does his purchasing in a store connected with the firm and comes to depend on his employer for everything that he has in the shape of recreation, treatment for illness, and education, may become little more than a chattel of the firm. It is my business, however, to present a perfectly fair picture of the conditions as I saw them, and I am quite satisfied that the worker who is working for the large firms of which I have spoken is generally better housed, better treated, and lives under more hygienic circumstances than the countless millions of workers who have to rent their *chawls* or *bustees* from private individuals, work generally for less wages, and without the amenities of which I have just spoken.

Non textile workers

The delegation had an opportunity of seeing other branches of workers and comparing their conditions with those of the textile workers. I think it is safe to say that the textile workers in India, in comparison with other workers in that country, have at least as favourable a position as that occupied by the European textile workers when compared with other workers in their own countries. Compared with European textile workers, of course, the Indian worker is in a much worse position.

Technical development

The figures of wages will show that, generally speaking, the weavers were better paid than most of the other grades of workers.

Traditionally, the weaver in India appears to stand higher in rank than most of the other grades, and this standing is generally reflected in the wages. Of the kind of looms of which a worker in England generally has four, we saw no factory where the Indian worker had more than two, and very often one. This is, as I already said, typical. Taking the factories from the point of view of height of the rooms, space, and ventilation, they are at least equal to the factories of Europe. The machinery is, with very few exceptions, of the latest and most up to date type and, whilst there was abundant evidence that – taken generally – European conditions were not being reached, we saw many concerns where, in every respect, the conditions were fully equal to the best European mills. The classes of goods made, too, were a revelation. I venture to say that none of the delegates thought that technical development had gone so far as it has done in India. Many of the manufacturing processes were fully equal to European standards, and in some cases the variety of yarns spun and cloths woven, dyed, and finished showed a range and variety which is probably not equalled by any individual European concern.

Recruitment system

One of the principal economic disadvantages in the textile trade in India used to be the peculiar method of “recruitment” of labour for the mills. There was formerly a kind of continual running stream from the agricultural parts of India to the mills and from the mills back to the land. Low as the money wages in the mills are, they are still tremendously higher than the wages paid to agricultural workers. It is impossible in a report of this kind to deal with the peculiar patriarchal Indian life, which makes it so easy for one brother to take another

brother's place, and for a constant exchange, as it were, between members of the same family to and from machine industry and the land. Information collected from all the industrial centres, however, proves definitely that this continual flow is being stopped and that the tendency now is for textile workers definitely to settle down in the towns or villages where the mills are built and to remain there. This, of course, adds enormously to the possibilities, in an economic sense, of the Indian textile industry. A continual flow of unskilled workers, with the constant outward flow of those who had become skilled, was evidently much worse for the employers than the present conditions. So, as a competitive factor, it may be stated definitely that, so far as the Indian textile worker is concerned, he is far more powerful now than he was 15 or 20 years ago. There is, of course, still a considerable flow from the agricultural parts, with a corresponding movement backwards to the land, but it is small as compared with former years.

Physique

It is extremely difficult to speak with any degree of certainty or assurance on the question of the physique of the workers in the textile industry. As a matter of fact, the general physique of the people varies very considerably between district and district, and race and race. Judging from the descriptions given to me by my friends of the workers in and about Darjeeling, there is a tremendous difference between the powerful and active mountain people and the people, say, of Madras and Bombay. To a European eye, the first sight of the textile workers of Bombay or Madras is extremely depressing. Owing to the Indian dress, a great deal of body, of course, is to be seen. In Bombay, as a rule, the workers seem to be underfed, their bodies seem to be emaciated, and their legs are like spindles. The Madrassite is perhaps a little better developed, and, as

one of the members of the delegation remarked, in Madras one sees the rudiments of development in the calf of the leg.

Again, I must call attention to the fact that the European eye is not a safe guide to an absolute conclusion. The people who seemed to us to be – to put it mildly – under-developed, displayed an agility and lissomness which was apparently out of keeping with their physical appearance. Infectious diseases, however, take a terrible toll of human life, and the infantile mortality amongst textile workers is frightful. India, of course, is different from Europe, and we must hold that fact in mind. Again, we must remember that in India a human being ages much more quickly than in colder climates. Marriages take place at a much earlier age, so that it would be folly to apply purely European standards. In spite of allowances made, it is probable that millions of lives could be saved by fresh air, cleanliness, and sanitation.

During and since the war, there has certainly been a tremendous advance made in many respects. Children do not work at such a tender age, the hours of labour have been decreased, general conditions have unquestionably improved. The age of marriage tends to become much higher, and a number of the old vicious practices seem to be dying out. When I remember, however, the villages inhabited by the so-called “untouchables” – the misery, the dirt, the rotting garbage, and the general air of dejection – I am appalled. There is a mountain of work waiting to be done.

Caste

I am satisfied that there has been an improvement in the lot of the factory worker, and that there is a slow improvement so far as the barriers between the castes are concerned. A large number of high-caste Indians are now working very hard for the uplifting of the lower castes. The task, however, is a terrible one, and he would be a foolish man who would predict a time when these depressed,

oppressed, and despised people will be regarded as equal members of the same community. This caste question, of course, runs through all industry, and forms a problem which cannot be solved by outsiders. Governments, whether Indian or British, may help by not putting obstacles in the way; only the Indians themselves, however, can bring about a state of affairs in which all workers can freely meet together, organise together, and become in every way equal to each other. No outside influence can, or even should, attempt to interfere in what must remain an Indian religious problem, to be solved only by Indians themselves.

Hopeful influences

There are two powerful factors which are doing much to prepare the ground for an improvement. The first, and at present more rudimentary influence, is that of compulsory education, which has now been introduced to a certain extent, in Baroda and Indore for example. Once children of all the castes are brought into the same school and taught from the same books, they may be trusted finally to break down, if not all the barriers, at least a considerable number of them. The second great movement, and in my opinion by far the more effective for the moment, is the industrial system itself. We saw many examples, some of them almost comic, of how the different castes kept to themselves even in factories, but we also saw and heard enough to prove that the old rigid Indian distinctions of caste tend to become effaced in the huge and complicated working of factories. Factory discipline and the necessity for men dovetailing their work into the work of others, is apparently doing a great deal to break down customs which have endured in India for centuries. But old customs, particularly religious customs, die very hard, and it is for that reason that I am not too sanguine about the quick growth of a national organisation of textile workers in India.

Children doped with opium

Amongst the abominations which exist is one which we were assured over and over again is present to a fairly considerable extent. It is that where the married woman textile worker with children is too poor or too indifferent to pay another woman to look after her children whilst she is at the mill; the children are kept half stupefied by doses of opium. At many of the large mills there are crèches to which married women can take their children. We were assured that where those crèches did not exist the ordinary custom was for some old woman, for a very small payment, to look after a number of the children of the married textile workers. Where neither crèche exists nor friendly neighbour – nor desire to pay even if the friendly neighbour were there – then the poor mites are kept half-dazed by opium so that they will not become a nuisance to the neighbours or endanger their lives by creeping out of the miserable *chawls* into the streets. I do not say that there is a very high percentage of these cases, but unfortunately evidence seems to prove that there are far too many of them.

The moneylender

Another system peculiar to Indian factory life is the tremendous part that the moneylender plays. The employers generally pay wages monthly and in some cases not only has the worker to wait a month for his wages, but he has to hold two to four weeks “in hand” so to speak. That means that he may work for six or eight weeks before receiving any money at all from the employer. As he is generally not too well supplied with ready money – people who come from the agricultural parts to begin factory work see very little of it – he has recourse to the professional moneylender. It has been said that these moneylenders do their work with the full acquiescence, and in some cases even assistance, of the employers. It is only fair to say

that we had no proof whatever of any case of any employer showing too friendly feelings towards these moneylenders. On the contrary, over and over again did we meet cases where the employers had tried very hard to stamp the system out but had usually failed owing to the ingrained habits of the workers themselves.

It is a curious anomaly that many of these moneylenders are not Indians at all but belong to physically powerful tribes coming from the other side of the Indian frontier.⁴ These “foreigners” prey on the very vitals of the Indian worker. We saw with our own eyes a few of these types. They generally carry large sticks which they are said to use very freely in case the borrower attempts to escape his payments. Interest is based on so much per rupee per month, and often runs at the rate of 200 or 300 per cent per year. As thousands of the workers get into the clutches of these men and never get out of them again, nearly all the wages generally go to the moneylender at the end of the month, who returns a certain proportion to them again on loan at excessive rates of interest.

Pompous ceremonies

Another feature of the Indian textile worker’s life that helps to keep him in subjection is the fact that such things as marriages in his family are celebrated with a pomp and circumstance quite ridiculous in comparison with his financial position. We heard stories of whole families being crushed under the load of debt incurred by perfectly foolish borrowings for ceremonies of the kind I am describing. There is also the gravest reason to assume, although it is very difficult to prove, that in many factories it is the custom to pay huge bribes for the permission to commence work. In fact, it is alleged that in many cases there must be a similar monthly bribe in addition paid to some worker who is acting in some kind of authority in order to keep on working.

These again are matters which only a vigorous organisation can remove. I am satisfied that they are neither the fault of the Government, British or Indian, nor of the employers, speaking generally. They are customs that must be broken by the Indian workmen themselves.

Co-operation almost unknown

In making our inquiries with regard to these moneylending transactions, we discovered an extraordinary fact. It is that apart from one or two concerns, partly or wholly administered by the workers in various factories, there seems to be little or nothing of workers' distributing co-operative agencies in India. The co-operative store which is known all over Europe, and which sells everything the workers desire for their personal needs or comfort, is practically unknown in the great States of India. It is a lamentable commentary on the condition of affairs that the only co-operatives we saw – outside one or two mills – were co-operatives which lent money to the workers at cheaper rates of interest than were charged by the Kabulis or usual moneylenders. No criticism can be more cynical than the fact that amongst the great mass of Indian workers, co-operation, up to the present, is almost entirely confined to moneylending institutions.

A suggested cure

I am not trying to explain away national customs, nor am I going to pretend that the employers are guilty of conducting these moneylending swindles. I have already stated that some of them have made great efforts to stop them. A simple thing like a weekly payday, however, would probably do a great deal of good, and might have a very great effect indeed in preventing the large monthly borrowings that at present make the moneylender almost literally the

controller of the lives of many of the Indian textile workers. It was, of course, impossible for the delegation to get information which would definitely state in figures exactly to what extent Indian textile workers are injured by moneylending. As a matter of fact it proved exceedingly difficult to get statistics of any kind of a general character outside wages and hours of labour. Statistics of these latter matters have been prepared in the most exemplary way by the Government of Bombay, and these statistics and the information collected by the delegation will make it possible for me to give a résumé that will be a fairly clear and complete picture of the wages paid and the hours worked by the textile workers in the principal textile areas of India.

Social work at Sholapur

Outside wages and hours, I have already explained that much of the social and hygienic work generally done under Government schemes in Europe is done in India by the employers. I think if I describe one of the best of these schemes, which is in existence at the Sholapur Spinning and Weaving Company's Mills, a clear idea of the scope of the social work of these huge concerns may be formed.

It was found at Sholapur, when the social welfare work was begun, that

harmful customs, antiquated habits, ignorance and illiteracy all stand in the way of amelioration of the conditions of Labour by creating suspicion, prejudices and sheer inertia.

These Indian social workers found that there were

enormous difficulties of uplifting a class of people whose lack of education and conservative instincts make them slow in adopting new methods of living.

There certainly was some hesitation on the part of the workers in Sholapur to take advantage of the facilities offered. This hesitation was not due, apparently, to a feeling on the part of the workers that the facilities were provided by the employers with a hidden motive; it was simply due to inertia, the cleavages of caste, and even the suspicion of workers against each other.

The mills are typical of the very large factories of which I have previously spoken. The whole concern, with its housing accommodation and welfare institutions, covers about 168 acres of land, and provides work for 7,849 men, women, boys, and girls.

Education

In the grounds of the mill there are schools which gave elementary education not only to the boys and girls who work in the mills as half-timers, but to the other children of the workers employed at the mills. In 1926 there were 60 children belonging to the workers and 472 half-timers getting elementary education. I draw the conclusion from these figures that a certain amount of moral pressure had to be exerted on the parents in order to get them to allow their children to attend school. Particularly this is marked in the case of girls and women. As a matter of fact, there are classes for women, with a daily attendance of 33, but, unfortunately, the social workers report that

the attendance is not, however, quite regular owing to social customs, conservative habits, and prejudice against women's education.

There is evidently a deadweight of prejudice against improvement and a disinclination towards progressive thought amongst the Indian workers, which will be very difficult to clear out of the way. There is a library and reading-room in connection with the firm, but only about twenty-five persons are taking advantage of these facilities. Twenty to twenty-five persons out of a total of nearly 8,000 is not a large

number. It is always well to remember, however, that a library and reading-room is of little use to a man, woman, or child who has never had any opportunity of learning to read.

Health

There is also a dispensary with free medical treatment, served by a full-time medical officer with six compounders and dressers. A maternity home with ten beds also stands in the grounds, and it needs no argument to prove that expert medical help and the aid of midwives in India are matters of tremendous importance to the poor women of the working classes. Expectant mothers are given light work for some time before confinement and are paid two months' full wages during this period. There is an allowance of half the wage for three weeks after confinement.

I have spoken before of epidemics in India, and it appears that during an influenza epidemic in 1918 there was a very large number of volunteers from the workers of the firm who helped in every way and delivered free medicines and nourishment. These men were given cash rewards and silver cups, evidently out of the funds of the firm.

There are three crèches at the firm, looked after by nurses and assistant nurses. The following short quotation I will leave to speak for itself:

When the babies are kept cleaner and healthier in the crèches, mothers, too, learn to take pains in looking after the cleanliness and health of their children at home.

There is a kindergarten school which is said to be breaking down the great shyness of Indian children and is also "useful in keeping them away from their dirty and dark homes and bad surroundings". There are boy scouts; there is a gymnasium for physical training, and even

groups for prayer. These groups sing prayers outside for about two hours. Judging from many opportunities we had of observation, it seems that almost the only recreation of the lower castes is the gathering together and the singing for hours on end of what appears to be to non-Indians the same words to the same tune. We were told that the depressed classes never sang anything except religious compositions.

In the grounds of the firm there is also a restaurant where the workers are said to get clean, wholesome and fresh food at cost price, and there is the nearest approach to European co-operative stores that I have seen. This was begun in 1918 and is managed by a small committee elected by the members of the stores.

Other activities

There is a kind of savings bank connected with the firm; also, a dramatic club. Baby shows are held in the grounds. There is a technical school with spinning and weaving machinery. There is a small recreation garden and a vegetable garden from which fresh vegetables are sold to the operatives. There is a tiny zoological garden, a very small museum, and it is intended to set up a laundry which will cater for the workers in the mills.

There are three blocks of *chawls* belonging to the firm; in all there are over 700 rooms, accommodating over 2,000 persons. The rent of these *chawls* is said to be less than those owned by private individuals, but the rents paid are said to return two per cent on the capital expenditure, after interest and depreciation on the capital expenditure has been met. What this means exactly I do not know, as I have no statement as to what the ordinary interest on the capital expenditure is.

There are also health lectures occasionally, delivered by competent persons in the lecture hall belonging to the firm.

The fight against indebtedness

One of the most interesting features is what is called by the firm an Amelioration Fund. This was started

with the idea of preventing our operatives from incurring heavy debts which it is difficult for them to repay owing to the high rate of interest.

Loans are given from this fund to the extent of six months' wages, at six and a quarter per cent rate of interest, on occasions such as marriage, betrothal, thread ceremony, confinement, illness and funeral. These amounts can be repaid – I believe they are actually taken from the wages – in monthly instalments ranging from six to eighteen in number. In 1926 there were 247 loans advanced from this fund, totalling nearly 15,000 rupees.

The firm [has] tried to find exactly how the work people stand with regard to indebtedness. They collected statistics relating to 1,767 men, all of whom worked in the spinning department, and with wages all less than 25 rupees a month. Out of that number they state that nearly 1,100 had no debts, while 668 had debts which averaged 200 rupees each, with interest as high as 25 [per cent]. No argument is needed to see what the condition of these 668 men is, particularly if they are heads of families – a debt amounting to eight months' wages, with, an interest of 25 [per cent], is indeed a terrible burden. It needs no elaborate calculation to see that a person who may be receiving 25 rupees monthly and has to pay four or five of them as interest on loans, is indeed in a parlous condition.

I have given this description at what I am afraid is great length, because I want my colleagues to have a clear idea of what a great textile concern in India is and how much wider its activities are than the generality of European textile concerns. As I have previously remarked, in making an economic comparison between Europe and

India, the price paid for a given piece of work, although an important factor, is merely one of the factors to be taken into consideration.

Relative costs of production

I now desire to elaborate what I have previously said about not being able to form a definite idea as to the Indian worker as an actual competitive factor, with his long hours and low wages, as compared with his fellow textile worker in Europe and America. If, in India, strong trade unions had been able to arrange lists or tariffs with the employers, it would have been perfectly easy to contrast the actual prices paid for given pieces of work with those paid in Europe where lists or tariffs exist. Unfortunately, however, conditions in India do not lend themselves to this accurate comparison.

Speaking generally, there seems to be an attempt in every textile concern to arrange prices so that the average worker gets about the same average wage at whichever place he works. It needs no argument to prove that the proprietor of an old mill, with old machinery, indifferent technical administration, and indifferent overlookers and staff generally, must pay relatively a much higher piece-rate than the employer with a well-equipped, well-administered and technically efficient mill. It is perfectly obvious that if, in India, a weaver at a badly-equipped old mill can earn 30 rupees a month, which is the sum earned by a weaver in the very best mill, one employer must be paying a much higher piece-rate than the other. So, the initial difficulty presents itself, that if you were able at one mill to get a most accurate comparison with European conditions, at the next mill all your calculations would be thrown out of gear.

From assurances given to me by men in responsible positions who are in a condition to judge the relative costs of production in England and India, I am inclined to think that, on the whole, the wages-cost for the production of a piece of cloth from the raw cotton to the finished article is actually very slightly less in India than in

England. In fact, I was assured by one man of great standing, whose word I have no reason to doubt, but whose name, obviously, I cannot give, that – on the whole – the wages-costs embodied in a piece of cloth in India were rather greater than those embodied in a piece of cloth in Lancashire.

As nearly every mill in India has a different standard, however, I frankly recognise the impossibility of making any definite statement, and have given this explanation in order to show how Indian circumstances prevent an accurate comparison being made with Europe.

Confused mass of contradictions

Another feature in Indian factories is the fact that in some mills the weaver will have two looms of anywhere from 40 to 46 inches in width. In other mills the weaver may only have one of these looms, but the wages may approximate to those of the other district, where two looms to a weaver are customary.

In this confused mass of contradictions, judged from the European standpoint, there was no hope of getting an absolutely clear picture of labour costs. There are huge textile centres where every separate firm makes its own list of prices, where the conditions vary widely, where under any system of lists or tariffs, wages would vary very widely, but yet there is a great similarity in the wages earned. So, I am afraid that I must say, with the best intentions in the world, no delegation could at present say dogmatically whether the hours worked and the wages earned in India mean a grossly unfair competition in a purely economic sense against the Western worker. Of course, we must hope and work for the day when the Indian worker will be much better paid, work much less hours, and be much better housed. These things are certain to come when the textile workers form strong organisations. But, when European employers tell us that low wages and long hours in India make it

impossible for them to compete, we must accept their allegations with the greatest reserve, and decline to accept as a fact the statement that long hours and low wages in India make it necessary that lower wages should be paid and longer hours worked on the continent of Europe.

Workers in various sections

The importance of India as a producer of raw material for the textile industry is apt to be underestimated. It is true that, so far as wool and silk are concerned, she does not manufacture largely and she has a very small number of people employed in working these fibers. As a matter of fact, in British India, which is the only part of India for which I possess statistics which allow me to speak freely, there are only 7,064 persons registered as working in woollen mills and 1,519 in silk mills. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that these figures, along with 1,018 engaged in miscellaneous textile industries and 765 working in the hosiery industry, are the only workers in these particular branches in India. In woollen, silk, miscellaneous and hosiery, there are many firms in the Indian or Native States, but I cannot say accurately, or even with any degree of accuracy, how many people they employ. There must be many thousands, but the total result, in comparison with the great cotton and jute industries of India, is almost negligible. There are engaged in British India in cotton spinning and weaving 332,223 workers.

Jute

In jute, which in all other countries in the world plays a very subsidiary part to cotton and wool, there are actually 341,961 workers engaged in the spinning and manufacture of the textile raw material. India, as a matter of fact, produces nearly the entire jute crop of the world. This crop, even in India, is localised and is grown

almost wholly in Bengal. I regret to say that I fell ill in Calcutta, and consequently was personally unable to make an investigation at all into the jute industry. As, however, the conditions in Calcutta and [nearby] district were investigated not long ago by representatives of the Scottish Jute Trade Unions, I shall be able, with the help of their report and the report of my own colleagues, to give in the wages section a good idea of what is taking place there. I confine myself, for the moment, to the fact that India is almost the only producer of the raw material for the industry of which I am speaking.

Raw cotton

India is a very valuable contributor, also, to the production of raw cotton. All European textile workers engaged in the making of cotton goods are more or less anxious with regard to the future of the raw material of the industry. For many reasons, it is extremely bad for the industry and the workers in it, that any one country should hold almost a monopoly of the supply. Because of this, many countries have tried to encourage in their colonies in different parts of the world the growing of raw cotton. Many of these experiments have not been as successful as was hoped – not because of the unsuitability of the soil – for nature seems to have provided suitable soil in overflowing abundance – but to the fact that where the soil is, the people to grow the crops are not present, and even where one finds both soil and workers there is not the necessary transport.

India is favourably circumstanced, in so far as she grows a very large proportion of the cotton crop that is needed for the production of the major part of the goods she manufactures. She is the second largest cotton producer in the world and is forging ahead very rapidly indeed. The following figures that are available for the last five years will show how rapidly India is becoming a more important producer of raw cotton. Here are the figures:

Year	Bales of 400 lbs. each
1921 – 22	4,485,000
1922 – 23	5,073,000
1923 – 24	5,161,000
1924 – 25	6,088,000
1925 – 26	6,038,000

There is no possibility of getting figures for the 1926 – 27 crop for some time, so I cannot give an estimate of what will take place further. Even these figures do not give the total production of cotton; they deal only with that cotton which is definitely sold to mills and exported. Tremendous quantities are used domestically for hand-spinning, the padding of quilted coats, which are so often used in Northern India, and other purposes. When everything is taken into consideration, it is extremely problematic as to whether the actual growth of cotton does not reach more than six million bales.

Of recent years there has been a great improvement, not only so far as the larger area engaged in cotton growing is concerned, but in the yield per acre as well. Constant attention has been paid to the quality of the cotton, and Mr. B. C. Burt, in an article in the *Empire Cotton Growing Review*, estimates that at least two million bales of cotton are now produced in India which are suitable for replacing American cotton for many purposes.

Exportable surplus

There is an exportable surplus of better-class Indian cottons left after the needs of the Indian mills have been satisfied. India, of course, has to import higher-grade cottons for some of her work, but generally speaking, it may be said that she not only grows the cotton requisite for her own factories, but has an exportable surplus in addition. So, in her two great textile industries, cotton and jute, she

has the great initial advantage of having the raw material at her doors. With the monopoly of jute, and self-sufficing so far as cotton is concerned, she begins with tremendous advantages. Apart altogether from the agricultural workers engaged in growing the crop, India employs in cotton ginning and baling nearly 150,000 workers, and in jute-pressing and similar work, some 32,800.

Imports from Britain and Japan

The importance of India as a consumer of textile goods to Europe, particularly to England, is perhaps not fully recognised. A few statistics taken from the Government of India's trade returns will show how tremendous are the quantities India imports. I make no apology for quoting the following summary made by the *Manchester Guardian* in full. Before I print the quotation, may I say that references made to Lancashire cotton cloth are invariably references to cotton goods made in England. It is simply because the industry is almost wholly concentrated in Lancashire that the words "Lancashire cotton cloth" have become equivalent to "English cotton cloth". The extract will also show that English manufacturers and merchants, as well as Indian manufacturers, are looking with anxious eyes on the progress of Japan. It is probably because of this anxiety that the United Kingdom and Japan are compared by the *Manchester Guardian*. Here is the quotation:

The Government of India's detailed trade returns just received show that Lancashire cotton cloth made much more progress than Japanese in the eleven months of the fiscal year which ended with February. The total imports from the United Kingdom were 1,315,504,000 yards, an increase of 184,755,000 on 1925-6. The imports from Japan - the second largest supplier - were 214,970,000 yards, an increase of 14,489,000 on the previous year. The increase from the United Kingdom was thus nearly thirteen times as large as Japan's. The respective increases and decreases were as under:

[Type of cotton cloth imported]	United Kingdom	Japan
	Yards	Yards
Grey	41,679,000	3,459,000
Bleached	94,566,000	1,754,000
Coloured	48,510,000	12,784,000

The figures for February alone were not so satisfactory as this, the grey cloth total being nearly 12,000,000 yards less than last year, and nearly all this loss falling upon British trade. Bleached and coloured cloths however, improved substantially upon last year's figures, while Japanese bleached clothes nearly disappeared and coloured clothes from the same country showed only a small increase. The following are the important figures in the returns for the two periods:

(000s omitted)

[Type of cotton cloth imported/ exported]	February		11 months	
	1926 – 7 yards	1925 – 6 yards.	1926 – 7 yards.	1925 – 6 yards.
GREY, total	42,985	54,633	675,533	631,339
From United Kingdom	30,940	42,591	536,534	494,855
From Japan	11,409	11,629	135,253	131,794
BLEACHED, total	43,533	36,250	508,753	412,404
From United Kingdom	41,699	34,710	490,505	395,939
From Japan	30	367	2,633	4,387
Swiss	1,192	478	7,377	4,646
COLOURED, total	34,140	29,206	405,034	330,311
From United Kingdom	25,242	19,880	288,465	239,955
From Japan	5,850	7,575	77,084	64,300
From Italy	859	423	14,832	9,306
From Holland	1,286	597	12,598	8,914

India's yarn imports showed a decline in February from 3,697,472 lb. to 2,529,300 lb. The United Kingdom's loss of trade was 439,228 lb., while Japan's was 806,228 lb. The figures for 11 months fell from 46,816,142 to 44,924,875 lb., but it is noteworthy that the United Kingdom's share increased from 14,023,692 to 18,349,502 lb., whereas Japan's fell from 30,848,829 to 24,157,414 lb., showing plainly that the course of cotton prices this season has been less unfavourable to British yarn than some recent seasons have been.

Wages in woollen mills

Before turning to general remarks about the position in Calcutta, let me say that so far as we could ascertain, the wages of the workers in woollen mills, where these existed, were higher than in the working either of cotton or of jute.

Conditions in Calcutta

The condition of affairs regarding housing of textile workers in Calcutta is similar to that in Bombay and other centres. The *bustee*, or worker's dwelling, is even worse than the Bombay *chawl*. Again, however, it must be said that where employers have built dwellings for the workers, they are invariably better than those supplied by private owners at rents.

When Johnston and Sime, for the Scottish Jute Workers, investigated conditions in Calcutta, the mills were running short-time in most cases, and their statistics of wages are based on four days' work, or 36 hours' actual working. It is probable that so far as the jute mills are concerned, they have a higher percentage of European capital than is invested in the great cotton industry. Certainly, the Scotsman plays a greater part in the jute industry than the Englishman plays in the cotton industry. As regards the work done, it appears that at least three Indian workers are employed to do the same amount of work as one Scottish jute worker; in fact, many competent authorities place the ratio much higher than that.

Fabulous profits

One of the most sensational parts of the report to which I have referred deals with the profits that were made between 1915 and 1924. The Scotsmen estimate that in ten years profits to the shareholders amounted to three hundred million pounds, equivalent to 90 per cent per year on the capital. The most surprising thing, however, is the estimate that a profit of three hundred million for three hundred thousand workers in the trade means, obviously, £1,000 per worker profit; the average wage was said to be about £12,105 per year. Johnston and Sime, therefore, estimate that, as the average wage is about £12,105 a year, and the profit per worker is £100 per year, the average annual profit is eight times as much as the wage bill. It is estimated that 60 per cent of the shares in the jute mills are held by Indians, so that so far as capital is concerned, the Indian, even in jute, outweighs the European. It is a fact, however, that effective management still rests in the hands of Britons – mainly Scotsmen.

Profits in the Indian textile industry have been so fabulous that even the workers themselves look upon what would be called a fairly high profit in a European factory as unsatisfactory and very low. Without criticising, may I just print the following statement from the Ahmedabad trade union, in order to show how even trade union officials look upon the present rates of profit. This is the quotation:

It is interesting to note that the actual situation as revealed by the published balance sheets for 1925 corresponds somewhat closely to the calculated estimate. Figures of the sale proceeds and cost of production extracted from these balance sheets bear remarkable evidence of these fluctuations. Cotton, fuel and stores consumed in 1925 are 17 %, one per cent less in value respectively than the consumption during 1924. Total profit of the mills whose balance sheets are available for comparison is about 14 % higher than that of the year 1924, and works out at 19.5 % on the paid up capital, against about 17 % in the previous year.

This is by no means a result which can have a heartening effect on those who have a stake or interest in the industry.

As I said I am not at all criticising; I am merely showing that what would be considered extremely good profits in Europe are looked upon as being very low in India, even by some trade union leaders.

Calcutta and cotton

In addition to jute, there is a certain amount of cotton spun and manufactured in and about Calcutta. There are roughly about a dozen cotton mills, where 13,000 workers – 10,000 men, 1,700 women, 1,300 children – are employed. The wages in these mills are somewhat similar to those in the jute mills. There is little weaving of cotton in Bengal, nearly all the cotton being spun into yarn and sold as yarn. In the south of Calcutta, the workers prefer to work four days a week, as they generally have small patches of land and prefer to have one or two days free in order to cultivate these small plots.

Complaints of merchant traders

The delegation, whilst in Calcutta, made an effort to get to know what was actually taking place in the economic field. It appears that the merchant traders of Calcutta complain that English goods are being raised above the natural prices by artificial means, for instance, restricted production. The result of this is that Japan is rapidly taking the trade which was formerly done with England, because of the fact that she will sell much more cheaply than the English spinner and manufacturer will. Again, as I have so often said, it is extremely difficult to find what the facts are, and I can merely give the statements along with the authority and leave them to the judgment of the readers of this report.

Hand looms

I have referred to the fact that cotton is often used in other ways than in the mills. According to a census taken in 1921, there were two million hand-loomers in India, which used chiefly yarns supplied from spinning mills. The average production of these hand-loomers is said to be about 100 pounds of coarse cloth per year.

Tea gardens

The matters I have dealt with in this general summary are largely things on which I can speak [of] personally. The rest of the members of the delegation not only visited the places I have hitherto mentioned but were able to visit other places in addition. For instance, they went to see the tea gardens around Darjeeling, and found that there appeared to be no Government supervision as to the conditions of labour or the education of the workers. Wages varied from coolies at four annas a day to skilled men in the factories at ten to 12 annas per day. Houses are provided free by the planters; the rents of these houses to non-workers on the plantations are four to five rupees a month.

Tata's extraordinary concern

Before turning to the other places at which textile mills were visited by the delegation, may I say that a visit was paid, for purposes of information and comparison, to the steel works of Messrs. Tata at Jamshedpur. This is one of the most extraordinary firms in the world. The ground on which the buildings stand was literally cut out of the living jungle. The firm owns 25 square miles of land. There are 120,000 inhabitants in Jamshedpur, but there is absolutely nothing in the shape of a city council or any other public body representing the inhabitants and determining the condition of affairs in the town. The

firm literally owns and controls the whole of the city. No trade union or any other kind of public meeting can be held without the consent of the employers. Water, sanitation, and all public services are owned and administered by the firm. It is true that there are a few privately-owned houses, but the land on which the houses stand is leased from Tata's.

The delegation reports that the wages paid are probably higher than in any other works in India. There is no question that as an industrial unit it is far and away the greatest in the country. The influence of the firm is not only felt in Jamshedpur, but extends all over India, and is very powerful indeed in the legislative bodies. For years it has been able to get high protective taxes and general government help. There is a union of the workers in Jamshedpur which has over 5,000 members. This union is affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress. It appears to be well managed, not under the influence of any political party, and its affairs are administered by actual workers of the firm. The position of the firm towards the union may best be understood from the fact that the member signs a form giving the right to the firm to deduct his union contribution from his wages; the firm makes these deductions and hands the sum over to the union. It goes without saying that an undertaking of this kind, with all the functions of a city council, would be absolutely impossible in any western country. The name of Tata is well known all over India, and all kinds of social service institutions have been heavily supported by members of the family and the firm.

Barbaric splendour

In a country like India, where native princes for countless centuries have been used to displaying barbaric splendour in jewellery and clothing, there is, of course, a large amount of embroidery, particularly in gold and silver. We saw some of the most gorgeous productions imaginable made by workers who were working for very

small wages indeed. It is, however, impossible to present anything like a picture showing even the average wages of embroidery workers or describing even the ordinary types of work. These workers are to be found working on a few handlooms collected together in a small place, embroidering by hand in the palaces of the great native princes, or working behind the counter in the shop of a small dealer. Their methods of working are so different from those of embroidery workers in Europe that it is impossible to make any comparison.

Kanpur

In Kanpur, the delegation found a large number of textile workers in very well-organised factories. The Kanpur manufacturers, more than any others in India, try to deal directly with the individual customer. All the Indian papers are full of advertisements of shirts, clothing, rugs, and all kinds of textile materials sold by the firms. There are some housing schemes of the employers in Kanpur which are very much above the general average of workers' dwellings in India. Generally speaking, it may be said that Kanpur stands well up in the comparison made between mills in different areas by the delegation.

Benares and Indore

Benares was also visited, and even in that old Hindu sacred city there were some 10,000 weavers, but they were working on handlooms. At Indore, the mills that were visited were very good and well managed. It is in this city and state that there is a system of compulsory education. There is no workmen's compensation law, however, and not far away from Indore there are mills working 13 hours a day. I have already explained that Native States are not amenable to the factory laws in what may be termed British-administered States, where the hours are restricted to ten a day. It is

quite recently that the union succeeded in reducing hours of labour in Indore City to ten; as a matter of fact, previous to September 1926, 12 hours were being worked. There is, however, no legal guarantee, in case the textile workers allow their union to decline, against the employers again reverting to 12 hours a day.

Nagpur

At Nagpur, the delegation again found mills which, so far as building and equipment are concerned, were fully equal to European mills; in fact, in one or two cases it is extremely doubtful whether European mills are either so hygienic or so well equipped. Again, there is a textile workers' union with about 1,000 members, but it is not recognised by the employers. The contribution is only four annas a year, and obviously the work must be confined within very narrow limits.

Help from all sides

I will try to summarise the information received under three or four specific heads in different sections; but before closing this general statement I beg, on behalf of myself and all the members of the delegation, to express our very deep sense of gratitude for the extraordinary hospitality and helpfulness we found everywhere in India. From the drawing up of our itinerary by Mr. R. Bakhale and Mr. N. M. Joshi to our departure again from Bombay, we found a reception and hospitality which were both warm and boundless. It is true that the refusal to talk politics rather annoyed some of the very advanced Indian politicians; it is also true that that refusal was very largely responsible for the very great willingness we found on all sides to give information. Whether we approached Government officials, the Prime Ministers of Native States, trade union officials, or employers' associations, the results were the same. Not a single mill

we desired to visit did we fail to visit; when we asked for particulars of wages at firms, the books were invariably brought out; there was no attempt, so far as we could discover, to hide anything. There was every desire, apparently, to let us see the whole of the circumstances, with the faith that we would present a fair and unbiased report of what we saw and heard.

The task before the workers

It would be very easy in a country like India, by deliberately shutting one's eyes to the history and the traditions of the people, and by only hearing the statements of one particular school of thought, to present a horrifying picture of the circumstances. It would be perfectly easy to make violent attacks either on the Government or on the employers, but if one looks at the circumstances with a desire to be as impartial as possible, and compares what might be termed purely Indian conditions, either in Indian States or in agricultural areas, with the conditions obtaining in industrial districts, one must acknowledge there are two sides to the picture. There are problems for a growing trade union movement in India which can only be settled by the workers themselves. Neither the British nor even the Native Governments can break down a system under which a man who is born the son of a shoemaker must always remain a shoemaker; no Government action can destroy a state of things in which one man is not permitted even to let his shadow fall across the path of another man. It would be the height of folly to blind oneself to the obvious fact that the worker in India, unless he becomes organised and breaks down the divisions that exist between the workers, may probably be even more bitterly exploited under a purely Indian Government than he is at present.

Spider's web of problems

In a report like this it is impossible to speak of a certain inexpressible feeling that even a short time in India produces in the mind and the heart of a European. Trade union organisation and labour political action are comparatively simple things in Europe, but in India, with its spider's web of criss-cross problems of religion, of tradition, of method and work, the task becomes so complex as to appear at times perfectly hopeless. It is impossible to go to that country without becoming a hearty well-wisher of the Indian people, and without hoping that the terrible conditions which now exist may soon be improved. Again, I beg personally to thank all those, whether trade union officials, members and officials of employers' associations, technical experts, or Government officials, who rendered us every service possible, and tried to make our task in India not only easy but pleasant.

Section 2

Trade Unions in the textile trade

So far as it is possible to ascertain exactly, there were, whilst we were in India, some 20 different trade unions for textile workers. The total membership of these trade unions was about 32,000 of which 14,000 were in Ahmedabad, 6,000 in the Bombay Textile Labour Union, and 2,000 amongst the jute workers in Bengal. I use these figures with a certain amount of hesitation, because it is extremely difficult to say, not only what is a trade union in India, but also where such bodies are in existence. It seems to me, also, that 32,000 is a number which is scarcely likely to be accurate in view of the fact that Calcutta, Ahmedabad, and Bombay account for 22,000 in themselves, whilst there is a second union in Bombay which is said to have 3,500 members, some of whom, at any rate, are textile workers. As there are unions of textile workers in Madras, and as the two unions of which I have already spoken in that city must have a considerable number of members, it seems to me that 32,000 is less really than the number of textile workers organised in India. There are unions of textile workers in Nagpur, Kanpur, Coimbatore, and in the State of Mysore in addition to those already mentioned.

Diffused effort

The great difficulty is that, with the exception of Ahmedabad, there seem to be almost everywhere competing unions. The example of the region of Calcutta, with its swarming thousands of textile workers with only about 2,000 organised, and two unions for them, is perhaps the worst example of diffused effort that can be found in India. I am afraid that very often political grounds are responsible for this fighting, and that the workers are often led to think that all India

needs is political freedom in order that the worker may benefit. As a matter of fact, bad as the conditions now are, they would probably be infinitely worse in India if the political power were in the hands of Indian employers. It is very regrettable that the workers, even at the very inception of their organisation, should be split into separate camps.

Leading organisations

It is quite evident that the organisation of textile workers is strongest in Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Madras. I have already, in the introductory part of the report, dealt with the peculiar difficulties in Madras. It is fairly safe to say that in spite of the division that exists in Madras, the unions of textile workers that exist do have an effect on the working conditions of their members, and that the textile workers of the city would be much worse off if trade unionism did not exist. That is in spite of, and not because of, the unhappy split, in which one union says, "Get rid of your non-textile workers as officials, and we will join a united organisation" while the other organisation says, "There can be no talk of joint organisation unless we have the right to choose whoever we will, textile worker or non-textile worker, as head of our organisation".

In Bombay is to be found perhaps the nearest approach to a trade union on what, for want of a better name, I will call the European model. The union takes all textile workers as members, in whatever branch they work, and its business is done from five different centres. The membership cards are printed in Urdu and Marathi and give details which are quite customary in Europe. There is also an active propaganda by means of big posters in prominent places in the mill areas. These posters give summaries of the work of the union and invite all textile workers to join it. In the present state of illiteracy, unfortunately, both the cards and the posters lose a great deal of what ought to be their usefulness. There is a central

managing committee which is really the authoritative managing body for the union. It consists of the principal officers and representatives of the workers in the proportion of one for each 200 members in any given mill. There are also committees in each centre or district, but the functions of these committees are purely advisory. There are also mill committees, and the central committee's idea is to give the actual workers themselves the largest possible share in the management of the union. This is in striking contradiction to the position in the Madras [Textile] Workers' Union, where even the managing committee itself is elected by the principal officers. I find it necessary to repeat again that the latter allege, as a reason for this procedure, that any election to the committee which was of a public character would be likely to result in victimisation of the members.

Objects of Bombay union

The objects of the Bombay Union (I am speaking always of the larger of the two unions) are given as follows:

1. To organise and unite the textile workers in the City, Island, and Presidency of Bombay;
2. To secure for its members fair conditions of life and service;
3. To try to redress their grievances;
4. To try to prevent any reduction of wages, and, if possible, to obtain an advance whenever circumstances allow;
5. To endeavour to settle disputes between employers and employe[e]s amicably, so that a cessation of work may be avoided;
6. To endeavour to provide against sickness, unemployment, infirmity, old age, and death;
7. To endeavour to secure compensation for members in cases of accident under the Workmen's Compensation Act;
8. To provide legal assistance to members in respect of matters arising out of, or incidental to, their employment;
9. To endeavour to render aid to the members during any strike or lockout brought about by the sanction of the Union.
10. To obtain information in reference to the textile industry, in India and outside;

11. To co-operate and federate with organisations of Labour, particularly textile labour, having similar objects, in India and outside;
12. To help, in accordance with the Indian Trade Unions Act, the working classes in India and outside in the promotion of the objects mentioned in this rule; and
13. Generally to take such other steps as may be necessary to ameliorate the social, educational, economic, civic, and political condition of the members.

It will be noted that in clause nine there is definite provision made for aid to be given to the members during strikes or lockouts. So far as I know, it has up to now proved absolutely impossible to lay down a definite and specific amount per week or month to which the member is entitled, but the principle is recognised.

A very modern growth

The oldest trade union in the textile trade is the Madras Labour Union, which was started by B. P. Wadia in 1918. The Ahmedabad Textile Workers' Union was started in 1920,⁵ and the Bombay Textile Workers' Union came even after that. It will be seen, therefore, that the unions are very modern growths indeed.

The Ahmedabad union [Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association]

While the Bombay Textile Workers' Union seems to be more on European lines than any other union, perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the strongest, union of textile workers is that of the textile workers of Ahmedabad. These workers are organised in the different sections and branches, but whilst the organisation is in separate sections, there is a very effective centralisation, and the general president and general secretary apparently act for all purposes and for all the grades of workers. Each separate branch union, however, has its own meeting, and the members of the

committee are elected by the votes of the members. Frequent meetings of the workers are held in order to give every information possible, not only about the work of the unions, but also as to the possibilities of general improvements in the lot of the workers.

Complaints made by the members are quite freely dealt with between the employers and the officials of the unions, and there is the closest possible touch, apparently, between the head offices of the employers' association and the head offices of the workers' organisation.

According to the annual report of the union's work in 1925, there were 1,004 complaints dealt with during the year, 73 of which were left over from the previous year, and 931 from the year under review. Fifty-eight of these complaints were rejected by the committee as unreasonable or trivial, and 790 were brought to a conclusion during the year. The committee said that 616 were successfully dealt with, 36 were compromised, 16 were unsuccessful, and 64 were disposed of for reasons not given. These complaints were against bad administration in 35 per cent of the cases, [while] unjust penalties inflicted on workers accounted for 26 per cent, and complaints about wages and the method of payment of wages formed ten per cent of the total. There were also complaints regarding the health and safety of the workers, general conditions of work, hours, holidays, and miscellaneous matters.

The union committee is very much in favour of the formation of a joint committee of employers and workers in order more quickly to deal with the complaints received. The officials of the union complain about the tardy procedure and hope that in future it may be possible more quickly to deal with disputes of any kind that arise.

Unauthorised strikes

During 1925, there were 33 strikes in Ahmedabad, but not one of them was authorised by the Union. The following quotation from the

report is enlightening:

The strikes in union mills were all unauthorised strikes. We can understand many of them in the light of desperate action to which workpeople were driven in consequence of inordinate delay in the settlement of complaints. But, for some of these, there was not the shadow of an excuse, and they could only be due either to sheer senselessness or wanton mischief. Whatever the cause, these strikes are a matter for deep regret and deserve severe condemnation.

The union relies, apparently, absolutely on arrangements between the employers and its officials, and there is absolutely no provision made in the rules for anything in the shape of a definite weekly or other payment in the case of strikes.

The “Untouchables”

Apart from its work in dealing with all kinds of complaints of the members, the union seems to confine its benefits entirely to benefits of a friendly or social service character. It gives medical aid and has two dispensaries and a hospital with accommodation for twenty indoor patients. It appears that the members belonging to the depressed or “untouchable” classes make a larger use of these services than any other section of the workers. The following quotation from the report will speak for itself as to the position of this class of worker:

It is natural, seeing that they have practically no access to most of the public institutions for medical help, and they have very limited private resources and facilities for the purpose.

Ahmedabad and education

The union also conducts nine day schools and fifteen night schools, and in 1925 gave instruction to a total of 1,286 students. It also has

the control and management of the day school and night school of the Bharatkhand textile mill, the employers meeting half the cost. The union employs 78 teachers, 43 of whom possess qualifying certificates. A special part of this education deals with the physical condition of children, and the committee are pleased with the success of their endeavours to cultivate the habit of regular bathing and scrupulous care of the teeth and nails. They regret, however, that the parents of the children do not provide them with adequate clothing. There is also a central secondary school and a nursery school. One of the most striking things about the Union is that apparently it draws a very large proportion of its expenditure on education from funds provided by the Mill-owners' Association. In the year under review, there was a total expenditure of 26,644 rupees, of which the Mill-owners' Association Swaraj (Home Rule) Fund paid 1,250 rupees a month; there were 60 rupees a month from the managing agent of a particular cotton mill, and private individuals gave 1,580 rupees.

There is a library and reading-room in connection with the union, but, unfortunately, the daily attendance is only about ten. There is a weekly paper, called the "Majur Sandesh", and 5,500 copies are distributed weekly free of charge. This paper gives information about Labour movements in India and foreign countries.

Gandhi, the dominant spirit

It may be said that the soul and inspiration of the Ahmedabad union is Mr. Gandhi, and the chief officers of the union may fairly be said to be his disciples. When Mr. Gandhi returned to Ahmedabad after his release from gaol, he was presented with a purse of money by the working men, which he handed over to the union, which in its turn utilises it for the hand-spinning of yarn to be made into home-woven cloth.

Legal and monetary aid

Legal aid is given by the union, and 30 cases were dealt with in 1925. There are two cheap grain shops belonging to the union, but at the time of the issue of the report in 1926 there was a danger that they would have to be closed down unless the cash purchases of the workers could be increased. There is a Labour Union Bank which issues loans to the union members at six and a quarter per cent. Many of these loans have been advanced to pay for old debts, for which interest ranged between 75 and 120 per cent. Although this matter has been dealt with before, I cannot refrain from quoting, without any further comment, the following short passage:

A system of petty advances to workpeople has been in vogue in a large number of mills for many years past. Some mills give weekly advances themselves, and, considering the prevailing conditions, the rate of interest charged by them cannot be called unreasonable. But in most of the mills the moneylender, who is in a majority of cases a Pathan, lends money at a rate which works out at a minimum of 300 %, and is frequently as high as 1,000 %. Authorities in some mills give facilities to the moneylenders for the collection of their dues.

Where Ahmedabad excels

I think it may safely be said that no union in India can even approach the Ahmedabad union so far as its knowledge of the economic situation is concerned. The officials take a very lively interest in the daily quotations of cotton prices, and in every other quotation of prices dealing with the cotton textile industry. Information is also compiled with regard to the retail prices of foodstuffs and the changes in the conditions of work and pay in the local mills. The union also takes a very keen interest in the profits made in the mills. I have already given a short quotation from the report dealing with

the profits obtained and showing how in India profits are looked upon in a different way from that in which they are regarded in Europe.

A sermon for the employers

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because the union has no strike fund and evidently tries its best to prevent strikes [that] it fails to speak out quite clearly with regard to the conditions. The following quotation I reproduce in full in order to show what the opinions of the chief officers of the union are:

Many powerful forces have been at work for long years to drag down the workman on all sides, and the wonder is, not that he is inferior in efficiency to foreign labour, but that he is still alive and working. Let alone considerations of humanity, if the mill-owners and the community had cared for the future of the industry, out of pure self-interest, they would long ago have provided every working family with a healthy dwelling, diffused as widely as possible knowledge of the laws of health, carried medical aid to every door, equipped every worker with elementary education of a useful and practical character, rescued him from the haunting vice of alcohol and released him from the ever tightening clutches of the moneylenders. A very little in some and nearly nothing in the other directions has been done so far.

One for the workers also!

But the workmen are admonished quite as much as the employers and are told to offer the utmost possible co-operation with the latter, to obtain the maximum production at minimum costs. They are asked to do the best they are capable of in order to deserve the best treatment and the best remuneration.

Room for improvement

It is quite evident, in spite of the close connection between the employers and the union officials, that even in Ahmedabad, almost

exclusively Indian as it is in its capitalist development, and with the spirit of Gandhi dominating to a remarkable extent, there is great room for improvement. Wages, housing, health, education, and indebtedness are all tremendous problems that have been scarcely touched yet by the work of the union. In the short time the union has been formed it would be perhaps unreasonable to expect more than has been done.

The other textile trade unions in other parts of India are sometimes confined to the workers in one single mill, and in no case can be said to be comparable in strength of organisation to the union in Ahmedabad. I have already said that the highest contribution we have found was four annas per month – roughly 4 ½ dime or 40 pfennig – and the lowest four annas per year. From the details given it will be seen that there is scarcely any possibility of a united textile workers' organisation joining with their comrades in the western world, but it may be that that consummation is nearer than we hope. In any case, we can keep in the closest possible touch and fraternal relationship with any textile workers' organisation in India which is willing and hope that the time when we shall definitely belong to the same International organisation will soon arrive.

Section 3

India as an exporter and importer of textiles

Although in the general introduction I have given some statistics with regard to India and the textile trades, I think it best to devote this special section to a short description of India as a consuming nation. The facts I am going to give are taken from the report of the Department for Commercial Intelligence and Statistics for the year 1926. This Indian report shows the prodigious quantities of textile goods which are still imported for the teeming millions of India's population.

Prodigious imports

In 1926, in cotton piece-goods alone, there was an import of 1,784 yards. This stupendous quantity would wrap round our globe over 44 times. Although this was an increase of 143 million yards from 1925, the value of the larger quantity was 20 million rupees less than that of the previous year. Nearly the whole of this loss of two crores of rupees was on grey goods, bleached and coloured goods remaining almost stationary. Imports of cotton twists and yarns went up from 49 million pounds in 1925 to 52 million pounds in 1926, although again, owing to the fall in prices, 1926 quantities cost 7.31 lakhs, whereas the smaller quantity in 1925 cost 7.75 lakhs (a lakh, of course, is 100,000 rupees). Of these huge quantities of yarn, England supplied 21 million pounds in 1926, as against 16 million pounds in 1925; Japan supplied 28 millions in 1926, as against 31 ½ million in 1925. There was a noticeable rise in the quantities of raw cotton imported in 1926 of 14,300 tons. It is to be noted that, of the total imports of 30,800 tons, no less than 13,400 tons came from the Kenya colony in Africa.

Exports

At the same time that India was importing these huge quantities of goods, she was also an exporter of raw cotton, mainly to Japan. She also exported, strange to say, 40 million pounds of cotton yarns, an increase of six million pounds over the year preceding, but the value was less by 17 lakhs. India has tremendous shipments, of course, to China, and actually increased her exports of yarn in 1926 by some 50 per cent compared to 1925. She also exported in 1926 no less than 179 million yards of piece-goods, an increase of 13 million yards compared to 1925, and an increase in value of one crore rupees.

Jute

I have already referred to the fact that India has almost a monopoly of the growing of jute. Her exports during 1926 were 618 thousand tons, valued at 280 million rupees. Germany and Great Britain are the largest purchasers, and in 1926 the former purchased 158 thousand tons, and the latter 127 thousand tons. Of the jute bag – known as “gunny” bag – she exported 446 millions, although the value fell from 270 to 255 millions of rupees in spite of the fact that she exported eight million more than in 1925. That India’s trade is worldwide will be shown by the fact that whilst Europe took nearly all the raw jute, Australia and Chile between them accounted for well over 120 million of made-up bags. She exported gunny cloth to the extent of 1,482 million yards, valued at 30 crores of rupees in 1926. This time, the United States of America took the lion’s share of the export, accounting for 987 million yards, whilst the Argentine Republic took 284 millions of yards. These figures are so colossal that it is only by sitting down and making a careful estimate of the total length of cloth and yarn produced that one can duly appreciate what the totals mean.

Bombay mill-owners unsatisfied

During 1926 it appears that the Bombay mill-owners were again very dissatisfied with the year that had closed; they reported heavy losses and said that the year was even worse in many respects than 1925, in spite of the prolonged dispute which took place in the latter year.

Woollen imports

In woollens there was an import of 12½ million yards, at a total value of 25,100,000 rupees. Of this total, Britain sent four million yards, Germany over a million and a quarter, France two million, Italy three and a half million, Belgium sent 645,000 yards, and Japan 988,000. The quantities again will show the tremendous importance of India in the world's economy. India is particularly important to the textile workers of Europe.

Artificial silk

India again is a great importer of artificial silk yarn, having increased her imports in 1926 from 1,826,000 to 3,167,000 pounds. Of this total, England exported to her 331,000 pounds and Italy 2,031,000 pounds; there was a tremendous drop in imports from England, and a tremendous rise in imports from Italy. In piece-goods made of artificial silk and cotton there was again a tremendous rise. In 1925, India imported nine million yards of cotton and artificial silk piece-goods; she paid for them 8,300,000 rupees. In 1926, she imported 29½ million yards at a total value of 21,600,000 rupees. Among the countries supplying her with these goods were: Britain, 11½ million yards; Italy, 9 million yards; Switzerland, four million yards; and Germany, 1,800,000 yards.

I have given these details and the quantities in order to show, not only how important India is to the textile workers of Europe and

the rest of the world, but also how important Europe and the rest of the world may be to India.

Section 4

Freedom of workers to organise

I have already said that there is perfect freedom of press, and no Government hostility or legal barrier put in the way of the formation of trade unions. As the textile workers stand before the law in India, they are infinitely better placed than were their European colleagues at the beginning of trade union organisation in Europe. Nor are there on the part of the organised employers any definite attempts to prevent the formation of trade unions, such as have been seen in every country in Europe.

Employers and the trade unions

As a matter of fact, it is quite evident that some bodies of organised employers actually favour the formation of trade unions, believing that the latter will prevent the very large number of strikes due to disputes which might easily be settled if a properly organised trade union existed to deal with the employers. That this opinion of mine rests on a solid foundation can be proved, not only by the assurances we had in India from scores of employers, but by official letters sent on behalf of employers to the director of the Government Labour Office in Bombay. The following passage from a letter sent by the Ahmedabad Mill-owners' Association to the Labour Office will speak for itself:

Gradual encouragement and development of trade unions on sound and systematic lines would doubtless facilitate the settlement of Industrial disputes on an amicable basis and would further bring labour forces in India to the level of recognising and shouldering the responsibility of the enforcement of the decisions obtained on any disputes that may arise between the employers and

the employees. This would also increase industrial efficiency and establish harmonious relations between capital and labour.

Of course, there are districts where the unions are not recognised by the employers; there are cases where employers say the union is merely used by political adventurers as a tool, and there are individual employers who would not be prepared to recognise any union except under absolute compulsion. Generally speaking, however, the employers seem to look upon the possibility of unions forcing up wages and improving conditions with less fear than they have for the innumerable stoppages of work which now take place on what they contend to be frivolous grounds.

The Government attitude

The fact that the Government itself has passed an act which legalises trade unions definitely and officially, is the clearest possible proof that the Government, as such, is rather favourable on the whole to the growth of trade unions. So, being free so far as press, platform, propaganda, and law are concerned, there is no reason why trade unions may not develop. As a matter of fact, trade unions are springing up all over the country.

Before the war there were unquestionably in India a number of peculiar laws, dealing particularly with the workers in tea plantations, which treated workers who had entered into contract with employers almost as property of the latter. These laws, however, have come to an end, and in recent years there has been apparently "a broad and liberal-minded policy on the part of the Government". The passage in inverted commas is from an article by Mr. Shiva Rao, the President of the Madras Labour Union, and may be taken, therefore, as not overstating the facts. Recently the Government has been circulating proposals regarding the levy of fines and the payment of wages

which are considered to be greatly in advance of what has existed up to the present.

Section 5

Labour legislation.

There is, in addition to the legislation of trade unions, now a workmen's compensation for accidents, drafted very largely on the lines of the law existing in England. There is, of course, a difference in the sums which are paid in case of accident, but when the difference in wages between England and India is taken into consideration, the comparison is in favour of India. The scale of compensation is based on the average wages of the worker, but in the case of a fatal injury, the amount paid depends largely on the financial position of the family. For instance, in the case of the death of the head of the family, the compensation is much heavier than is paid for the death of a son or daughter whose wages are not the principal means of support of the family but are an addition to the family income. This compensation for fatal accidents is equivalent to 30 months' wages, but with a maximum of 2,500 rupees. In the case, however, of a son or daughter without any dependents, only 200 rupees are paid.

Benefits frequently lost

As might be expected in a country where illiteracy is so great, there are frequent complaints that workers lose benefits they are entitled to under the law, because they do not understand even the very simple methods to be adopted in making claims. The growth, however, of organisation, and of the many organisations for social service, which, whilst not being trade unions, often attend to the interests of the workers, will probably reduce to a minimum the number of people who are not paid what they are legally entitled to.

Hours

I do not need to refer to the fact that in all British India the hours of labour are now limited to 60 per week in the factories. It must be definitely understood, however, that the laws for compensation for accidents, and the definite reduction of the hours of labour only have force in what is generally known as British India. In the States which are under Indian rule these laws do not apply; the Native States, so far as labour legislation is concerned, are far behind so-called British India.

Factories act [of 1922]

The most wide-sweeping changes have been made in the Factories Act which applies throughout British India. Not only have the hours been greatly reduced, but the position of children in the factories has been simply revolutionised. Before the war, children of the most tender age could be found about the factories working. It may not appear much to Europeans to speak of the raising of the age of children to 12 before they are allowed to work, but in India it represents tremendous progress. The present writer himself, in England, went to work at ten, and worked full time at 13. No child in British India can now work in the factory full time until over the age of 15. The Factory Acts also contain provision with regard to compulsory resting time. There has been a great interest taken in the problem of ventilation of factories and much progress made.

No health insurance

At the present time there is nothing in the shape of a national unemployment fund or of national health insurance. For the moment, the lack of the former is not very serious, as, generally speaking, there is little or no unemployment in the cotton [trade], and in the jute

trade there has been short-time [work] rather than unemployment. The lack of compulsory national health insurance, however, is a very serious thing for the workers.

Hopes for the future

To sum up, it may be said that the workers are perfectly free to organise, that there is no special obstacle or difficulty in their way, and that the last few years have marked great development in labour legislation. The following quotation from an article written by Mr. Shiva Rao will show that active Labour opinion in India is hopeful with regard to the future:

A good deal, doubtless, has been achieved through legislation, particularly by the Government of India. Radical improvements have been made in the Factories Act, and the Department in charge of Labour is unremitting in its efforts to bring Indian Labour the advantages secured by years of agitation in the West. A Workmen's Compensation Act is on the Statute Book, a Trade Union Act will shortly come into force.

Section 6

Wages of textile workers. Buckingham and Carnatic Mills

This is a very difficult section to compile because of the fact that the actual money paid as wages does not always represent the full earnings of the workers. An example will show how difficult it is to give particulars with scientific accuracy. At the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras, for instance, the firms pay wages for ten and a half days per year as holidays. All persons who work at the firm for five years are entitled to 15 days' holiday with full pay; this is in addition to the ten and a half days previously spoken of. The firm works 58 ½ hours a week instead of 60, gives education to children, trains workers of the factory as foremen and managers, provides technical instruction or pays for attendance at Government classes with full wages to the employees whilst they are in attendance, and has an elaborate system of gratuities. When a boy begins work, he is credited at the end of each half-year with five per cent of the amount paid to him in wages, and a bonus of another five per cent, making ten per cent. If he works ten years with the firm, ten per cent of the wages he has earned during the period is then paid to him. He then begins on a system of 15 per cent for seven years; if he completes that term he is paid the amount. The third period is for five years, and 20 per cent is paid to him on the wages he has earned during that time. The firm makes certain payments in case of sickness (half-wages up to one month per year); they supply free medicine for workmen and their families, and houses at one rupee eight annas per month.

There are a number of other interesting things done by the firm, but I am merely pointing out these things in order to show that the actual wages paid must not be taken to mean everything that the worker receives in every firm. My difficulty is that there might be two firms together, both paying the same wages, but by special provisions made by one firm, one set of workers might be infinitely better off financially than the other. It would be as well, in studying these figures, always to bear these facts in mind.

Improved position

There appears to be no doubt whatever that the post-war textile worker's position is much better than it was before the war. The President of the Bombay Textile Employers' Association claimed that wages paid were 93 % higher than in 1914, and that in spite of the fact that hours had been reduced voluntarily from 12 to ten by the Bombay Mill-owners' Association:

[...] This reduction of hours was made three years before the Government of India ratified the Washington Hours of Labour Convention. No reduction was made in the pay of the workers, and the net result was that piece-work payment for work done was now 130 % higher than it was previous to 1914. In addition to this, during five years of prosperity, a month's wages were given each year to every worker.

Actual wages

I now turn to the actual wages. It is well in this connection to point out that there is a claim by one workers' organisation that up to 1921 real wages payments had only increased by 70 per cent, and that the cost of living had gone up by over 200 per cent. The two statements (i. e., employers' and workers') differ so widely from each other that I am going to give details of wages from the publication of the Labour Office of the Government in Bombay, issued in 1923. On the whole I believe these to be the most reliable figures provided to date. The figures relate to over 194,000 people, or more than 80 per cent of the workers employed in the centres dealt with. The wages were those earned in May 1921, since which time there has been no radical change in rates; they are exclusive of overtime pay and any annual bonus, and can strictly be compared with wages that are now being earned. Permit me to say that the rupee is now one and a half English shillings, or one and a half German marks; the anna is 16 to the rupee, and there are 12 pice to the anna. Here are the wages, showing the percentage of workers with their relative earnings, and the average daily earnings taken over the whole group. These wages, it will be noted, are for full-time work, that is to say, with the engine running ten hours a day.

1 Daily earnings: men/ percentage numbers of men whose daily earnings in May 1921, fell within the undermentioned limits.

Centre [of cotton industries]	Under 12 A.	12 A. and under 18 A.	18 A. and under 24 A.	24 A. and under 36 A.	36 A. and under 48 A.	48 A. and above	Average daily earnings of those who worked full time	Rs.	A.	P.
Bombay (City and Island)	4.8	35.3	23.8	27.2	5.2	3.7	1	5	6	
Ahmedabad	10.1	36.8	20.0	26.9	3.6	2.6	1	5	0	
Sholapur	49.5	23.9	14.2	10.3	1.3	0.8	0	15	11	
Other Centres	27.0	26.4	19.7	22.6	2.7	1.6	1	1	8	
Bombay Presidency	10.2	34.2	22.2	25.7	4.5	3.2	1	4	7	

2 Daily earnings: women/ percentage numbers of women whose daily earnings in May 1921, fell within the undermentioned limits.

Centre [of cotton industries]	Under 8 A.	8 A. and under 12 A.	12 A. and under 16 A.	16 A. and above	Average daily earnings of those who worked full time	Rs.	A.	P.
Bombay (City and Island)	5.7	34.0	48.3	12.0	0	10	9	
Ahmedabad	2.7	36.3	48.0	13.0	0	12	1	
Sholapur	91.6	7.7	0.7	—	0	6	9	
Other Centres	28.6	0.9	15.4	13.1	0	10	1	
Bombay Presidency	18.2	31.2	40.0	10.6	0	10	2	

3 Daily earnings: big lads and children/ percentage numbers of big lads and children whose daily earnings in May 1921, fell within the undermentioned limits.

Centre [of cotton industries]	Under 4 A.	4 A. and under 8 A.	8 A. and under 12 A.	12 A. and under 16 A.	16 A. and above	Average daily earnings of those who worked full time		
							Rs.	A.
Bombay (City and Island)	–	15.2	29.2 (0.5x)	44.9	10.7	0	11	1
Ahmedabad	5.4	69.9 (68.4x)	19.8 (2.2x)	4.9	–	0	11	4
Sholapur	57.8	18.6 (14.1x)	23.6	–	–	0	9	1
Other Centres	19.0	60.0 (44.9x)	17.7	3.3	–	0	8	11
Bombay Presidency	9.6	31.4 (29.5x)	25.5 (0.8x)	27.3	6.2	0	10	7

x The percentages in brackets relate to the number of half-timers included in the totals at these rates. a Half-timer. b Counting two half-timers as one full-timer.

Wide differences in earnings

It will be noticed that there are wide differences in the earnings between one place and another. If a comparison, for instance, be made between Bombay and Sholapur, the difference is remarkable. I call attention to two sets of figures only. Less than five per cent of the men in Bombay get under 12 annas a day; there are nearly 50 per cent in Sholapur who make these low wages. Again, in Bombay, women who get less than eight annas a day form 5.7 per cent of the workers; in Sholapur, no less than 91.6 per cent of the women workers are working for less than eight annas

a day. And yet at Sholapur there are mills as fine as any in the world; in fact, there is one factory the range of whose products is enormous.

In order to make these figures explicable, may I give details stating the different categories of workers in one or two mills? I am not giving the names of the mills – I scarcely think I am entitled to do so. In one mill, the wages are as follows for a full month’s work:

[Kind of work]	[Wage] per month
Blowing room:	
Ordinary worker	21 Rs. plus 70 %
Chief of the department	55 Rs. " "
His assistant	36 Rs. " "
Winders	15 Rs. " "
Frame tenters	32 to 33 Rs.
Ring spinners	16 Rs. to 8 A. plus 70 %
Mule spinners	35 to 40 Rs.
Weavers	45 Rs.

In another mill with spinning and weaving, the wages are:

[Kind of work]	[Wage per month]
Weavers	44 – 45 Rs.
Winders	25 – 27 Rs.
Loom over-lookers	111 Rs.
Head over-lookers	165 Rs.
Doffer	20 Rs. 8 A.
Tapesizer	80 Rs.
Assistant sizer	40 Rs.

At a third place, weavers make as much as 86 rupees monthly, and the lowest wage is about 50 rupees. The average wages in the different departments of another mill are as follows:

[Department]	[Wage per month]
Blowing-room	27 Rs.
Card-room	26 Rs.
Ring-room	27 Rs.

In the same mill, weavers working on drop-box looms can get up to 70 rupees a month, and the lowest wage is 33 rupees.

At one of the finest mills in India, the following are the wages that are being paid for 26 days' work:

[Kind of work]	[Wage per month]
Head loom-over-looker	229 Rs.
Ordinary over-looker	110 Rs.
Weaver	53 Rs.
Sweepers	13 Rs. 8 A. as minimum wage.
Warehousemen	25 ½ Rs.
Blow-room workers	27 Rs.
Card-room workers	27 Rs.
Frame tenters	35 Rs.
Ring spinners	15 – 15 ½ Rs. plus 70 %, plus bonus of 8 % for each full working week.

The individual wages at another firm are:

[Kind of work]	[Wage] per month in Rs.
Card-room:	
Ordinary workers	32
Helpers	30
Loom over-lookers	142
Weavers	47
Warehousemen	33
Cloth examiner	42
Winders	20
Ring spinners	24
Tape sizers	93
Assistant sizers	46 ½

It must be specially noted that “month” generally means a working month of 26 days. These details will show the relative position occupied by different workers in the industry, and the figures given from the official return cover a very large proportion indeed of the workers in the cotton trade in India.

Figures given to us by the committee of the Bombay Textile Labour Union showed that for two looms the weavers got 25 rupees monthly for plain cloth, 25 – 30 rupees monthly for dobbies [dobby looms], and 60 rupees monthly when working one jacquard loom, 60 inches in width. The workers stated that the blowing-room workers generally got 27 – 28 rupees a month, and in the card department the wages were 25 – 26 rupees per month.

Wages in Madras

The general average daily wages for all mills in the Presidency of Madras for 1925 were as follows:

[Kind of work]	[Daily Wage]	
	A.	P.
Cotton weaver (man)	14	10
Boy assistant	5	1
Cotton spinner (man)	12	11
Cotton spinner (boy)	5	1
Adult jute weaver	10	3
Boy jute weaver	2	6
Jute spinner (man)	8	6
Jute spinner (boy)	4	4

As, roughly, the position of the textile worker in Madras as compared with other workers is the same as in the rest of India, I am going to give the figures of the average wages of a number of other trades, to show the comparison that exists. Where the cotton weaver, for instance, gets 14 a. ten p. per day:

[Kind of work]	[Daily Wage]		
	Rs.	A.	P.
The engine driver gets	1	4	10
“fireman”	0	10	11
“fitter”	1	2	4
“turner”	1	1	10
“riveter”	1	0	2
“boiler-smith”	1	7	2
“carpenter”	0	15	9
“bricklayer”	0	14	7
“compositor (hand)”	0	13	2
“printer’s machine worker”	0	15	2

Unskilled labour, so-called, is very badly paid:

[Kind of work]	[Daily Wage]		
	Rs.	A.	P.
Cotton ginning (men)	0	7	6
" " (women)	0	4	7
Pressing (men)	0	9	8
" " (women)	0	5	10
Rice (men)	0	7	8
" (women)	0	4	8

Unskilled labour

These are all daily wages, of course. Whilst the wages of textile workers in different parts of India may vary widely, the relative comparison, as I said, remains the same, and the Madras example may be taken to cover the rest of the country.

Ahmedabad

At another typical mill, in Ahmedabad, the monthly wages were as follows:

[Department]	[Monthly Wage]		
	Rs.	A.	P.
Blow-room	20	4	0
Card department	24	0	0
Frame department	31	12	4
Spinning	26	5	0
Winding	14	0	0
Warping	45	1	0
Sizing	43	2	0
Weaving	42	1	0
Calendar	31	0	0
Cloth department	35	0	0

These are mills in Ahmedabad where the wages are less; there are mills where the wages are higher; but I think the figures given are a fairly accurate guide to the rates paid to different types of workers.

Wages of jute workers

I will give a typical set of figures for a jute mill in Calcutta for four days' working. In the batching department, the average wages are about one rupee per day; in the preparing department, however, they are little more than nine to nine and a half annas; in the roving department, from 12 to 12 ½ annas; in the spinning department, about 14 annas; in the winding department, slightly higher; weaving, about one rupee eight annas per day; and in finishing, roughly about half the wages paid to weavers.

Wages in a native state

Here is an example of the wages paid to the individual workers in a mill in a Native State:

[Kind of work]	[Wages in] Rs. per month
Mixing men	13 to 17
Blow-room men	13 "18
Card strippers	12 "15
Grinders	13 "21
Tenters	13 "15
Drawing tenters	12 "18
Slubbing tenters	18 "25
Intermediate tenters	15 "20
Roving tenters	15 "18
Roving tenters (working two machines)	21 "31
Back tenters	13
Adult piecers	15
Big boys	9 to 14
Half-timers	4 "8
Reelers, senior (women)	12 "15
Reelers, junior (women)	6 "8
Winders (women)	9 "12
Warpers	22 "35
Sizing hands	19 "30
Drawing-in boys	16 "28
Weavers, two looms	25 "35
Weavers, single loom	13 "18
Folding men	13 "20
Dyeing	13 "18
Bleaching	13 "18

Plus ten per cent for regular attendance.
Plus ten per cent bonus when declared.

Section 7

Accurate comparison of wages and conditions impossible

I have selected this material from a huge mass of statistics as to wages which the delegation got together in India. I think the wages given are fairly representative of those paid generally in the industry, but accurate comparison is absolutely impossible. How [do we] compare, for instance, Bombay, where the weavers are running two looms, with Madras, where weavers, working on exactly the same type of machinery, have only one loom? The conditions inside the factories vary so widely that it is impossible to compare them with each other, much less to compare them as a whole with factories making the same materials in Europe. I leave to my readers the task of forming an idea as to what these wages actually mean.

Indian and British output

I have already called attention to the fact that it must not be assumed that the worker is doing the same work that European textile workers are doing for their wages. May I refer again to what Johnston and Sime said about the jute industry? It was that at least three times the number of people were employed as would be employed in Scotland, and that a great authority had put the proportion much higher even than that. The same kind of thing applies in the cotton industry. We found as many as five times as many people working in the card-room as are to be found working on the same machinery in a Lancashire mill. Certainly, we found four workers employed in Madras on work that would be done by one worker in Lancashire. Where automatic looms were used, as, for instance, in Madras, the proportion became even wider apart.

So, when the cruelly low wages are considered, they ought to be considered in due perspective, and with a knowledge of the work for which the wages are paid. It may be asked how the employers are able to get workers at these wages. The answer is, that India is a country, or more truly stated, an aggregation of countries, where agriculture, carried on in a primitive way, still occupies a vast mass of the people. The agricultural worker may be said to earn in actual money payments about one rupee per week. However extraordinary this may appear, it is the fact, and it accounts for the Indian being willing to leave the land and go to work in the factories.

Section 8

Conclusion

I have had to compile this report under very great difficulties, which I am sure the Committee will appreciate. Owing to my illness and the regrettable tragedy which accompanied it, our papers were mixed together hopelessly and disarranged. Much of the material which was to be used in the report was either lost or died with my daughter. I trust, however, that what I have been able to do will have produced in the minds of the members of the Committee the picture as it appears in my own mind.

A study in black and white

That picture is a curious mixture of light and shade. There are conditions so unspeakably vile in the housing of the people that one hesitates even to attempt to describe them. There are religious customs so different from anything existing in Europe that it is very difficult indeed for a European mind to understand them and to come to an unbiased decision. There are differences of temperament, differences of outlook, and even differences in conception which are impossible for an investigator even to pretend to understand unless he can spend a very long time on his investigations. But I am perfectly certain that whatever the factory industry is, whatever its trials are, or whatever its history has been, it is not all black. The factory worker evidently can, if he so desires, live a fuller life than the people of India could before the introduction of machinery driven by coal, oil, or electricity. Whilst in the villages, generally speaking, there appears to be little or nothing done in order to give an education to the people, there are in the towns certain facilities which will assure at any rate an elementary education to the man or

woman who is determined to acquire it. The ordinary textile worker in India, whether man or woman, is no longer a chattel or serf. He or she has the opportunity of joining with other workers in a trade union organisation, and there is no law, at any rate in British India, which will interfere. In fact, as I tried to point out in India itself, the position is not so bad as it was in Europe at the beginnings of our own trade union movement.

Although I do not hope that next year or the year after there will be a National Textile Workers' Organisation in India, I am not without hopes that the next ten years will see at any rate a central co-ordinating organisation, which will be able to affiliate to the International Textile Workers' Movement. I am certain that those who are actively engaged in the Indian textile workers' trade unions today would be delighted to be able to federate with us. I hope that when the day for federation comes, the Indian textile workers will receive the heartiest possible welcome from their fellow textile workers all over the world.

Notes

- 2 James Hindle (1870 – 1942) was a member of the Amalgamated Weavers' Association. Michael Brothers (1870 – 1952) was secretary of the Cardroom Workers' Amalgamation, and became a Labour MP in 1929. See Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement*, 399.
- 3 The original expression in Shaw's report reads: "European differences, however, were of the lightness of down [sic!] compared with the difficulties in India." See Shaw *Investigations into the Conditions of Indian Textile Workers*, 16.
- 4 Shaw's statement reflects two common descriptions of moneylenders in working class areas as "Kabulis" and "Pathans". These two groups had the reputation of demanding particularly high returns.
- 5 Shaw is referring here to the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association that was founded in 1918.

Working India. Its Future and its Struggle. Report of the German members of the deputation sent to India by the International Federation of Textile Workers (1928)

Karl Schrader

Franz Josef Furtwängler

The text has been edited as follows: 1) The spelling of names of names of persons and places has been homogenized throughout the document. 2) Tables have been homogenized throughout the document. 3) Comments have been added in footnotes. Footnotes appearing in CAPITALS are part of the original document.

Based on the Visit to India of the German Textile Workers' Delegation; compiled by Karl Schrader and Franz Josef Furtwängler as commissioned by the German Textile Workers' Union; Berlin 1928

The question might be raised whether with certain people, even those with a great capacity for sympathy, distance might have a psychological significance. Perhaps their sympathy gives way when they can say 'This torment is unheard of but it's happening far away, somewhere on the other side of the world. And since it's so far away, I don't feel any sympathy!' But if distance has an effect of this kind on sympathizing, we cannot help but ask: How far precisely does human love reach?²

Dostoyevsky

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Being of pure substance, like fire, the Sudra will
 Burn all that is bad in the world,
 And the aim of humanity is his being;
 No one shall call him small or mean.⁴

Satyendra Nath Datta

II. The condition of Indian workers

1. Wages and living standard

Apart from printers, mechanics, and various kinds of skilled construction workers, weavers are the best paid workers in India. Bombay, where the cost of living is 20 per cent higher than in the country's other industrial centres (in particular due to high rents), also has the highest wages for weavers and, indeed, the highest wage levels for workers in general.

To get an idea of wages in India, we have to examine the incomes of this "labour aristocracy" of weavers in Bombay and compare them with the cost of living in that city. We shall start with figures supplied to us by owners and managers of the mills that we visited; those quoted here are monthly wages on the basis of a 60-hour week. It should be noted that weavers in Bombay almost always have to manage two looms, while weavers in other cities (Madras, Ahmedabad, Indore and Kanpur) have to manage only one.

We were told in two mills that weavers were paid up to 60, 70, and even 80 rupees.⁵ However, it was expressly noted that this was for a few quite exceptionally skilled workers with many years' experience, who were employed for high quality work. In one of these mills, it was said that weavers' wages were "rarely below 50 rupees, and in some cases up to 80 rupees". Just how modest the number of cases are, in which wages of 60 to 80 rupees are paid, is shown by the information we received at the second mill: the lowest wage for a weaver here was 30 rupees; the highest, for operating the difficult Jacquard looms, was 70 rupees; but the average wage for all the weavers employed by the firm was 32.5 rupees! Two other mills gave the average wages for their weavers as 45 and 40 – 45 rupees respectively, while another firm in Bombay claimed that it paid an average wage as high as 53 rupees, and a maximum of 70. The trade association for the Bombay cotton industry quotes an average of 40 to 45 rupees for the whole city.

We frequently asked groups of workers in the textile industry on this subject. They declared with a noticeable degree of consensus that eight out of 100 weavers earned a wage of 50 to 55 rupees, while the majority of weavers earned between 33 and 40 rupees. Some weavers on simple looms earned as low as 20 or 25 rupees. If we assess the credibility of the particular figures, we believe that a figure of 40 rupees is not too low as an average for Bombay weavers. It is rather likely that this figure is actually too high.

Forty rupees, however, is the sum required in Bombay to feed, clothe and shelter a family of four or five people at the traditionally low levels of requirements. Below this income threshold, hunger begins. Much trouble was taken to justify this low wage level to us, in terms of how much simpler the dietary and living habits of Oriental people were compared with Western people; but it was never brought into consideration that the majority of proletarians here are not even in a position to satisfy these modest needs. Orientals may well live on rice, pulses and other vegetarian food instead of expensive meat; but they have to dull their hunger all the same. The Indian worker may be able to meet his traditional needs for furniture and household equipment without the heavy costs of his European counterpart, but he still needs shelter from heat and insects, dust and the dirt of the street – however modest in scale.

It is extremely hard to give a breakdown of an Indian worker's budget. Indeed, it is almost impossible in the present state of affairs. Not only are the incomes of various categories of workers extremely different, still more so are their customs with respect to food, clothing and accommodation in the different provinces of this vast country. The decisive thing, however, is that apart from the city of Bombay, nowhere else in the country were official investigations into the living standard of the industrial proletariat conducted. In deriving a minimum budget for a family of four or five on 40 rupees,

therefore, we started from the fact that poorer Indian students in Bombay need 15 rupees per month for food, housing and clothing. A figure of 10 rupees per head for a working-class family, then, would be the minimum requirement.

A more valuable standard for the cost of living of a working-class household was given by detailed household accounts of families of postal workers in Bombay, which the organisation of this group of employees collected from its members. The figures were published in a special edition of the journal *The Postman*. While their living standard is very modest, it represents that of an upper stratum of the Indian proletariat among workers in large-scale industries: textiles, metals, railways, etc. Scarcely five per cent of the working-class can afford a budget of this kind. The poorest households depicted in these figures show a monthly budget of 42 rupees. Yet, only the best-paid section of textile workers in Bombay attains this level of wages. The national average of wages in this industry and others lies far below this level. A comparison between these quite poor household budgets, and the average and sub-average wages that we shall go on to demonstrate, will give at least a first indication of the poverty of the mass of Indian proletarians.

Table 1: Monthly budget of a postal worker in Girgaum (suburb of Bombay): family of five, husband, wife, son and two daughters.

[Basic expenses]	Rs.	A.	P.
1. Rent	9	5	0
2. 74 lbs rice	10	2	0
3. 16 lbs cheaper quality rice (<i>patni</i>)	2	0	0
4. 4 lbs <i>tur dal</i> (small red lentils)	0	10	0
5. 4 lbs <i>gram dal</i>	0	4	0
6. 4 lbs potatoes	0	4	0
7. 8 lbs <i>masur</i> (another variety of lentil)	0	8	0
8. 3 lbs <i>wal</i> (white beans)	0	4	6
9. 12 lbs wheat flour	1	14	0
10. 5 lbs butter (<i>ghee</i>)	2	3	0
11. Fuel	4	2	0
12. 8 lbs cooking oil	1	0	0
13. 12 lbs coconut oil	1	8	0
14. 2 bottles kerosene	0	5	0
15. 24 lbs onions	0	9	0
16. 30 coconuts	3	0	0
17. Spices, etc.	1	8	0
18. Assorted vegetables	3	12	0
19. Fish twice per week	3	0	0
20. Mutton twice per month	0	12	0
21. 4 lbs salt	0	3	0
22. 2 lb tea	0	10	0
23. 12 lbs sugar	0	10	6
24. 6 litres milk	2	4	0
25. Tea for taking to work	3	4	0
26. 4 lbs raw sugar	0	4	0
27. 1 doctor's visit	3	0	0
28. Annual visit to birthplace, per month	3	5	4
29. Washerman	0	12	0
30. Barber	1	4	0
31. Occasional tram and railway	0	8	0
32. Guests and religious ceremonies	1	8	0
33. Soap for washing	0	13	0
34. Soap for bathing	0	4	0
35. Books, fees and breakfast for two children at school	7	0	0
36. Annual clothing expenditure (shirts, coats, jackets, <i>dhotis</i> , caps, sunshades, sandals, underwear, etc.), per month	5	15	8
Total	78	8	0

Table 2: Budget for a married couple without children (Bombay).

[Basic expenses]	Rs.	A.	P.
1. Rent (one room)	6	12	0
2. 64 lbs rice	9	0	0
3. 8 lbs <i>tur dal</i>	0	4	0
4. 4 lbs <i>gram dal</i>	0	4	0
5. 4 lbs <i>vatana</i> (coarse Indian corn)	1	0	0
6. Spices	0	6	0
7. 4 lbs <i>wal</i> (white beans)	0	6	0
8. 1 lb. Mutton	1	0	0
9. 4 litres coconut oil	0	2	6
10. 10 lbs onions	0	1	3
11. 4 lbs salt	0	6	0
12. 10 lbs potatoes	0	10	0
13. 2 lb tea	–	–	–
14. 10 lbs sugar	0	9	3
15. 4 litres milk	1	6	6
16. Tea for taking to work	2	13	0
17. Barber	0	12	0
18. Underwear	0	6	0
19. Soap for washing	0	3	3
20. Assorted vegetables	3	12	0
21. Guests and religious ceremonies	2	0	0
22. Occasional tram and railway fares	0	8	0
23. Tobacco and chewing tobacco (betel)	1	8	0
24. Clothing (annual expenditure)	2	12	4
2 pairs <i>dhotis</i> 10/0/0			
2 shirts 4/0/0			
1 coat 6/0/0			
1 cap 1/4/0			
2 pairs sandals 3/0/0			
1 sari 7/0/0/			
3 <i>khan</i> (blouses) 2/0/0			
<i>subtotal</i> 33/4/0, that is monthly			
25. Fuel	4	8	0
Total	41	4	1

Table 3: Budget for a husband and wife with two small children (aged 5 years and 6 months respectively).

[Basic expenses]	Rs.	A.	P.
1. Rent (one room)	13	8	0
2. 64 lbs rice	9	0	0
3. 16 lbs <i>patni</i> rice	2	4	0
4. 4 lbs <i>tur dal</i>	0	10	0
5. 4 lbs <i>gram dal</i> , 4 lbs <i>vatana</i> and 4 lbs <i>masur</i>	0	12	0
6. Fuel	4	2	0
7. 5 litres edible oil	0	10	0
8. 5 litres coconut oil	0	10	0
9. 4 bottles kerosene	0	10	0
10. 20 lbs onions	0	6	0
11. 10 lbs copra nuts	0	14	0
12. Spices	1	0	0
13. Assorted vegetables	2	6	0
14. Fish (twice per week)	2	0	0
15. Mutton (three times per month)	1	2	0
16. 4 lbs salt	0	1	6
17. 2 lb tea	0	8	0
18. 15 lbs sugar	0	15	0
19. 0.5 litres milk per day	5	10	0
20. Tea for taking to work	3	12	0
21. Doctor's bill	1	0	0
22. Annual visit to birthplace	3	5	4
23. Underwear	0	4	0
24. Barber	1	0	0
25. Tram and railway fares	0	8	0
26. Festivals and religious ceremonies	1	0	0
27. Soap for washing	0	13	0
28. Betel and <i>bidis</i> (the cheapest Indian cigarettes, made from a kind of crumpled cigar tobacco wrapped in a green leaf and tied with a thin thread)	1	6	0
29. Contribution to clothing	3	13	8
Total	63	14	6

Table 4: Budget for a family of four (husband, wife, daughter, husband's mother)

[Basic expenses]	Rs.	A.	P.
1. Rent	6	4	0
2. 80 lbs rice	11	4	0
3. 24 lbs <i>patni</i> rice	3	0	0
4. 4 lbs <i>tur dal</i>	0	10	0
5. 6 lbs <i>gram dal</i> , 4 lbs <i>mung</i> beans	0	5	0
6. 6 lbs <i>masur</i>	0	3	9
7. 4 lbs <i>wal</i>	0	2	0
8. 2 lbs <i>gram</i>	0	1	6
9. Fuel	4	2	0
10. 12 litres coconut oil	0	6	0
11. 22 litres edible oil	0	10	0
12. 12 bottles kerosene	0	3	9
13. 16 lbs onions	0	4	0
14. 10 lbs potatoes	0	7	6
15. 10 lbs copra nuts	1	1	6
16. Spices	0	9	4
17. Assorted vegetables	3	4	6
18. Fish (twice per week)	2	0	0
19. Mutton (3/4 lbs once per month)	0	4	6
20. 10 lbs salt	0	3	9
21. Tea at home	1	8	0
22. Tea for taking to work	1	14	0
23. Barber	0	12	0
24. Annual visit to birthplace	2	8	0
25. Soap	0	6	0
26. Guests and religious ceremonies	1	0	0
27. Chewing tobacco	1	14	0
28. Contribution to clothing	5	1	0
Total	60	12	0

Table 5: Budget for a family of three (husband, wife and baby).

[Basic expenses]	Rs.	A.	P.
1. Rent (one room)	5	5	0
2. 48 lbs rice	6	12	0
3. 16 lbs <i>patni</i> rice	2	0	0
4. 4 lbs <i>tur dal</i>	0	10	0
5. 2 lbs <i>gram dal</i> , 2 lbs <i>vatana</i>	0	5	0
6. 2 lbs <i>masur</i> , 2 lbs <i>mung</i> beans	0	4	0
7. Fuel	4	8	0
8. 1 litre coconut oil	0	4	0
9. 5 litres edible oil	0	10	0
10. 4 bottles kerosene	0	10	0
11. 20 lbs onions	0	5	0
12. 10 lbs potatoes	0	7	6
13. 6 lbs dried copra nuts	0	10	6
14. Spices	0	9	4
15. Assorted vegetables	1	15	6
16. Fish (twice per week)	2	0	0
17. Mutton (0.5 lbs once per month)	0	3	0
18. 4 lbs salt	0	3	0
19. Tea at home	2	13	0
20. Milk for infant (2 litres per day)	2	13	0
21. Tea for taking to work	1	14	0
22. Annual visit to birthplace	1	10	8
23. Barber	0	12	8
24. Soap for washing	0	6	6
25. Guests and religious ceremonies	1	0	0
6. Clothing	3	13	8
Total	42	12	8

All interviewed workers assured us that the cost of provisions today is 80 per cent higher than before the War, and in some cases 100 per cent higher. Wages, however, are far from keeping pace with the rise in prices. Here we can only report on the present state of wages and living costs.

We have seen that the minimum that is needed to maintain a working-class family in Indian conditions, 40 rupees per month, is earned only by the best-paid group of textile workers, the weavers in Bombay. A small group of specialist workers in the smoothing room of cotton mills is mentioned as earning higher wages than this. Even in Bombay, however, there can only be very few among the great mass of cotton spinners who earn the minimum required to maintain a family. The average spinning wage in Bombay is given by various employers as 27, 29 or 32 rupees. Other figures for machinists in cotton preparation are given in some cases at 24 rupees, some at 32 and 38 rupees. Taken as a whole, these figures, which in all cases are those given by employers, show that even the majority of male skilled machinists are not in a position to feed a family without the wife also working in the mill.

Women's wages are extremely low, with the exception of a small number of particularly skilled occupations. Wages of 27 rupees for women workers are certainly exceptional, if indeed they exist at all. Even 17 to 18 rupees for women performing skilled work is very much on the high end of the

average wage level. The average wage for women workers in the first mill we visited was given as nine rupees. It is unlikely that the average in other mills is any higher. The wages of male labourers (bearers, chair porters, removers and workplace sweepers) are given again by the employers themselves as around 13.5 rupees per month in the highest case. In all likelihood, their average is not much more than the female average of nine rupees. Furthermore, there are children between 12 and 15 years, so-called “half-timers”, who work as packers for six hours per day. Their wages, which the employers likewise give as nine rupees a day, may actually be significantly below this. Here we have in very broad lines some striking reference points for the wages of textile workers in Bombay, which are generally seen as the highest in the country.

In Ahmedabad too, employers, who are almost exclusively Indian, claim to pay weavers a wage of 43 rupees, though housing and food costs are somewhat lower than in Bombay. The cost of living is also cheaper in Sholapur and Madras, both cities with large cotton mills. It must be noted that in both places weavers generally operate a single loom, either because labour is sufficiently cheap to permit more intensive serving of each individual machine or because the workforce in these places is inferior to that of Bombay in skill and experience. Naturally, the wages of the workers in question are correspondingly lower. Thus, in Sholapur, a weaver operating one loom is paid 20 rupees, while a weaver operating two looms is paid 38 rupees. In Madras, where weavers operate one loom almost without exception, wages are supposedly between 27 and 30 rupees. In both Sholapur and Madras, wages for spinners are between 16 and 18 rupees, i. e. already extremely low, while young packers earn no more than six to seven rupees – even according to the employers, and still less according to the other side. In these places, wages for male casual labourers are similar to those of women. In Kanpur and Indore too, weavers earn no more than 20 rupees per month.

The following figures were obtained from the supervisory authorities in the Presidency of Madras:

Table 6: The textile labour force in the Madras Presidency.

	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
Number of spinning and weaving plants	23	23	26	28	29	30
Workers employed	29,689	29,332	32,086	33,443	31,829	33,612
Of which children	5,458	4,665	4,498	4,117	4,401	3,952
Division by sex and age						
Coimbatore	Men	2,895	3,242	3,530	3,857	–
Women	754	912	1,096	1,266	–	
Children	440	590	660	559	–	
Madras	Men	10,430	10,867	11,116	10,670	–
Women	515	422	451	400	–	
Children	1,191	1,100	1,043	868	–	
Madurai	Men	2,280	2,453	2,461	2,745	–
Women	1,362	1,429	1,449	1,527	–	
Children	1,666	1,386	1,514	1,510	–	
Malabar	Men	1,224	866	986	1,108	–
Women	430	384	401	401	–	
Children	30	46	144	96	–	
Tirunelveli	Men	2,640	2,202	2,088	2,011	–
Women	1,232	1,163	1,100	1,095	–	
Children	1,095	913	897	876	–	

Table 7: Average daily pay of textile workers in the Madras Presidency.

[Adult and child workers per department]	1921			1922			1923			1924			1925		
	Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.	Rs.	A.	P.
Cotton weavers [Men]	0	13	2	0	15	8	1	0	2	1	0	10	0	14	10
Boys	0	10	0	0	6	11	0	5	3	—	0	5	1		
Cotton spinners [Men]	0	10	0	0	10	8	0	11	0	0	10	5	0	12	11
Boys	0	4	11	0	5	10	0	5	1	0	4	7	0	5	1
Jute weavers [Men]	0	8	0	0	8	8	0	9	3	0	8	0	0	10	3
Boys	0	6	0	0	2	6	0	2	6	0	3	0	0	2	6
Jute spinners [Men]	0	6	11	0	7	8	0	8	1	0	7	11	0	8	6
Boys	0	2	4	0	3	9	0	3	4	0	3	8	0	4	4

These figures are of course for a working day of ten hours. The standard working week is 60 hours, except for the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, where the working week is only 58 hours. Weekly wages are thus easy to calculate. According to these figures, wages are extremely low. Yet, they have certainly not been underestimated, as they were taken from official sources, based again on information from employers themselves. And these employers are certainly the last people to have an interest in making wages appear lower than they actually are. From what has been said previously, it is rather to be expected that the figures have been massaged upward.

Madras has a tramway network with shareholders in London. It pays the following wages: for a driver 12 annas per day; and for a driver with ten years' service one rupee per day. Unskilled labourers in the workshop earn seven and a half annas per day, while locksmiths and smiths earn one to 12 rupees. The British-owned railway company in the same city pays the following monthly wages: skilled railwaymen 18 rupees, unskilled railwaymen 13 rupees, and coach-builders 35 rupees. It is evident, then, that wages in other trades are by no means better than in the cotton industry. They are mostly worse. The Bengal and Nagpur Railway Company, where a strike was actually taking place during our stay, pays even poorer wages. In this case the information given is completely beyond question, since it is taken from the British imperialist organ, the *Times of India*: an unskilled monthly wage of ten rupees, and for Indian office workers 25 rupees.

Wages in the Calcutta jute industry are wretched indeed. The two Scottish trade unionists Johnston and Sime, who made detailed investigations in this sector in 1925, reported the following wage rates at that time:

Table 8: Wages in the Calcutta jute industry, for a four-day week of 38 hours; wages include 50 per cent War Bonus, General Bonus, and *Khoraki* (or food allowance granted to compensate the workers for compulsory idleness upon two days per week, due to the employers' policy of restricting production).

[Kind of work]	[Categories of workers]	Rs.	A.
Batchers	Women and girls	2	4
Preparers	Women and girls	2	4
Rovers	Men and women	2	12
Spinners	Males	4	4
Winders	Males	5	0
Beamers and Dressers	Males	4	4
Weavers	Males	6 – 11	
Hemmers and Sewers	Males	1	12
Balers	Males	5	8
Jute Bale Carriers	Males	6	0
Coolies	Males	3	0
Durwans (Gatekeepers)	Males	4	0
Line <i>sardar</i> or Tenter	Males	8	0
Children in Roving Department	Boys	1	8
Children in Spinning Department	Boys	2	8
Twisters	Males	3	3
Bobbin Cleaners	Old men	1	8

Source: Thomas Johnston and John F. Sime, *Exploitation in India* (Dundee: Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union, [1926]), 7: "There is no standard rate of wages. Each mill owner pays what he likes. The wages vary from mill to mill, but the [...] figures which we set down as the normal rates earned by large numbers of workers, may be taken as pretty near the average."

We can also mention in passing the average wages of Indian seamen, whose monthly pay is 26 rupees, or, two sterling. At the Tata Iron and Steel Works, employers and workers agree that the following day-wages are paid: women (engaged in very varied work, including very strenuous transport and lifting work) receive an average of four to five annas, male labourers received seven annas, while native skilled workers are paid to an upper limit of around two rupees. On average, these skilled male workers are paid as much as weavers of Bombay.

Day labourers and women workers, on the other hand, receive less than their counterparts in the Bombay textile industry. It should also be noted that the Tata workers' housing is entirely in the hands of the company. The company rents out rooms at relatively low rates. The entire land in the town of Jamshedpur, a town of 120,000 inhabitants, belongs to the Tata Company, as do all the houses built on it – from the bungalows of the directors and managers down to the small brick dwellings of the workers. The only exceptions are the huts of coolies from certain forest tribes, built out of wood, lime and thatch. These people obtain a small parcel of land from the firm, for which they pay a monthly rent of a few pence and build the huts themselves. The one-room dwelling of the average worker costs him a rent between one and two rupees per month. Only the larger dwellings of skilled and relatively well-paid workers, sometimes divided into two rooms, cost as much as the rents paid by cotton workers in Bombay: four, five, six and even seven rupees. This is an average that they complain about. To a certain extent, therefore, the lower wages of these iron workers are, in comparison with those in the Bombay cotton industry, balanced by a lower cost of living. In Jamshedpur, however, the price of foodstuffs is only a little lower than in Bombay, if at all. In the textile industry of Nagpur, the average daily wage for women is only four to six annas. For skilled labour,

such as winding etc., wages are between six and eight annas. In other towns, average wages are not much higher, and in the jute industry of Calcutta they are definitely much lower. In tea plantations, day labourers of both sexes are paid an average of four annas. The national average for all industries is between three and five rupees per week for male casual workers, as we have already established.

The reader may object that on wages this low the majority of the industrial proletariat would literally starve. This, however, is actually the case in India, and the only matter in dispute is whether it is 40 or 50 per cent, or even more of Indian workers and their families, who are not able to eat their fill once a day. Mahatma Gandhi, when released from prison in very poor health, was pressed by his doctor to avoid any occasion for excitement and not to bother with anything. He answered that he could refrain from writing, and if need be, give up reading, but how could he suddenly stop thinking that in India a hundred million people went hungry. A hundred million! That is a good third of the country's total population, and the proportion is certainly no lower among the industrial proletariat. No other proof is needed of the accuracy of such figures than the look of the people themselves. They are generally mere skeletons, dressed in a few rags. The significance of this appearance is often brushed away with the assurance that physical weakness is a particular characteristic of the Indian race. But it is easy enough to find living refutation of this assertion among the bourgeois classes of Indians in all industrial districts: in Bombay and Madras, Bengal and the United Provinces of the north. There are just as many large and strong individuals as anywhere in England or Germany.

Wage scales of textile workers in various towns

It has been pointed out frequently that average wage levels presented here were one-sidedly drawn up from the employers' side. The workers, or their organizations – insofar as these exist, have no input here. They have not even the possibility of checking or correcting the accuracy of the figures given, since wages are paid to individual workers without any written record. We want to stress that all the information we were given by employers in India were influenced by a propaganda campaign for protective customs duties, pursued under high pressure and with the intent of concealing from the visitor the bottomless poverty of the Indian proletariat. Or, at least with the intent of giving reasons for this poverty that would divert attention from the real matter at hand, which anyone can see from the unbelievably high dividends that are drawn.

From the wage figures listed here, there is still a portion to be deducted. Workers frequently complain about fines imposed on them. These complaints add up to the assertion that the penalty system as a whole amounts to a regular and most substantial curtailment of wages. The diversity of fines and the ruthlessness with which they are imposed makes such assertions very believable. If they are correct, then all wage rates and tables are seriously affected. For completeness' sake, however, we reproduce here the information we were given.

Table 9: Wages at New Victoria Mill Co. Ltd., Kanpur.

Department	Kind of work	Average monthly wage		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Weaving	Weaver	40	0	0
Carding	Striker	15	0	0
Carder	15	0	0	
Stretcher	35 – 40			
Picker	12	8	0	
Supervisor	35 – 70			
Spinning	Self-acting spinner	40 – 50		
Placer	20	0	0	
Second placer	15	0	0	
Packer	12	8	0	
Supervisor	35 – 60			
Winding	Winder	30 – 40		
Woman winder	25 – 30			
Supervisor	30 – 50			
Tradesmen	Turner	35 – 60		
Smith	35 – 45			
Plumber	35 – 60			
Electrician	50 – 100			
Coolies	17	8	0	

The plant has 100,400 spindles and 1,500 looms. It employs an average of 4,000 workers. At the present time, these were made up as follows: weaving 1,230; carding 900; spinning 800; waste spinning 200; winding 300; repair workshop 200.

Table 10: Wages at Coupergunj Mills and Juhi Mills, Kanpur.

Department	Kind of work	Wage		Monthly/daily	
		Rs.	A.	P.	
Carding	Mixing room worker	0	9	0	per day
Carding worker	0	9	0		per day
Department foreman	30	9	0		per month
Supply work	0	9	0		per day
Stretching	Worker (piecework)	32	0	0	per month
Pre-spinning	Coarse flyer	30	0	0	per month
Middle flyer	25	0	0		per month
Fine flyer	20	0	0		per month
Spinning	Spinner	32	0	0	per month
Turner	20	0	0		per month
Packer	0	6	0		per day
Senior overseer (mule)	130	0	0		per month
Senior overseer (ring-spinner)	80	0	0		per month
Overseer (self-actor)	55	0	0		per month
Overseer (ring-spinner)	25	0	0		per month
Weaving	One-loom weaver (piecework)	18	0	0	per month

Department	Kind of work	Wage		Monthly/daily	
		Rs.	A.	P.	
Two-loom weaver (piecework)	35	0	0	per month	
Senior overseer	150	0	0	per month	
Department overseer	60	0	0	per month	
Tradesmen	Smith	1	0	0	per day
Carpenter	1	3	0	per day	
Builder	1	1	0	per day	
Fitter	0	15	0	per day	
Coolies	0	9	0	per day	

Note: This mill has 80,000 spindles and 1,000 looms. It employs 2,634 men, 114 women and 31 children (total 2,279).

Table 11: Wages at Elgin Mill Co. Ltd., Kanpur.

Department	Kind of work	Monthly wage		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Carding	Mixing room worker	21	1	6
Carding worker	10	10	0	
Machinist	18	0	0	
Machinist ⁶	22	0	0	
Skilled carder	45	0	0	
Stretching	Machinist	24	13	3
Spinning	Senior overseer (mule)	95	11	13
Senior overseer (ring-spinner)	88	8	0	
Department foreman (mule)	51	0	0	
Department foreman (ring-spinner)	60	5	0	
First spinner (mule)	41	8	0	
First spinner (ring)	17	8	0	
Second spinner (mule)	40	3	0	
Turner (mule)	23	9	0	
Stacker (ring)	15	10	0	
Stacker (half-time)	11	4	0	
Preparation	Coarse flyer	33	1	0
Middle flyer	29	8	0	
Fine flyer	27	11	0	
Weaving	One-loom weaver	18	7	0
Two-loom weaver	37	5	0	
Senior overseer	142	6	0	
Overseer	78	0	0	
Tradesmen	Fitter	37	14	0
Smith	37	6	0	
Carpenter	31	10	0	

Department	Kind of work	Monthly wage		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Builder	32	0	0	
Coolies	17	5	0	

Wages are paid on a fortnightly basis. Working time is ten hours per day for adults and six days a week. Children are not employed here. Workers are allowed half an hour each day for washing and smoking within the ten-hour shift. The staff receive free medical attention, and the workers' children have free elementary schooling. A large portion of mill workers live in houses that are owned by the company at a rent of one rupee per month.

Table 12: Wages at United Malwa Works, Indore.

Department	Kind of work	Monthly wage in Rs./A./P.		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Carding	Mixing room worker (male)	27	10	0
Striking machinist (male)	22	12	0	
Carding worker (male)	24	6	0	
Carding foreman (male)	195	0	0	
Stretching	Machinist (male)	24	8	0
Spinning	Senior foreman (male)	170	10	0
Department foreman (male)	55	4	0	
First spinner (male)	16	4	0	
Waste spinner (male)	11	6	0	
Spinner (adult male)	8	2	0	
Half-timer (children 12 – 15)	8	2	0	
Preparation	Coarse flyer (male)	24	8	0
Medium flyer (male)	24	8	0	
Fine flyer (male)	24	8	0	
Mechanic	146	4	0	
Weaving	Weaver (piecework)	44	0	0
Overseer	100	0	0	
Chief overseer	215	0	0	
Tradesmen	Fitter	81	4	0
Smith	56	10	9	
Carpenter	50	6	0	
Builder	60	7	0	
Coolies	24	6	0	

Note: This mill has 12,961 looms and 40,000 spindles; the average yarn number is 16.

Table 13: Wages at Empress Mill, Nagpur, 1926.

Department	Kind of work	Average minimum wage per month in Rs.	Average maximum wage per month in Rs.
Machine Shop	Smith, first class	77	92
	Smith, second class	62	77
	Fitter	62	122
	Turner	62	92
	Former	47	77
	Plumber	47	77
	Boilerman	24	32
	Assistant boilerman	17	21
	Oiler	20	24
Spinning	Overseer	45	65
	Stacker	12	14
	Threader, turner	15	24
	Stacker	14	15/8/0
	Stretcher	20	29
	Winder (female)	10	17
	Weighman	15	25
	Striker	15	24
	Carder	15	24
	Fitter	32	55
Weaving	Chain shearer	21	38
	Cutter	20	39
	Weaver	22	50
	Preparer	17	32
Dying and bleaching	Turkish red dyer	15	24
	Indigo dyer	20	26
	Piece dyer	20	26
	Bleacher	16	26

Department	Kind of work	Average minimum wage per month in Rs.	Average maximum wage per month in Rs.
Tradesmen	Carpenter, first class	47	62
	Carpenter, second class	39	47
	Cobbler	24	47
	Builder, first class	54	69
	Builder, second class	39	54
Various	Messenger boys	7	12
	Coolies (male)	15	29
	Coolies (female)	11	14
	Watchmen	17	39
	<i>Mali</i>	12	22

Note: This mill has 100,352 spindles and 2,250 looms.

On top of the wages shown, a bonus is paid which is calculated as follows. The regular bonus of one rupee eight annas is paid to every worker who is present the whole month, with the exception of weavers, turners, fitters, smiths, formers and plumbers, whose wages are viewed as sufficient. There is then also a monthly bonus for long employment, which is paid to workers whose wage is not more than 60 rupees, according to the following scale:

Employed for between 5 and 10 years	1 Rs.
Between 10 and 15 years	1 Rs. 8 A.
Between 15 and 20 years	2 Rs.
Over 20 years	2 Rs. 8 A.

The monthly wages indicated above are increased by these bonuses where applicable.

Table 14: Wages at Model Mill, Nagpur.

Department	Kind of work	Average monthly wage		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Weaving	One-loom weaver	25	0	0
	Two-loom weaver	150	0	
Striking	Worker	19	8	0
Carding	Carding worker	21	0	0
Overseer	25 – 75			
Pot-boys	16	8	0	
Stretcher	22 – 30			
Stacker	12 – 15			
Spinning	Thread layer	16 – 19		
Stacker	13/8 A.–15			
Half-timer	7	8	0	
Overseer	24 – 85			
Winding	Female winder (piecework)	10 – 16		
Overseer	20 – 45			
Tradesmen	Turner	25 – 75		
Smith	30 – 85			
Former	19 – 110			
Electrician	40 – 140			
Coolies	16	8	0	

Note: This mill employs an average of 3,226 workers; it has 52,408 spindles and 1,020 looms. At the present time, the workforce is divided as follows: weaving shop 1,129; carding shop 473; spinning shop 805; winding 267; repair shop 164. Wages were entered inconsistently in this table even in the German original.

Table 15: Wages at Bharat Abhyday Cotton Mill Ltd., Calcutta.

Department	Number of workers	Wage per month in Rs.		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Striking	23	20	3	0
Carding	38	21	13	0
Stretching	58	13	13	0
Machine carding	12	12	8	0
Medium flyer	12	18	20	7
Preparation	108	16	14	0
Spinning (ring)	125	18	10	0
Spinning (self-acting)	78	18	8	0
Various workers	224	—		

Note: Wage figures here are for the month of November 1926. A total of 678 workers are employed. The plant is entirely under Indian management.

Table 16: Wages in Calcutta jute plants in 1925.

Department	Kind of work	Average monthly salary		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Carding	Machine-feeder (female)	10	0	0
Receiver (female)	9	8	0	
Coolies (male)	11	0	0	
Overseer (male)	22	0	0	
Batching	Batcher (male)	11	8	0
Overseer (male)	22	0	0	
Stretching	Machine-feeder (female)	9	8	0
Receiver (female)	9	4	0	
Coolies (male)	11	0	0	
Overseer (male)	22	0	0	
Preparation	Machine-feeder (female)	10	12	0
Fine flyer (male)	12	4	0	
Shifter (male)	11	8	0	
Coolies (male)	11	0	0	
Overseer (male)	22	0	0	
Spinning	Spinner (male)	17	0	0
Children (12 to 15 years)	6	0	0	
Department overseer (male)	25	0	0	
Senior overseer (male)	42	0	0	
Coolies (male)	11	0	0	
Winding	Shot winder (male, piecework)	28	0	0
Coolies (male)	12	0	0	
Chain yarn winder (male and female, piecework)	24	0	0	
Coolies (male)	11	0	0	

Department	Kind of work	Average monthly salary		
		Rs.	A.	P.
Weaving	Weavers (male, piecework)	40	0	0
Department overseer (male)	60	0	0	
Senior overseer	104	0	0	
Sewing	Machine sewer (male, piecework)	43	0	0
Hand sewer (male, piecework)	29	9	0	
Hand sewer (female)	17	8	0	
Fitting-out	Hand calender (male)	13	8	0
Weighman (male)	13	0	0	
Overseer (male)	21	8	0	
Senior overseer (male)	33	8	0	
Tradesmen	Fitter (male)	45	0	0
Smith (male)	36	0	0	
Carpenter (male)	36	0	0	
Builder (male)	36	0	0	

Notes: Based on information from the Factory Inspectorate. Wages are paid weekly.

A large section of the wages indicated in the above tables, including for example of weavers, appears to be a maximum, rather than an average wage. Thus, the figures given for coolies in Tables 9 and 12, of 17/8/0 and 24/6/0 rupees per week respectively, are open to serious doubt. In Kanpur and Indore, from where these figures are drawn, wages are significantly lower than in Bombay. The high wage of 146/0/0 rupees per week for mechanics in Table 12, on the other hand, we take as credible, as in the central Indian princely state of Indore skilled mechanics are quite likely to be hard to find. In general, the sometimes very significant wage differences among the same categories of workers in different places and establishments may not correspond to reality. Bombay alone displays greater wage

differences than those between other towns, and has the highest textile wages in the country, as already mentioned. But even there, wages are not in general as high as those given for other cities in these tables.

2. Wages and foreign rule

We shall deal briefly here with a question that it is certainly necessary to raise: are wages in mills run by Indian employers higher than those in British firms? There is no doubt that wages in the British-owned jute industry are even worse than in cotton, which is controlled partly by Indian and partly by British capitalists. It can be said in all conscience of the British-owned mining industry and the purely British tea plantations that working conditions there are among the most wretched in the country. In the cotton industry itself, however, there is scarcely any difference in wages paid between Indian and British-owned companies. The British mills in this industry are generally more modern than the Indian ones, and often use more rational and productive methods. Despite this, wages in the British enterprises are no higher than in the Indian ones. They rather pertain to the “customary local wage”, and in the best of cases are supplemented by various welfare provisions, as compensation for the sharper exploitation in the rationalized enterprise.

How, though, is the “customary local wage”, and that for India as a whole, determined? Given dividends of 100 per cent, this is certainly not by the demands of competitiveness in the world market, or the wage levels in other countries. The customary wage in India is rather governed by the degree of resistance that the Indian industrial proletariat is in a position to raise against ruthless exploitation unrestrained by consideration of social or population policy. And when this resistance reaches the last stage of social struggle, a stoppage of work, it is broken by the deployment of the imperialist army, which beats down the strikers with a ruthless force of which only a foreign army is capable, and which no domestic government could permit itself, no matter how removed and cut off it was from the people. This army intervenes and shoots just as indiscriminately and mercilessly whether it is Indian or British mills that are on strike,

as shown by recent examples such as the Indian Tata company, or the various English railway companies, where strikers were attacked with bayonets, and most recently in the great Bengal-Nagpur railway strike last year.⁷

This is confirmed in another sphere with similar conditions, by the British Labour MP Colonel Malone. He reported from China on how the “customary” wage, which in Chinese mills was a function of backward organization and low productivity, is now paid by the most rationalized large British companies. These companies demand much greater effort from the workforce and use their imperialist colonial power against the developing indigenous proletariat for the benefit of European firms. The dividends from these, Malone says, repay the capital invested in the space of four years, whereas Chinese employers are generally better disposed towards wage demands of their workers.⁸

We are very familiar with the constantly repeated defence of the colonialists, which always ends with the claim that workers are paid no better by local employers than by foreign imperialists. If this has a certain truth to it, the underlying fact here is no less correct: i. e. that the local capitalist only exploits the defencelessness to which the local proletariat is reduced to by foreign militarism that knows no respect or restraint, in a manner that no government would dare to venture against its own people.

Under an indigenous government, be it ever so aristocratic or autocratic, each “subject” is still a human being. For the European government and administration of a “coloured” colonial people, however, “Coolie number so-and-so”, is simply an object of exploitation that can be shot easily. As Malone expressed it pertinently: the stranger, who does not even understand the people’s language is scarcely able to differentiate one “coloured” face from another and he seldom extends more respect or compassion than he would to a domestic animal. No European court sees the destruction of such “coloured and inferior” human life, on no matter how great a

scale, as a crime equal to the killing of a man of the judge's own race (this on the subject of the relation between the social and the national freedom struggle of the proletariat of the oppressed colonial peoples!).

3. Indian housing conditions

The housing of Indian industrial workers is hard to describe without giving the impression of exaggeration. The worst picture was already presented to us on the first station of our Indian journey, Bombay. Bombay is a peninsula, and as a result very limited in its possibilities of expansion. The vigorous commercial and industrial upsurge of the city in these circumstances naturally makes land extraordinarily expensive, and plots for private dwellings almost unobtainable. The consequence is that the housing shortage there is the very worst. The other two centres of the textile industry, Calcutta and Madras, follow [this pattern]. Workers' housing is in parts located outside these cities – on the periphery, consisting of self-built huts made of mud, bamboo and lime. But as the cities steadily grow, the opportunities for housing of this kind diminish too. For good or bad, the greater part of the Bombay proletariat has to find shelter in four or five-storey *chawls*, which are blocks of slums.

You have to see a *chawl* of this kind, or rather, to smell it, in order to believe it. It consists entirely of individually rented rooms of the smaller type of big-city housing blocks in Germany. These spaces have no "furniture" of any kind, not even decent flooring. In most cases, they do not even have a bed. A bundle of straw is spread on the bare earth or the crudest floorboards, or else a cheap thin cotton cover, not to serve one person, but four to seven; for often enough a family seeks to reduce its costs for housing by taking sub-tenants. 774,000 workers in total live in such one-room "dwellings" in Bombay, with several in each room. In place of a window, these rooms contain an aperture some 30 centimetres

square. Since this vent does not give onto the street, but onto a narrow corridor of scarcely a metre wide separating one *chawl* from the next, it is generally nailed shut with wooden boards or pieces of tin, to stop the stench of the passage streaming in, at least as far as possible. For these passages, just like the house steps, often serve simultaneously as rubbish deposits, drains and cloaca, and the fearful, indeed indescribable stench from them is said to be even worse in the rainy season.

It would be quite perverse to ascribe such conditions to the Indian people's lack of a sense of cleanliness. For both men and women work in the mills, and if the children make a mess at "home", no one is there to clean up after them. The landlord does not take responsibility for this, and the tenants themselves are too poor. If we also take into account the water supply situation, in which often a hundred families have only one stopcock at their disposal, it is clear that with or without any tendency to uncleanliness, the worst kind of dirt is bound to arise. It should be stressed against this that everywhere where women do not work in the mills and take care of the household, the most fastidious cleanliness obtains, the floor is swept clean and the few kitchen implements are polished to a shine.

These are the conditions of proletarian housing in the city of Bombay, which alone counts for half of the Indian cotton workers. The rent for one of these one-room dwellings varies between four and seven rupees, comprising a tenth and a sixth of the monthly wage, or even a fifth to a half for the many who receive lower wages. There is scarcely any workers' housing in Bombay, on account of the high price of land. This is more common in Madras, Bengal and some other industrial regions. In Bombay, on the other hand, there are some tenements built by the city (municipal *chawls*) in which conditions as to light and cleanliness are substantially better than in most of the previously described private blocks. The employers' association for the textile industry even contributed towards the erection of this municipal housing by making the city a loan of 90,000

rupees at a rate of six per cent. Because of their great poverty; countless proletarians who work by day in textile mills spend their nights on the streets and in public places.

Housing needs in Madras and Calcutta are different from that in Bombay. In Madras, where self-built clay huts are more frequent, it regularly happens that after storms or heavy rain, the narrow mud walls under the thatch and bamboo roofs are swept away, and countless families wander around homeless. Another kind of housing common in Madras and Calcutta are the *bustees*, small, one-storey rented cottages belonging to private landlords or companies. The worst housing we saw was in Bangalore, where we spent several hours visiting these housing quarters. We went personally into some half a dozen dwellings, to get a clear idea of their size and other qualities. These were predominantly mud huts covered with grass or palm leaves. The doorway was rarely more than 1.5 metres high and entry was possible only in a sharply stooped position. The living space was generally about 2.5 metres square, i. e. 6 square metres. This provided the quarters for a family of five or six. This kind of housing has to be renewed at least every two years, as it does not withstand more than two rainy seasons. We have seen dwellings of this kind that would seem to be no more than one year old, thus indicating to have weathered just one monsoon. The walls were already so degraded on the weather side that the roof had begun to lean and one had to assume that if urgent repairs were not affected, the huts would definitely be destroyed completely in the next rainy season.

In Bangalore housing districts, the so-called drainage ditches were particularly frightful, being in fact no more than black pools of stagnant water that give off a pestilential stench. We circumvented several such ditches, scarcely a metre wide, and it requires substantial strength of mind, not to mention a robust constitution, for European organs of smell to undertake such inspection without damage to health. It was probably on this inspection in Bangalore

that Miss Shaw, the delegation's secretary, picked up the infection from which she suffered during our stay.

A prison that we visited in the princely state of Jaipur was in any case infinitely better, healthier and more decent than any of the proletarian housing that we saw. Among these, however, the housing of workers in the Tata Iron and Steel Works in north-east India was the best. A jute spinning plant outside Calcutta that we visited had constructed quite decent accommodation for its workforce, but this was very much an exception. Even the little huts of the small peasants and farm workers that we had occasion to see in various regions were better in general than the housing of the industrial proletariat. These too are mud huts roofed with bamboo, reed or straw. They are, indeed, primitive enough, yet they are decent inside and stand in the open countryside with fresh air. They are cared for by the rural population better than is possible for industrial workers after a ten-hour shift and an often long journey to and from work – not to mention the atrociously bad water situation.

The fact that Indian industrial workers come from the same people who inhabit these clean huts is sufficient proof that the filth in urban dwellings is not the result of any disposition to dirtiness on the part of their inhabitants. Further evidence is the generally observable cleanliness of the whole Indian proletariat as far as their rudimentary clothing and metal cooking and eating implements is concerned, the standard of which everywhere aroused our admiration. Moreover, people can be observed on all sides washing and bathing.

As already mentioned, some of the workers in Madras, Calcutta etc. live in workers' housing, which is cleaner and sometimes also less expensive than the private *chawls* and *bustees*. The proportion of workers in workers' housing in some firms is between 15 and 30 per cent. There are few companies that house a higher proportion of their workforce, while many firms provide no housing at all. Despite the obvious advantages that company housing offers in relation to others, workers do not show any great enthusiasm for it. It

was often explained to us cynically enough that they “felt better in their hovels”. But we soon found out that the decisive motives were quite different. Once workers move into company housing, they are generally cut off from kinship and tribal connections that they have maintained with their native village. This has influenced their choice of housing. The key point, however, is that the move into company housing makes them terribly dependent on their employer. There is no law to protect them from being thrown out from one day to the next, as soon as they are laid off or they leave their job. In Madras, we heard bitter complaints of how dismissed workers and their few belongings – cooking pots, bedcover and the rest – were brutally thrown out of company housing even in their absence.

4. Epidemics among industrial workers

In connection with the housing situation, diseases and epidemics have to be mentioned. These affect people throughout this poor and plundered great land. It is only too understandable that industrial workers suffer most from diseases and epidemics, given the most pitiful conditions into which they are cramped.

We were able to familiarise ourselves with this grisly phenomenon at close quarters. Deep in the heart of the country, in the textile city of Nagpur, one of the main centres of the so-called Central Provinces, there was an outbreak of plague during our stay. In this city, where land conditions for housing construction provide more room than in the narrowly hemmed-in city of Bombay, workers' housing is of a different kind than the latter. The houses lie outside the actual city limits in the open countryside. Instead of blocks and tenements, they consist of tiny huts of reed, straw and bamboo combined into little villages, with an aspect reminiscent of a medieval armed camp. In the centre, the employers' “social welfare” programme had constructed barracks for about a hundred people each, which served for entertainment and meetings of inhabitants,

especially the youth. The entire “village” was covered in a carpet of dust, in which the feet sink up to the ankle. In the lack of water, insufficient lavatories and bitter poverty of the inhabitants, who, like the majority of the industrial proletariat of India, are under-nourished, lie the grounds for the widespread epidemics and illnesses of a tropical country. The foreigner is less surprised at hundreds and thousands who are stricken by plague in such a situation than at the fact that pestilence leaves such quarters ever again.

The defence measure against epidemics is to establish a [medical] centre at some distance from the source of infection to which those taken ill are brought. Medical assistance, if available at all, is just as scarce and unsatisfactory as is health and accident support in the mills themselves. The isolation centre, like the “workers’ village”, is surrounded by a grisly picture of stunted cattle, half-dead goats and naked children who, completely covered in dust, play their games among sick and dead animals, while mosquitoes and other insects establish a solid connection between the romping children and these decaying corpses. A few hundred metres away, however, the latest kind of ring and self-acting spindles are operating, the 1925 model from Lancashire. The workers operating them return in the evening to the dusty hovels of their village. The next day, perhaps, they are taken to the plague centre along with their fellow sufferers.

Employers and the foreign government equip this country with the most modern tools and heavy machines. When there is a high profit to be gained, they overcome all difficulties and obstacles. Against pestilence and plague, however, they still have not found a solution. The proletarians remain helpless before the forces of nature, as if it were still the Middle Ages, while the industrialists have the machines from Lancashire, and enjoy dividends of a percentage that vies with that of the black death in the workers’ village.

5. The state of education

One of the worst deprivations of the Indian proletariat is the general illiteracy. This is a source of numerous misunderstandings.

According to the Census report of 1921, some eight per cent of persons over ten years old can read and write to some minimum extent. This is already a very low percentage. But in the British-governed industrial provinces the proportion is much lower than the national average; and in fact, no higher than four to five per cent. The national level of eight per cent is only obtained by a series of native states, headed by Baroda and followed by Cochin, Travancore and others, which have an educational figure that is well above average. In the state of Baroda, for instance, in which, thanks to the Maharaja's initiative, compulsory education has existed for 25 years and literacy is now a common acquisition of a large portion of the population. [...] ⁹

Though not of the same scope as Baroda, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin also pay great attention to popular education. It is generally the case that in many other native states far more is done for education than in the British territories. In the latter, policy is determined by quite different considerations than those of popular welfare. An expanded school system would also raise political concerns. The Indian proletariat is well aware of this, and how bitterly it feels that the British government places obstacles on popular education is shown by the applause that greeted the British member of our delegation, Tom Shaw, when he said that a government which, for a hundred years, had neglected to advance the people under its control to the most basic level of literacy is not worth the name of a government.

Indeed, by destroying the traditional village community, and by introducing the blood-sucking collector system, the British occupiers destroyed the old school system. Given their insatiable need for money for the army and navy and given the high salaries of officers and civil servants, up until now only a very small part of the high taxes paid by the Indian people has been allocated to popular

education. Of all the sins that British rule has committed against the Indian people, this crime of devastating an old culture while preventing a new intellectual culture is the very worst!

In Burma, which has only been under British rule since 1885, and which has been able to preserve a strong culture of its own until recently, the school figures are far above the Indian average. The same is true of “red Bengal”, where the attendance of higher education has different causes, in particular the enlightening work of the revolutionary intelligentsia, with its great yearning for freedom among the popular masses.

But even what there is in the way of education is not the work of the government. Christian missions and philanthropic associations have conducted a great variety of educational work, as have textile employers more recently. The latter was partly due to pressure from trade unions and the national liberation movement. Here too, schools have been established, for example in the great iron and steel works belonging to Tata, the Indian Krupp.¹⁰ On the other hand, included in the eight per cent who have learned to read and write is an extremely large number whose education has been paid for by their own or their family’s resources. This is in particular the case for students at higher teaching institutes. Students at universities, colleges, academies, technical and agricultural centres, and the like, make up nearly a quarter of the entire school enrolment, which at the present time is between one and a half and two million. This disproportionately high number of students in higher education, in relation to students educated at public expense, is an outstanding feature in the sociology of India, which merits consideration from several aspects. It is a feature in which India is almost alone in the world; of the larger countries at least, only pre-War Russia would be in any way comparable.

This brief consideration of how the small fraction of the educated population is divided between different parts of the country as well as by social class will make clear how among the industrial proletariat of

the big cities under British rule, there are at most one or two in a hundred who have had any kind of schooling. Even insofar as the basic knowledge of English required for communication with employers and authorities is concerned, it was repeatedly confirmed to us in large mills of two to five thousand workers that there was not a single worker who understood any English, let alone had any fluency in it.

6. Corruption in mills and factories

A general object of complaint is bribes that each worker has to pay in order to find employment. The overseer (*sirdar* or *sardar*) regularly extracts a sum of five rupees, equivalent to the wages of one to two weeks' work.¹¹ Additionally, the worker has to bribe the *sirdar* to get permission to go on leave. We asked the employers' association in Bombay whether it would not be possible to replace this corrupt system of hiring by setting up public job centres. The arguments we heard regularly in its defence were a motley mixture of denial and justification. That was not without a comic side: first, the rapid growth of industry today means shortage of labour, rather than surplus. Secondly, the system is not as bad as presented by political "agitators"; and thirdly, at the present time it is the only possible system.

The true state of affairs, however, as we established in the course of our journey, is that the employer and the *sirdar* are closely allied in exploiting the workers, for whom the bribes paid are regular expenses. If a firm faces trouble because it employs children below the legal age, or because children who should be employed only half-time are employed on a double shift, or because women are employed on night-work, or because men work more than 11 hours a day, then the employer can plead ignorance and the responsibility lies with the *sirdar*. The *sirdar* thus provides a kind of risk insurance for the employer. There is no denying that the *sirdar*, who is usually

an Indian, knows his people. But in no way is he indispensable in this intermediary role. This emerges clearly from the fact that the Tata Iron and Steel Works have abolished the system and operate successfully with its own recruitment centre, which is well conducted and compiles interesting statistics. In the entire Indian textile industry, however, there is to this day no public job information, though in the big cities, where mills are located, this could be established without any great difficulty. Even the seamen of Bombay are hired under the bribe system, and only in Calcutta is there a kind of employment bureau for seamen, though not completely free of the *sirdar* system.

7. Late payment of wages

Almost throughout the Indian cotton industry, but especially in the district of Bombay, wages are paid on a monthly basis. It is not hard to imagine what confusion and shock this extended payment causes to people who in their great majority suffer considerable hardship, quite apart from the fact that it is absolutely unjust to make people who so badly need their small income from day to day wait a whole month until their labour is pitifully rewarded. As if this were not enough, the first two weeks' wages are withheld from each worker as a caution, so that only in the most favourable case does he receive payment for two weeks after he has worked a whole month, and often the first month's wage only after six weeks. The long payment period is made even worse by a widely practised arbitrariness with payment date. In this respect at least, there has been a considerable change for the better in recent years, so that this abuse can no longer be called general. All the same, there are still complaints today of companies who pay the month's wage only after a delay of five or even six weeks.

The motivation of employers in insisting on monthly payment, despite repeated demands from workers for weekly payments, or at

least fortnightly payments, is unclear. Is it the reduction of office and accounts work, or the interest to be had on the sum withheld, or perhaps both? In the Calcutta jute industry, wages are often paid at shorter intervals, generally twice a month. One suspects this is because of the abominably low wages there. Too many workers would starve if they had to wait a whole month. In the cotton industry too, there are some mills outside Bombay where the payment of wages is fortnightly.

8. Arbitrary fines

Fines in the form of deduction from wages are imposed arbitrarily and with no regulation; for instance for absence from work. If a worker misses one day in the mill, he generally loses two days' wages; this is frequently the case in mills with authorised leave. In Madras, we visited a spinning plant in which two days' wages were deducted for authorised, and three days for unauthorised, leave. If a weaver makes a significant mistake in his work, then the whole piece is given to him and counted at the shop price, so that in the evening and on Sundays, workers can be seen on the street trying to sell goods of this kind, to get just a fraction of what has been deducted from their wages.

The system of "substitutes" also arouses much complaint. In many textile mills, it is customary that workers are not permitted to stay away from work, even in urgent cases, until they have found a substitute for their absence and at their own cost. On top of this, workers have to pay the substitute a dismissal fee as soon as they resume work, while only receiving their wage at the month's end. Workers complain frequently of how fines deducted from their wages are not spent on welfare provisions, but rather divided among the mill's senior staff.

The worst of these arbitrary penalties is very often in cases where a worker gives notice or is dismissed. It is not unusual to take considerable deductions from the wages that the worker is owed and, in addition, the two weeks' wage that was withheld when he was taken on. The reasons for deductions are all kinds of penalties: supposedly bad work, breaches of discipline, late arrival, etc. Eventually, he goes home without a penny. A worker who was cheated in this way could, in theory, complain to the courts. In practice, however, such a complaint is impossible, given the worker's inability to pay for legal fees, unless his trade union takes up the

case for him. Even if it gets to this point, however, the outcome is still very questionable, for as we have already emphasised, workers receive no written record of their wage calculation. In court, therefore, the employer either maintains that fines deducted were justified or tries to deny that any deductions were made at all. And so, even seeking compensation for his most basic rights, the lack of schooling, for which the imperialist foreign government bears the greatest responsibility, works against the Indian proletariat.

9. Workers' indebtedness

The reader may well ask how a worker manages to survive those weeks for which wages are withheld, and how he pays the required bribes. The course he now embarks on is both simple and fateful, leading the Indian proletariat into a further circle of hell. He borrows the sum from a moneylender, who is quite often the same person who supervises his work in the mill or is one of those professional moneylenders who come from the northern province of Kashmir and regularly sets up shop in the mill districts. For a loan of three or four months he pays interest of 100 per cent or more; it is naturally impossible to get any firm information on these matters.

According to the workers' leader Joshi, no less than three-quarters of textile workers of Bombay are in the hands of moneylenders. Most of them have debts of about four months' wages. In other industrial cities, the situation is no better. In Madras, the local trade union leader Shiva Rao introduced us to a group of young women workers whose complaints he wanted to translate for us. We assumed at first that these were complaints about illegally long hours worked by young people and were astonished to hear that they were women who were dismissed when they were about to give birth. They then had to borrow money in order to pay for their reinstatement. Somehow the women survived until they received their next wages in six weeks' time. The distress that was visible in

their appearance reminded us of the descriptions of Zola¹²; it is impossible to convey in a factual report.

10. Unemployment

Unemployment in India is not a problem on the European scale. The industrial proletariat generally maintains connections with the countryside to the extent that, in case of need, he can return and receive support from his extended family or kin, somehow maintaining his existence for better or worse. What is more significant is that large-scale industry in India has so far developed on an unbroken ascending curve, and has generally not needed to throw masses of workers onto the street; rather, it has constantly sucked in new ones from the country, from where peasants are driven by the pressure of taxation on their tiny plots. Unemployment in our western countries is also caused in part by these coloured masses being attracted on an increasing scale into low-paid industrial work. Nothing could show more clearly the worldwide connections of the social question and working-class politics than the fact that the tax collector in an Indian village is in a position to influence and depress the labour market for the European proletariat by ruining the small peasants.

It would be an exaggeration to say that there are no unemployed in India. But, until now, there has not been a problem of urban unemployment on the western scale. However, a problem of full severity exists in India for a stratum that workers in our countries face to a much more limited extent. There is very high unemployment in India among the intelligentsia, the extraordinarily numerous employees with higher education who are employed in trading companies and businesses, as teachers in native schools or British establishments, as railway staff and in more junior posts of state and public service. Especially in big cities such as Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, unemployment among this intellectual

proletariat is very widespread. The over-filling of intellectual professions is understandable if we recall the relatively high proportion of Indians who attend higher education. Added to this is the fact that employment opportunities for the relatively numerous intellectuals are seen as a threat by British employees and the junior ranks of the British Civil Service.

It is interesting to see in this connection how whites and coloureds are paid for the same activity. The so-called "Civil Lists", which give official ranks and salaries for each province are very instructive here. A college teacher, for example, if he is British by race, earns between 1,500 to 2,500 rupees per month. His Indian colleague in the same faculty, for whom English is a second mother tongue, receives between 100 to 150 rupees. The differences in salary are just as crass in the middle ranks of the civil service, where Indians moving upwards and British moving downwards often encounter each other on the same level. At major railway stations, the stationmaster is British; at smaller ones he may be either British or Indian. If he is British, then like any white employee he earns a monthly salary of 2,000 rupees or more, no matter what his particular aptitude may be. He occupies a pleasant country house with servants, has the right to a month's annual leave and an early and generous pension. An Indian on the same level of service at the same station is paid just like an Indian teacher at a college, so that he has to hold his hand out and say a polite "thank you" to get a tip from a traveller for reserving a compartment.

We cannot refrain from adding here that the European official who is forced to live for a number of years in the tropics, and has to renounce many conveniences of his home civilization, may well have a certain claim to balance this by a higher salary, especially as fairly frequent home leave and all available comfort during his stay in hot countries are needed to prevent a rapid deterioration in health. But if competent and well-trained native personnel are paid so poorly in the same positions that they cannot even satisfy their basic

demands, and when even those higher paid employees are subject to a deliberate policy of keeping them in a subordinate position, this cannot but arouse rage and resistance among such an intelligent people as the Indians. This should make a modest contribution to understanding the widespread Indian way of thinking as far as comparing the nature and significance of the national and social struggles is concerned.

11. Mill welfare

Social provisions exist in a more or less developed form in most mills that are under British ownership, but this is rarely the case with those owned by Indians. In the large mills, there is indeed a pressing need to establish provisions for medical attention, crèches and child care, as well as delivery rooms and the like. We visited a large number of establishments of this kind and had to acknowledge that these correspond to modern standards and are everywhere marked by a painstaking care and cleanliness.

In this section on welfare, we shall give a few examples. In Sholapur, the Indian mill of Mr. Morarji is distinguished by its provision of maternity support. The provisions are as follows: women workers approaching childbirth are allowed seven weeks' leave on full pay, though during this time they are supposed to perform some light housekeeping at the mill. For three weeks after birth they receive half pay. This is undoubtedly a great deal in Indian conditions, being provided here by the decision of the employer. Mr. Morarji is very wealthy, and besides his large plant in Sholapur, which employs eight thousand workers, he also has a mill in Bombay, as well as a share in the Tata company and several steamboats in the coastal trade. In his cotton mill, he has also introduced a number of welfare measures: medical attention, facilities for young people, canteens, shops and housing.¹³ Another mill that stands out by its special provisions of this kind is the

Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras with 9,400 workers. This company also operates a savings bank.

In Germany, the workers' movement has always opposed the system of company savings banks, as in our conditions they present a danger of keeping wages down. The situation in India is very different. Here there is not the least government social welfare. If a worker falls sick, often having migrated to the city from a remote rural district, he has no relatives to take care of him and even runs the risk of starving to death. In these circumstances, the existence of a company savings bank can be seen in the workers' interest. These operate as follows: an account is opened for each worker. When wages are paid, five per cent is paid to the savings account without this being deducted from the net wage. After a year this is returned at double the value. In case of sickness, up to 60 per cent of the sum saved can be drawn. If we take the case of a weaver earning perhaps 350 rupees per year, and having been with the company for three years, he will have accumulated a savings deposit of 105 rupees. In case of sickness, he can then draw out 60 rupees, a sum that enables him to withstand an illness of several weeks. After ten years with the company, the deposit is increased to 15 per cent and can then be withdrawn at any time. Provision is made in case of death for the account holder to nominate a person who is entered in the register and is then authorised to withdraw the deposit. In the prevailing Indian conditions, this has to be seen as a welfare provision that protects the worker from the direst poverty.

The motives leading employers to welfare measures of this kind are of varying kinds. First among them is trade union activity and agitation, as in such a poor country, employers certainly seek to clip the wings of these with such provisions. Apart from this, however, it is abundantly clear that even if workers take up the welfare benefits offered to them, these are still only a poor substitute for a dignified wage, and for social and legal measures that the government here refrains from introducing. As far as British-owned mills have made

welfare provisions, this is due to the fact that since the political action of Mahatma Gandhi and the emergence of a general Indian liberation movement, the ground is beginning to heat up under their feet, so that welfare in their mills acts as a kind of lightning conductor. In many places the decisive intention may also be to keep workers with the company for longer and slow down a turnover of labour that is damaging to the regular course of production. In the jute-producing region of Calcutta, and probably in other regions as well, welfare provisions have also been established with the object of escaping higher taxation for the general expenses of the municipality.

Taken as a whole, these arrangements are still at an early stage, and because they exist only patchily and only benefit certain groups of workers, they cannot replace the lack of public (state or municipal) provisions. The latter, however, have been completely neglected by governments and local authorities in India, so that apart from mill-owners, only some philanthropic societies have concerned themselves with workers' well-being. Particular mention here should be given to the Social Service League of Bombay, which by its work of education, money-lending and other facilities does a good deal for the working-class.¹⁴ In Ahmedabad, however, and neighbouring Indore, it is the trade unions inspired by Gandhi, supported by private funds from Indian nationalist circles, which have pursued welfare provision on a quite significant scale.

12. Alcohol and opium among workers

Before the start of British rule, public consumption of alcohol was unknown in India. The general drinks of the people were milk in its various preparations and tea. But in India as in China, imperialism made the addictive use of intoxicants into a rich source of income. In rural Indian communities, where people are still more closely bound together, there is as yet no extensive consumption of alcohol. In the

village community, drunkards are expelled from caste associations; the worst fate that can befall an Indian. Muslims are forbidden the use of alcohol by their religion, and to which the Indian Muslims keep very strict allegiance, while higher Hindu castes also reject the consumption of intoxicating liquor. The burden of drink thus blossoms particularly in the proletarian poverty of big cities, where people from all parts of the country live together, torn away from their old community and family connections, uncontrolled and in the worst conditions. The British government was quick to grasp that among these people with very low wages and incomes, who could not be made to pay income tax, monopolised alcohol trade was the only possibility of drawing revenue even from the lowest stratum of the Indian people. It therefore declared drinking dens in proletarian quarters and neighbourhoods of mills to be its monopoly, and leases them out on an annual basis by public auction. If one of these “locals” gives a good return, the British government automatically draws a higher revenue from the concession, as prospective lessees come forward in greater number, raising the price by their competing demand. Government income from alcohol concessions in 1924 – 25 came to no less than 340 million marks.¹⁵ No wonder that provincial governments in all parts of India jealously guard these gloomy goldmines from being sabotaged by agitation and boycott.

Trade unions and their leaders do their utmost to boycott these outlets, and as far as their influence on organised workers goes, their struggle against liquor bars has met with success. But in order to move forward to a general battle against drinking dens, they would need to set up pickets outside them. And the government, which was quick to appreciate the threatened danger, has moved against these boycott measures in Bombay, Madras and other cities with an utter lack of restraint, not hesitating to use weapons against pickets to keep the joints open. Shortly before our arrival, popular leaders demanded that the Madras provincial government should legislate to make the province alcohol-free, but this was refused on the ground

that the income from the concessions was one of the strongest sources of state revenue. In the Bombay province, the Ahmedabad trade unions have repeatedly made the same demand, similarly without success.

The drinks consumed vary from one province to another. In Madras it is palm wine or toddy with its strong, vinegary smell. In other parts of the country, alcohol is brewed from rice. In every case these are liquors of the lowest possible quality, which however does not prevent them fetching a fairly high price. A pitcher of evil-smelling palm wine, for example, costs four annas, i. e. the average daily wage of an Indian coolie. This amount is however sufficient to make a man completely drunk. For Indian mill workers and their dependents, these drinking dens are a source of nameless misery, but for the government and its officials, these are a rich spring of income as well as a source of the worst kind of corruption. Shortly before our departure from India, a high British government official was dismissed from his post for giving out concessions against bribes.

Opium trade plays a similar role to alcohol outlets. There are 5,950 opium dens that the government itself describes to Parliament as "concessions", besides a considerable number which are not known to the government, or which it does not include in the figures. In 1925, some 73,000 acres in India (296,000 hectares) was used for the production of opium. Despite the worldwide agitation against the immense crimes of the opium trade, only four provincial governments, representing a small portion of India as a whole, have even moved against the social smoking of opium in public saloons: the provinces of Punjab, Delhi, North-West Frontier and United Provinces. In all parts of the country the burden continues as before, and even plays a certain role in the care of children and infants, as proletarian women who work in textile mills are sold a kind of pill containing opium which they give to their children to send them to sleep.

If we consider how this evil thrives in the interest of a foreign government in no way concerned for the health of people, and under its express protection, we can understand to what degree in India the struggle of the labour movement and trade unions is also necessarily a struggle for political freedom.

13. The legal situation of Indian workers

a) The factory legislation of 1922

From 1922, the Factory Act was applied to all industrial companies in India. Unfortunately, this new legal protection for workers stops short of tea estates, where the arbitrary will of the plantation owner continues to reign unchecked. In other branches of industry, trade and transport, the working week is now limited to 60 hours and the working day to 11 hours. The law also provides for a weekly rest day, and for a break of one hour for rest and food within the working day. Hours beyond 60 in a week have to be paid at an overtime rate of 25 per cent above regular hours. The law also forbids night work for women between seven p.m. and five a.m.

Besides this general factory legislation, there is also the Indian Mining Act, which is less satisfactory than the general law as far as it forbids child labour only below the age of ten. Its only advantage compared with the 1922 Factory Act is that it prescribes a maximum working week of 54 hours for underground workers instead of 60 hours. Indian people experience it as especially uncivilised and demeaning that mining law permits employment of women in mines, and even underground work, a provision of which mine-owners, mainly Europeans, make very extensive use.

Even though the labour protection measures in Indian factory legislation are certainly very modest, they could represent a certain advance, if the customary management practices did not offer dozens of ways in which these limited regulations can be flouted. In

textile towns such as Kanpur, where British employers are in a dictatorial position, working time is finessed in the most flagrant ways. For instance, periodically in the course of the day, mill clocks are stopped to trick a primitive workforce that naturally has no watches of its own, or else the management announce that working time will be paid according to the turns of the machine. What is possible in mills of that city is shown by a striking fact: there are mills there that do not even have toilets, so that men and women have to go and relieve themselves in the open air and are chased back into the workshops by the overseer if they stay out too long.

In the Calcutta jute industry, the working week is at times cut back to three days per week in order to restrict the monopolised production of jute. At present, a 54-hour week is worked in four days. The mill masters have introduced a complex overlapping shift system that makes it impossible for the individual worker to check the working hours he has put in. The workforce is divided into five shifts A to E, whose starting times, breaks and finishing times are supposed to be as follows:

Table 19: Shifts in the Calcutta jute industry.

Shift A	5.30 – 6.30	8.30 – 13.30	15.30 – 18.30
Shift B	5.30 – 7.30	9.30 – 14.30	16.30 – 18.30
Shift C	5.30 – 9.00	10.00 – 15.30	17.30 – 18.30
Shift D	5.30 – 10.30	12.30 – 16.30	18.00 – 18.30
Shift E	6.30 – 11.30	14.30 – 17.30	–

According to this scheme, the average working time per worker is nine hours and 30 minutes per day. The machines, however, run for 13 hours and 30 minutes on each of the four days worked, so that neither a factory inspector nor any other outsider is in a position to check how long each individual worker is on the job each day.¹⁶

If circumventions of the prescribed working time such as these are possibly only local and isolated, the provisions concerning women's and children's labour are flouted on a far greater scale. Already in Bombay we were told how easy it is for employers to get around the ban on night work for women. In most mills, the inspector visits no more than once a year, announcing his arrival in advance into the bargain. In our experience, the law on child labour can scarcely be described as anything more than mere legislative window-dressing. In two mills that we visited, our arrival was announced. Children who were evidently below the legal age were sent out to the toilets before our arrival, while the exits were guarded by one of the uniformed supervisors, a fact that we heard about unfortunately, only in the evening after we had left the premises.

In Calcutta, the labour commissioner himself informed us with a smile that the law was almost impossible to apply. First of all, it is hard to tell in India whether a child is more or less than 12 years old; and as far as half-timers are concerned, i. e. children between 12 and 15, it is extraordinarily common that after finishing a six-hour shift in one mill, they go on to another shift at a different mill, something that is impossible to prevent. When asked how the abusive employment of young people on double shifts in this way might be recognised, he answered: "Only if the child dies in the wrong mill, so that the identity details are not right." In such a case, the employer simply shifts responsibility on to the *sirdar* or overseer.

The only way of preventing the fearful abuse of the employment of children for a total of twelve hours on a double shift would be to introduce compulsory education in the districts under British rule, as it has long existed in Baroda and other "native" states. But the British government is not prepared to find the money for this and lacks any sense of duty towards the people it rules.

b) Women's and children's work

In the Indian cotton industry as a whole, women make up something between a quarter and a third of all workers, and a similar percentage work in the jute industry of Bengal. The employment of women and children on tea plantations is also very widespread, even if impossible to establish statistically. The reason for this, as officially given, is that plantation owners encourage the coolies they take on to bring as many of their dependents with them to work as they can. This has the double advantage for employers in that that the young children work for a wage even lower than that of men, while often displaying greater nimbleness in plucking the tea leaves. It strikes any cultured person with horror that in the Bengal mines women make up more than a third of the entire workforce and have to work underground in the same way as men. In the iron industry as well, the Tata works, for example, employ some 3,000 women in the most arduous transport work. Throughout India, again, women are to be found in heavy lifting and transport work in the building industry. The traveller arriving in Madras is struck right away by the large number of women to be seen day in, day out with baskets on their heads, in which they carry bricks and other building materials for a distance that can be measured in kilometres. From early to late, whole processions of these women workers can be seen, moving in a crocodile from a depot of materials to a construction site and returning likewise, a work for which they are paid between two and four annas a day, without any check being possible as to whether they work for more than 11 hours. We shall return to the subject of women workers later on in this report.

Working conditions for women differ considerably between particular districts and centres of the cotton industry. In some cities, such as Bombay, Sholapur and Madras, various firms have established care facilities for children and infants in their mills, where they are looked after by women personnel. Two firms of our acquaintance, one in Sholapur and the other in Madras, also provide maternity support to the extent of full pay for seven weeks before

delivery and half pay for three weeks after. Women in the cotton industry, moreover, enjoy the same benefit from certain welfare provisions as do men. It is especially in the case of sickness that women workers suffer. Whereas male workers can generally return to their village, this option is not open to women, whether because they have been expelled from the village community on account of leaving home or are unable to make the journey for other reasons.

The worst case, as far as female labour in the textile industry is concerned, is the condition of workers in the jute industry of Bengal, where the greater part of all textile workers are employed. As far as we are aware, there is scarcely any kind of maternity assistance there, and a worker who stays away from work because of childbirth is treated as if she has left work for some other reason and is dismissed from the mill. The practical consequence of this fear of dismissal is that the worker has to pay the foreman more or less a month's wage as a bribe in order to be taken on again, which leads many women to await their delivery actually in the workplace. An official government inquiry into *Women Labour in Bengal Industries* reports as follows:

It emerged from individual investigation of 132 women workers that 102 of them had between them a total of 338 children alive, of which 139 first saw the light in the mill while their mother was at work.¹⁷

The report adds in almost triumphal vein that of these 139 children living at the time of the inquiry, 91 were still alive. The very high level of infant mortality among the Indian proletariat can scarcely be of surprise, given conditions such as these. On average, 660 infants in every 1,000 die before they reach the age of one year. The Gandhi trade union in Ahmedabad has established that in that city, infant mortality is an average of 38 per cent in the population as a whole but rises to 60 per cent among the working-class and to 80 per cent for the "untouchables". We were unable to discover for ourselves

how high the percentage is for Bengal. Yet, everything seems to indicate that infant mortality among the proletariat here is the highest in the country, as nowhere else is the visitor confronted with more gruesome images of female proletarian poverty than among the Bengal jute workers. In a thick cloud of dust from jute sacks and fibres, pregnant women work until their delivery is imminent, and start again immediately after.

Since there are no facilities for infant care in the Bengal jute mills, the mother watches the newborn baby at the workplace, alongside the machine she serves, and it is not unusual for her to hold it on one arm while operating the machine with the other, an image that we saw dozens of times. Bigger children play in the dirt and dust of the piles of jute and finished sacking, and as soon as they are old enough help their mother with petty tasks at work, a few years before they are employed in the mill themselves. The picture of poverty is a pathetic sight: in one of the jute spinning plants in the Calcutta area, the Englishman who was escorting us while touring the mill discovered a woman worker occupied in sewing jute sacks together with her infant, both only scantily clothed, and marked all over with distinctive spots. This was a case of smallpox and at a signal from the Englishman both mother and child were dismissed from the premises without any great scandal. When asked why infants and children of all ages were allowed to remain in the mill, managers and inspectors replied that a ban on this custom would mean hardship for the women themselves, as they would then have to pay an older woman out of their earnings to look after their children.

In Bombay and the other cotton centres, it is customary for several women together to entrust their children while they are at work to the care of an older woman, in return for a small payment. The jute workers of Bombay, however, are too poorly paid to be able to afford this luxury. The women workers' pay is so low that they cannot even rest from work after childbirth. Both employers and

government quite openly declare that there would be no point in responding to international demand and preventing them from work for a number of weeks before and after childbirth. Given their pathetic level of pay, leave from work would be a hardship they simply cannot afford.

The wretched poverty into which children of jute workers are born just beside the machine and after that, growing up in the dirt of the mill, has effects that are only too visible. The malnutrition of these dirty figures is immediately apparent, and their damaged faces give an impression of premature adulthood and even old age. It is questionable whether these proletarian children will ever experience a single year of childhood outside of the mill. They spend their entire childhood alongside their mothers in the workshop, and at 12 they reach the legal age at which they can be employed in the mill themselves. According to the law, children from 12 to 15 may only work half-time, i. e. six hours per day. But the legal age is ascertained not on the basis of a birth certificate, but by “outward appearance”. The examining doctor is fairly generous in making this assessment, as he assumes that this outward appearance is deceptive, since the children always seem very stunted and backward, and are mostly older than they would appear.

A remarkable conclusion, if sadly quite pertinent! Women’s pay in jute mills is in the best of cases no more than about eight rupees a month; that of children working half shifts is only four rupees and less. And just as children have no real protection against being worked overly long hours, so these women are also mistreated with forced overtime at every opportunity, while employers make the customary excuse that the *sirdar* was responsible without their knowing.

The fact of occupational disease in the jute industry, so-called jute dermatitis, has also been proved officially and published about by the government. This is especially prevalent among women in the preparation departments of the production process. The same

report, however, maintains that there would be no purpose in paying women workers a higher wage, as they would in any case hand over their pay to the man they live with. This is a very interesting excuse, with which Europe is not yet familiar. The highest paid women workers, those employed underground in mines, earn a monthly wage of 11 or 12 rupees. Though we had no direct opportunity to see it, children lead a similarly wretched existence here to that in the jute industry. They grow up alongside their working mothers. Just as in the building trade, women here often carry loads of 35 kilos for a distance of 150 metres, as the mine-owners have no interest in supplying their plants with modern technology and transport as long as they have such cheap labour-power at their disposal. They pride themselves though on paying an allowance for childbirth between eight annas and one rupee.

The question of marital relations in the Indian industrial proletariat cannot be simply answered. Workers from certain castes and tribes migrate from the village together with their wives and work with them in the same mill. If one party changes workplace, the other party will definitely follow. In other castes, tribes and regions, only men move to the town and cohabit with women working in the same mill. Such unions generally do not last very long, and the relationship dissolves as soon as one party seeks a different job. Among these women, who lead a free or temporary cohabitation, some are from fairly high-placed castes and families, who have been expelled from their caste, village or kinship community and come to work in the mills.

From everything we have been told by our Indian colleagues, it is probable that married women make up the greater number even in the industrial proletariat. If the others seek a temporary relationship with a man in the same mill, this is generally, as things go in India, for reasons of protection against overseers and fellow workers. But also, because the men generally earn too little for a separate existence, and the women invariably so, they thus seek to relieve

their circumstances by living together. In trade unions, women are generally represented in a substantially lower proportion than men. Old traditions also still prevent them from attending public meetings of any size. Even women who are members of the organization stay away from such meetings.

c) The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923

In 1923, a law on accident compensation came into force. This provides the heirs of a worker who suffered from a fatal accident at work with his wages for 30 months. In case of permanent disability, wages are paid for 42 months, and 84 months for a young person. Partial loss of working capacity is provided for, according to the degree assessed.

The complete lack of education among the Indian proletariat is, again, injurious in this case. The greater part of Indian workers is quite unaware of the existence of this law, and the small section who have any information about it are generally in no position to find a way to make claims under it. The law also sets a six-month deadline, after which no further claim is possible. At the so-called Labour Office in Madras, it was actually explained to us that claims for accident compensation run especially low because workers are unaware of this law and its operation. Only the work of trade union organisers has managed in recent years to bring a larger number of cases before the courts and obtain compensation for those entitled to it. The leader of the workers' organisation in Madras, Shiva Rao, spends a large part of his valuable time on dealing with individual cases of this kind.

When a claim is made by a worker who has been permanently and completely disabled and is incapable of further work, the situation is at least relatively clear. The question then is to prove that the accident was suffered at work, and what the former wage was. The case is different with partial incapacity. The law does not

establish any kind of scale for calculating compensation, so that at the end of the day the decision is made arbitrarily by ill-willed officials. In both Madras and Calcutta, we heard all too many complaints about how these decisions were reached.

The worst situation, however, is with regard to claims made by survivors. Since the great mass of Indian people are married according to either Hindu or Muslim rites, there is no record of these marriages by the public administration. It is hard to establish the actual existence of a marriage in such circumstances. Though free cohabitation of men and women is not uncommon among the Indian proletariat – torn away from the extended family and village community and thrown together in the populated quarters of big cities – it is altogether less common than the number of compensation claims, which are dismissed with the convenient assertion that such women are simply prostitutes. The Indians for their part assure us that the stigma of widowhood is so strong in their tradition that it can virtually be ruled out that anyone would make such claims without due foundation. In any case, the law here plays a vicious trick and enables the majority of claims to be rejected. Here again we see how little meaning written laws have, when not taking into account the particular circumstances in which they are applied. The Indian accident compensation law may appear to European eyes as a step forward, but if attention is paid to its practical application, it is, as of now, of very limited value.

The last and most recent piece of Indian labour legislation, the trade union law, we shall come back to in a later chapter.¹⁸

d) European administration of justice and social life

The fact we have already mentioned, that the Indian people are faced with judges from a foreign land, is especially injurious to the proletariat. It leads to constant humiliation in cases where the two parties in a court case are of different coloured skin. The judge then

is siding instinctively with one of them. There can scarcely be anything more irritating and insulting to a workforce awakening to self-awareness than the daily experience of how claims that all are too well justified are laughed out of court. Shortly before our arrival, when an Indian worker at the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras was half strangled by an English supervisor, the trade union brought the matter to court. The judge challenged the entire Indian workforce with the laughingly delivered judgement that he could not view such a small outburst of temper against a "native" as tragic, as it could equally happen to himself. When workers are killed by such abuse, and a European judge dares to dismiss the plaintiffs with a judgement of this kind, even the calm Indian nature of their class comrades is brought to boiling point. This was the case, for example, when in September 1926, at the Gouripur jute mill, an Indian weaver was knocked to the ground by an English supervisor and trampled to death. The perpetrator was acquitted on the grounds that the particulars of the event could not be established with any certainty (!). This led to a general uprising of the workers at the plant, against which a police detachment was mobilised.

In railway workshops and in those mills where Indian workers are almost exclusively under European supervision, attacks of this kind are common. They are made even on women, as these are simply "black bitches". In cases where such murder is acquitted, whether because of public opinion or because of working-class protests, the sentence is a fine. The derisory amount to be paid for such fines has the effect of an acquittal. In Shimla, for example, an officer kicked a rickshaw coolie to death, while in Calcutta two Englishmen fired on municipal workers and seriously injured them because the noise of their work disturbed the rather late morning sleep of these two whites. There are many reports of similar cases, and the number would probably be uncountable if the newspapers had any opening into the closed realm of tea plantations. From there only rare reports by those who have escaped reach the outside

world. The *Handbook* of the All India Trade Union Congress for 1925 wrote:

The plantations in Assam are the private property of their owners and the labour working there generally reside on the private land of these masters. No outsider, however well-meaning and however interested he may be in the improvement in the labour conditions can enter the private precincts of the plantations and attempt to organize labour. Any attempt, therefore, at organization of the plantation labour, cannot but be a futile one so long as either these plantations continue to be the private property of their owners and there is no connection or communication between the labour there and the outside world or the labour itself becomes sufficiently educated to understand the value of organization.¹⁹

We may hope that the Indian workers' movement will soon be able to establish such a connection between tea slaves and the outside world and effect a change with the help of the International Labour Organisation. Here too, the World War was a great revolutionist. Until then, even the worst humiliations were experienced by Indians as an inescapable fate. Today, any throwback of this kind is already a signal for popular revolt. In many Indian towns, leaders of workers' organisations are in a position to record cases of mistreatment, especially those with a deadly result, and make them known to European public opinion. No catastrophe in the world is so dreadful that nothing good comes out of it. What the religious doctrines preached and frivolously flouted for centuries did not manage to achieve has been brought within reach by the hellish chaos of the World War: the end of slavery and respect for the poorest human life. Even the desperate slaves of tea plantations rose up a few years back in a powerful act of liberation, an attempt undertaken with heavy sacrifice of large numbers. In order to reassure both themselves and public opinion, the imperialists set up commissions to investigate the "situation". One of the reporters even made the involuntary joke that the coolie uprising resulted from the previous incitement and "Bolshevising" of tea slaves by German Catholic

missionaries. But propaganda talk of this kind deceives neither those making it, nor does it prevent anyone else from realising that the chains are rattling in all the dungeons of imperialism, to a degree that is now becoming dangerous for it.

e) Freedom of press, speech and association

Time and again, efforts were made to convince us of the existence of complete freedom of press and assembly. Indeed, the appearance is that the public operation of workers' organisations is unhindered in terms of speech and association. We attended meetings of several thousand in which we spoke along with local organisers, and we believed therefore that action and propaganda work in this country could be carried out without friction. We eventually found out, however, by curious incidents that took place already in Bombay that these meetings are silently spied upon by agents of the Criminal Intelligence Department. After leaving Bombay for Calcutta, we saw and heard rather more of the vigorous activity of the criminal police that is the best organised in the world: that of the province of Bengal. If it is the case that a popular leader is sent to prison simply on the basis of an ill-considered word, or that their organisation dissolved, it is not hard to imagine the other ways in which the workers' movement can be inhibited by harassment and detention of various individuals. One of the most blatant examples in Bengal was the year-long imprisonment of the leader Subhas Bose, who was also working for trade unions, and was held in jail so long without any legal process that he developed tuberculosis and was quite ruined in health. The number of people punished in this way on the basis of their public activity is quite shocking in Bengal alone, and their treatment in prison is often medieval in its cruelty.

The situation with regard to freedom of press is scarcely any different. During our stay in Calcutta, two novels written in Bengali by a popular writer were banned, simply because they presented the life

of the Indian people before the British invasion in rather idealistic colours. The following month G. S. Dara's book *India* was banned, its author being a lawyer in Lahore. There is no reason to assume that periodical literature and the daily press are better treated. However, this offers a guarantee for those judging Indian conditions, as it proves that the complaints, criticisms and accusations on which we have, among others, relied on for our report are in no way exaggerated.

[...] The demand is made here for Indian book printers:

Change in the draconian laws that make printers punishable and responsible for all banned utterances in the newspapers, books or leaflets that they print.²⁰

What document could demonstrate more clearly the state of law and freedom of thought in India?

Freedom of assembly and association both exist in theory, and in quiet times also in practice to a certain degree, but it needs only the occasion of a strike or a wage demand for the appropriate provisions of the penal code to be applied, and for weakly based liberties to be terminated. Under section 144 of the Indian penal code, meetings and assemblies of workers can be broken up at any time, and the bloody manner in which workers are mown down has been shown in a series of major strikes. The strike of the Madras city tramway workers in 1918 led to military attacks; the strike of the Tata workers of Jamshedpur in 1920 led to dead and wounded, while one of the most brutal examples of the oppression of the working-class in time of struggle was provided by the strike at the Bengal and Nagpur Railway Company, which ended in March 1927, and where 10,000 workers took part, and were opposed by British volunteer battalions with bayonet attacks.

14. Miscellaneous

After what has already been explained, it is scarcely necessary to add that nothing like a statutory period of protection from dismissal exists in Indian industries. Likewise, there is no provision or protection for the unemployed, and we have already reported how dismissed workers are ruthlessly thrown out of their workers' housing. When we asked whether there were factory regulations, we were told by workers that indeed these did exist in some companies, but they were of course just one-sided provisions in favour of the management, and in most cases so unreasonable and draconian that workers were never able to appeal to them as an established right; it was better rather to ignore them.

Neither is there any general welfare provision by the state, local authorities or insurance bodies. Only a few companies with welfare provisions, such as we have already mentioned, afford their sick at least a rudimentary medical care and first aid; cases that, as explained, are in no way general. As a rule, workers dismissed on grounds of ill health or old age return to their village, where they are cared for by their extended family or caste. Those who are excluded from the community for breaking religious or other caste proscriptions are reduced to beggary and utter destitution. The same goes for all the many cases in which accident compensation is refused to industrial victims, despite the legal provision for this. What we have seen of such misery on the streets and at meetings is impossible to describe in a few lines.

A few words of explanation are still needed on the labour offices that have been mentioned above. These offices, a kind of inquiry and information bureau performing a wide range of tasks, exist in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The one in Bombay is particularly significant, compiling a considerable amount of statistical information on conditions in local industry, the situation of textile workers, the

number of workers employed, and how they are divided according to occupation and wages, as well as costs of living. Though this office is scarcely in a position to provide comprehensive information in these areas, it can at least be assumed that their figures are of recent date. Most of their research and information is still in an embryonic state and does not demonstrate any conclusive results. Nonetheless, valuable publications have been produced, their author being the former director of the bureau, the Englishman F. Shirras. His book *Report on an Enquiry into Working Class Budgets in Bombay* made him all too well-known as a friend of the proletariat, leading to him being “promoted” from his former position to the native state of Ahmedabad, where he is now working as a college teacher.²¹

The results we obtained from the labour office in Madras were rather less extensive. They culminated in the assertion that accident claims are very rare due to ignorance of the law, something that we already knew. We were however given a series of comparable wage figures for trades outside the textile industry (smiths, locksmiths, building workers), from which we could perceive that these wages too are only insubstantially above or below those of the better-paid weavers in Bombay, if higher in general than the same wages in Madras.

The Calcutta labour office made a better impression. The most important information we obtained there, especially concerning the situation of Bengal jute workers, has been used at various places in the present report. This last labour office also maintains a detailed list of all workers’ organisations existing in Bengal, their establishment and in some cases dissolution, along with precise personal details on leading individuals carrying out trade union agitation at the present time. It is probably therefore also a good and reliable source of information for the highly renowned Bengal criminal police.

15. Comparison with early capitalism in Europe

If we examine the present situation of the industrial proletariat in India, comparisons with the European proletariat in the early capitalist period immediately spring to mind. But as with all comparisons, this holds good only with strong reservations. Here in Europe, the core and driving element, even in the first phase of the workers' movement, were dispossessed artisans who formed the wage-earning proletariat, those excluded from independent practice of their trade, with a portion of the rural proletariat making only a supplementary element. Certain artisan traditions were thus present at the very start, while urban life was also new only to a small part of these workers. The basic artisan component of the industrial proletariat adapted itself quite organically into the urban class system as a "fourth estate". Literacy, too, was by no means uncommon among the early industrial workers, both in England and especially in Germany. There was no foreign language to serve as the only possible means of communication with employers and officials, as is the case in India. The Indian proletariat, in particular cotton workers, stem almost exclusively from the rural proletariat, and thus completely lack these artisan and urban traditions and customs. In some towns, caste connections that still survive, or did until recent years, are of some benefit, in that they provide a certain support, as well as a moral control, for people who are torn away from their social roots and find themselves in the big city. It is not uncommon in the new world of industry for a tight caste association to even promote the formation of trade unions and the development of a spirit of solidarity.

But while the industrial proletariat in India is by and large a more shapeless mass, and also more helpless due to its lack of education than was the case early on in Europe, it is faced not with an inexperienced early capitalism but with a strong and firmly organised high capitalism, equipped with all available political resources and

allied moreover with a foreign government, which is still less concerned by an unbounded exploitation than the European governments of the early capitalist age, who were advised by far-sighted and influential individuals, not always in vain, in favour of intervention and the introduction of social policies.

The fear of early capitalist nations that more human material would be consumed in the course of a generation than that newly provided seems to have made no particular impact on the masters of India's three hundred million, especially as mass starvation was not introduced by industrial capitalism, but was already a consequence of the tax system of the foreign government. The fear of unrest and revolution, which played a large part in overcoming early capitalist conditions in Europe, would likewise have failed to kindle any concern in the rulers, if the proletarian movement in the wake of the World War, its displacements of economic activity, and the revolutionary sentiment and movement it sparked on all sides both socially and nationally had not assumed a global scale.

This works in favour of the Indian proletariat, as does the greater attention with which Europe today follows and criticises events in other countries, similarly a consequence of the War, which drew far-flung lands into the orbit of world industry. On top of this, the Indian proletariat, even if its organisational connections are still weak and embryonic, can turn to good account the experiences of the workers' movement in the West, something that its leaders, the intellectual "outsiders", do to a generous degree.

Finally, we should add that the rhythm of development today has greatly accelerated on all sides and in every country, in comparison with the situation before the War, and still more so in comparison with that in European early capitalism. Likewise, the speed of the means of communication and transport gives a further ray of hope in this dismal situation. For the workers' movement, too, what an Indian intellectual said to us in relation to the general mood of will and

desire for change in his country also holds good: "Before the War we moved forward an inch in ten years, after the War a mile!"

A special examination

a. The productivity of the Indian worker

Figures for Indian wages can have a comparative value internationally, especially in economic terms, only if the question so often raised nowadays by employers in every country, that of relative productivity of the Indian worker, is taken fully into account.

It is beyond doubt that there is no branch of Indian industry in which workers reach the same level of productivity that they do in Germany or Britain. The only question is the precise ratio of Indian to European "efficiency". On this point, however, conditions differ greatly between the various branches of industry. In the Tata Iron and Steel Works, the performance of each worker is assessed by the firm in detailed statistics and accounts, according to which productivity is about two-thirds that of European workers in the same branch. As this is a modern plant in heavy industry, with similar machinery and products to those in Europe or America, direct comparison of the number of workers and their output is possible. But even in such well-managed modern plants, the comparative productivity is reduced, as we subsequently established, by the fact that the firm still does not use all the labour-saving machinery of German or Belgian iron works, whether because lower wages do not make such rationalisation necessary, or because the rapid expansion of the plant has not yet made better implementation possible in all particulars.

As well as this, the 40,000-strong workforce at Tata is drawn from very varied populations of southern, central, northern and north-western India. The workers are for the most part from the provinces of Madras, Bengal, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Punjab and

Chota-Nagpur, as well as indigenous jungle people from parts of Bihar-Orissa. Each of these has a particular disposition for some work or other, through their intelligence or bodily strength. In some departments of the plant, all the foremen and the entire technical staff are Indian, which is nowhere the case for example in the textile industry.

We can give evidence from our own eyes of the productivity in the railway repair and coach-building workshops that we visited. Many of the wood and metal workers employed there struck us as being more or less comparable with European tradesmen in their skill and pace of work. We noticed such talent in a very diverse group of workers: carpenters, plumbers, fitters, installers, engineers, and ascribed it to the fact that these people were probably drawn from old artisan castes, who had cultivated the dexterity required for their trade for centuries or even millennia, until it became an inherited characteristic. In these railway workshops, moreover, there is a fairly comprehensive system of apprenticeship, which is not the case in other large-scale industries such as the Tata works.

The Bengali artisans, for their part, are seen even by the British as at least on par with their own countrymen. Besides any specific culture of caste or modern skill, a contributing factor here is certainly the high level of popular education in Bengal, and perhaps also the natural liveliness and attentiveness of this people, whose infamous intelligence is notoriously irksome to the British government. Their intelligence is the reason for their particular oppression and persecution.

Average individuals' performance in the textile industry is lower than in the above cases. It is true that at Benares and elsewhere, in the domestic trades of silk and brocade weaving, really enchanting creations are produced with wonderful fabrics. But this is all individual handicraft quality work resting on a traditional culture, and can be left out of consideration here.

In the production of cotton and jute, which was the particular object of our investigation, the employers informed us that estimated labour productivity of Indian workers was at a third or as low as a quarter of that of European workers, with only a few weavers in exceptional cases displaying a performance much above this. As opposed to employers' information about wages, the value of which is extremely questionable for reasons we have already explained, this information on productivity can be subjected to certain checks. With machines of a particular construction, speed of rotation and output, it is only necessary to compare the number of personnel operating them with the equivalent number in European countries. But it is only within strict limits that this simple numerical comparison enables conclusions to be drawn on the relative productivity of Indian workers. If comparisons of this kind are offered for entire mills with a definite number of spindles and looms (and these were generally the comparisons we were given), great caution has to be taken in interpreting the figures. For in India, the numbers are swelled by including workshop sweepers, people engaged in shifting coal and other materials, and all kinds of other ancillary personnel employed, which in England is generally not the case. In this way the productivity per worker appears less than it actually is.

There is also a difference between productivity and actual output and in this connection the following point should be noted. In many Indian cities, each weaver serves two looms and in other regions there is only one weaver per loom. In Britain and Germany, a worker generally serves four looms of the same quality. It would be quite wrong however to conclude from this that the productivity of an Indian worker is half or a quarter of that of the European. It is rather that in districts with sufficiently available labour-power, one man is placed at every loom, probably on the consideration that the man's wages are so low that extra employment raises the productivity of each machine by a few per cent, bringing a greater profit than saving on labour would achieve. It is impossible to be sure whether this is

the decisive factor, but in any case, it is supported by the fact that in cities such as Madras, for example, where a single worker is placed at each machine, no women are employed in the mill, which would suggest the availability of sufficient male labour. This fact alone should show that because of differing particular circumstances, even the simple comparison of number of workers with output can lead to mistaken conclusions. What is certain is that the information on Indian labour productivity we were offered by most of the employers, of a third or even a quarter of the British level, is much too low.

There is an opportunity of checking information of this kind by comparison with other documentary evidence, going back nearly forty years. An official report of 1888 on the Bombay cotton industry states in a sharply critical tone: "In a factory with the same number of spindles, twice as many workers are employed as in England".²² The same judgement was made by another report, on the cotton industry in Bengal, which concluded that it took 72 hours' work in India to produce the same output as that of 60 hours in England.

There are also British reports from 1906 and 1907 maintaining that English workers have three times the productivity of the Indian workers. Only in one special case, however, was the claim made of the English weaver producing four times the output as an Indian. Some years later, a detailed and quite precise comparison of textile productivity in Madras and Lancashire came up with a ratio of 1 : 2.4. It should be remembered in this connection that the workforce in Madras very likely lags behind that of other Indian textile districts in physical and vocational aptitude. If we also take into consideration that in the last forty years, and from all industrial regions of India, there is irrefutable official evidence and testimony from employers confirming that Indian industrial workers have made rapid and continuing progress in skill and productivity, we should give little credence to information given to us in 1926 – 27 that presents a more pessimistic picture than figures from earlier decades. It must be conceded that comparisons of this kind are extremely hard and

the conclusions reached today vary just as they did in the past. A further circumstance that intervenes here is that in India today one can find all kinds of textile machinery, from the most backward to the most modern. Alongside the most primitive methods and equipment for washing and dyeing fabrics we saw the most modern kinds; and alongside the oldest spinning machines, the most modern ring spinners of 1925 model. Today, mills with modern machinery are certainly predominant, in marked contrast to the almost prehistoric housing of their workers. We did sometimes find departments of a mill in which the same quantity and quality of output was produced by three times as many workers as in England, but their employment was not strictly necessary, as the earlier example of the weavers with one or two looms shows.

b. Wages and output

A striking observation we made in such cases is that the total wages paid to three workers employed to produce the same output as in England were still substantially lower than that paid to a single English worker. In Indore, for example, the Mahatma Gandhi organisers showed us the department of a cotton-spinning plant in which 34 Indian workers performed the work of 12 English workers, both in quality and quantity. But between them they earned a weekly wage that was 40 per cent below that of the group of English workers. A similar relation is seen in almost all cases. In a very different region, we were also able to establish that the piece-rate paid for a bolt of fabric of exactly the same size and quality was 30 per cent less than that paid for the same work in England. If on top of the extremely fat dividends that are still paid today after the boom years have faded, and if any further evidence was needed against the employers' assertion that wages in India are higher in relation to production than they are in England, this would be sufficiently refuted by the above examples.

It would be quite erroneous, however, to suppose that the profits of Indian industry are expressed in these high dividends alone. The total wage fund of a mill or factory is made up in India as in Europe in wages for workers and salaries for the managing and supervisory staff, with the simple difference that this latter element is far more substantial in India in relation to workers' wages than it is anywhere in Europe. Comparison of the number of technical, commercial and especially supervisory staff shows a great excess of these in India as compared with Europe. The large number of supervisory personnel is explained in terms of the lower level of workshop discipline among textile workers recruited from the countryside and their helplessness in the face of any mechanical or other problems. It is not hard to see that there is here an element of truth. As far as the senior management and board of directors are concerned, it is not just the number of personnel that is substantially higher, but also the incomparably high salaries they receive. Directors, managers, commercial and technical staff, right down to workshop foremen, are Europeans, whose salaries, housing, leave and pension conditions, etc. are set without any competitive limitation, according to salaries paid to Europeans by the British administration. Indian companies naturally have to pay these "colonial salaries" to their leading personnel as well, as they are dependent on Britain for recruitment.

The Tata Company is the first and almost the only major Indian enterprise that now draws a high portion of its leading personnel from Indians, so that large divisions of the company are completely under Indian management. And this emancipation is making steady progress. The textile industry, on the other hand, is still completely under British management. Among the large number of mills and factories that we visited in all parts of the country, there was only one cotton-spinner in Calcutta, not a very large one, that was completely Indian-run.

The fact, however, that European management remains necessary throughout the Indian textile industry raises the total wage

and salary fund so considerably that, viewed in the light of competitiveness on the world market, the advantage of the industry due to its very low wage costs is considerably offset by these high management and administration costs. The examples of Indore and Ahmedabad enabled us to calculate that the senior management costs of a mill here are three times as high as the equivalent for a mill of the same size in Lancashire. The so-called “managing agent” of a large Indian company receives a salary of between 100,000 and 250,000 rupees, without taking all kinds of special benefits into account.

c. Reasons for lower productivity

After this digression into a consideration of competitiveness and entrepreneurial salaries and having refuted all the tendentious exaggerations and other erroneous aspects on the question of lower performance of Indian workers, we still need to explain why the Indian worker in large capitalist factories produces less on average than in the same industries of Britain and Germany. We have already seen, however, from the few reports quoted, how expert judgements on this differential differ considerably, even when based on decades of experience. This reinforces our persistent caution in expressing a definite judgement after only a few months’ stay in the country. Surely, a further improvement in the performance of Indian workers could be noted today in relation to evidence from earlier times.

What however is more important than comparative estimates that leave a great deal to subjective judgement is the question of how the undoubtedly lower productivity that still persists in relation to British and German conditions is to be explained. This explanation necessarily involves the attribution of responsibility to various factors, some of which are unchangeable, such as the country’s climate, racially based physical weakness or other intrinsic characteristics, while others are of a kind that can be altered by

human will. The first factor that suggests itself is that lower productivity is largely explicable in terms of the tropical climate. Our visit took place from November to April, the so-called “cold” season, when the average temperature is around that expected in German high summer. The temperature in the following hot months is much higher, and the rainy season also has a higher temperature than we experienced during our stay. We found it all the more remarkable when we were told by mill-owners on many occasions that productivity varies between the “cold” and hot seasons by no more than five to eight per cent. Other factors must therefore be involved and play a larger part.

The most important of these is the comprehensive illiteracy of the entire Indian working-class and the lack of the most basic schooling among the great mass of workers. The Indian industrial workers consequently have not the remotest connection to the enterprise as a whole, no idea of their own function as part of the overall process. They remain quite helpless in the face of any breakdown of the machine that they serve and see the artfully organized workings as either a plaything or a diabolical instrument. We often hear older people in Europe say about modern technology: “If only our ancestors could see this!” In India today, however, it is as if the contemporaries of *Simplicissimus* or peasants of Martin Luther’s time had woken up in workshops of a modern electric-powered mill and been set to work on the assembly line.²³

A second reason for the lower productivity of Indian workers results from the first one: the lack of workshop discipline. All regulations, instructions, advice, indeed any communication between management and workers, or among the workforce itself, has to take place verbally and in a roundabout way, involving waste of time and misunderstanding. A big company without general use of written communications is like a modern city without telephones or public transport; it lacks an element that is part of its very essence. Moreover, a particular level of production and technical mode of

operation requires a particular rhythm of human life in general. Work and life need to have a common pace. Railways and electric subways, lifts and pneumatic mail, affect the tempo of life of the modern mill worker just as the automatic sewing or spinning machine that he operates, and the speed and intensity of his work feed back again on these machines. Indian workers are as familiar as our peasant forefathers were with hard work on the land. But the rhythmic uniformity of the steam-engine pistons driving the conveyor belts is unknown to Indian workers, and they have to be educated by “agitators” to divide the hours of the day sharply between hours of work, and time of rest and recreation. Even today, Indian workers interrupt work on the machine with smoking, washing, prayer, etc., even if trade union education and the demand for shorter working hours and legal regulation of working time has already effected much change. Some time is needed (to all appearance not a very long time) for the industrial worker to finally abandon the last residues of his old village tranquillity. In the Tata works, this process is much further advanced than anywhere in the textile industry. In the latter, complaints about workers’ persistent “loitering” are still loudly heard, and even if these are exaggerated, they are not without foundation. It is only too understandable, all things considered, that workers spend part of their time in the mill on washing, for example. In their housing quarters, the *chawls*, sanitary facilities are so often unspeakably squalid, used by hundreds, with a single water tap serving 50 or 100 families, whereas water in the mill is abundant. On top of this, work is interrupted by village festivals that are generally religious in character, as well as by weddings, which urban workers also travel to attend if they are in a position to do so.

But the frequent interruptions of work cannot be attributed simply to village traditions and a placidity influenced by religion. There are other immediate reasons for lower productivity. It is needless to emphasise that even a shorter working day cannot be intensively worked by people of whom some are only able to fill their stomachs

once a day, while others never eat their fill, or people who have suffered chronic malnutrition for generations. There are however an extraordinarily large number of these in India, especially in the textile industry.

If hunger is one factor preventing people from working to their full capacity, another is the lack of decent housing anywhere. In Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, indeed even in smaller industrial centres, thousands upon thousands of textile workers have no proper shelter to call their own. In the dry season they sleep in the streets, on plinths of monuments and other people's roofs, while in the rainy season they sleep on floors and under verandas, since they prefer to spend their meagre and insufficient wages on something to eat, inadequate as this may be, rather than on accommodation. It stands to reason that such people never get a proper rest and suffer also from the uncleanliness that is the inescapable result of sleeping in such unsatisfactory conditions, especially in disease-ridden India. Among workers unable either to eat or to sleep decently, loafing about, skiving off and disappearing from work is the most natural thing in the world.

Malnutrition and bad housing loom large as direct causes of reduced productivity. It follows that this could be substantially improved by better wages. A further cause, besides the already mentioned lack of general education, is the absence of vocational training. Not only is India without general elementary schooling, it also lacks any system of apprenticeship or instruction for a trade. Vocational schools worth the name, as well as technical institutes accessible to the broadest circles of people, we found only in the princely state of Baroda with its exemplary school system. There is a system of apprenticeships at the railway-workshop, that we mentioned earlier, and this goes together with the very high productivity of Indian tradesmen there. The Tata Works has made similar efforts in the area of vocational training, though the relatively high level of productivity there cannot be attributed to the educational

system, since this productivity simply amounts to a selection of young people from whose ranks the firm trains its supervisory staff, making the company increasingly independent of disproportionately expensive European personnel. There may well be other factors that contribute to explaining the productivity of the Tata works, especially the fact that housing conditions there are better than anywhere in the textile industry, thanks to the efforts of the company. Tata has also escaped the system of corruption and bribes that is otherwise so widespread and forms another obstacle to rational operation.

In the textile industry, where complaints about inadequate performance of Indian workers are most widespread, housing conditions are likewise most wretched. On top of this, the workforce in the textile industry is always swelled in times of growth and expansion like the present with the rapid recruitment of new workers from the country, and these novices to industry naturally display to the highest degree the much-lamented lack of aptitude, factory tradition and workshop discipline. The textile industry also has workshops and departments in which the temperature [inside] remains higher than the temperature outside, year in, year out. The health of workers, and thus also their performance, is seriously affected by the lack of ventilation and hygienic facilities. Not least are the consequences of alcohol abuse to be added, that the government promotes for financial reasons. This affects textile workers of big cities more than any other group of Indian workers.

If one inquires to what degree the productivity of the Indian industrial worker could be raised by removing all the negative features listed above, the best response is already provided by the mechanics, metal-workers, fitters and building tradesmen of Bengal. They are famous throughout India. Their talent as craftsmen is based on traditional artisan practice, and as a result of training that is widespread in Bengal, they have been able to adapt quickly and easily to modern methods and requirements. In a position therefore to obtain everywhere the best jobs and represent a proletarian

aristocracy, they generally do not suffer the crippling and ruinous effects of malnutrition and wretched housing and are able to compare with any European in their trade. This example of the Bengali tradesmen makes it possible for us to look forward to a time in which the entire Indian proletariat, freed from oppression, from state-sponsored alcohol abuse and obstacles that are today imposed on general education, will be in a position to provide itself with the intellectual and material prerequisites for developing a level of productivity, which will bring Indian workers and their families to an existence at a higher cultural level, even with a shorter working day. This development will also free the workers of Europe from the relentless cheap competition of overseas capitalism.

The extent to which the achievement of satisfactory productivity by Indian workers is possible by paying a humanly decent wage is shown by the report of the French Abbé Dubois, who already wrote 140 years ago:

Their workmen certainly lack neither industry nor skill. In the European settlements, where they are paid according to their merit, many Indian artisans are to be met with whose work would do credit to the best artisans of the West.²⁴

The words of this old report coincide completely with what was said here about tradesmen and metal-workers of Bengal.

III. Types of Indian workers' organisations

The Indian workers' organisations described in this chapter are mostly ones that our delegation got to know during our visit. We had occasion to attend meetings of trade union members and speak to them. We visited offices and examined administrative arrangements. We were able to study the mode of operation of officials and we held discussions with small groups of shop stewards. This gave us an

insight both into their manner of recruitment and preparation for struggle, as well as into the structure and the spirit of these recent associations, the oldest of which goes back no more than a decade.

It is unnecessary to stress here that this kind of observation and participation enable a better judgement of the spirit of these organisations, their leaders and their members than the mere study of statutes, minutes and other publications. Our own workers' organisations in Europe could likewise not be judged simply by their written statutes and declarations. The Indian workers' movement, however, is still in its infancy. Unlike its elder sisters in the West, it cannot impress by its large number of members, high budgets, carefully constructed management, or indeed its social and legal achievements. Neither in its membership nor in its principles and practices has it reached a stable state, and it has yet to become a regularly functioning organism. Despite basic commonly shared ideas, the workers' movement is in many local cases the reflection of the way of thinking and the temperament of the individuals that came to lead it, or of the lack of leaders. Their importance is far more pronounced than in the workers' organisations in the West. In a movement such as that of the Indian proletariat, concrete knowledge of the particularities of local and personal relations is still far more indispensable than in the large organisations of Europe, which have attained a stable form. We obtained some knowledge of this, which we shall seek to convey to the reader in this report.

1. The two textile workers' associations in Bombay

Out of a total of over 300,000 workers employed in cotton spinning and weaving, no less than half work in the spinning mills of Bombay. It is not surprising that the first mass movement of these workers came into being as far back as the 1890s, with repeated mass demonstrations and the first experiment at a rudimentary trade union structure under the aegis of liberal friends of the workers from the

indigenous bourgeois class. The Bombay proletariat thus already has a certain tradition of social struggle. Unfortunately, however, this veteran city of the movement has not kept pace with subsequent development. Today, the percentage of textile workers who are organised here is far lower in relation to the total number than in other textile towns such as Madras, Indore, Coimbatore or Ahmedabad; lower, indeed, than the average for the Indian cotton industry as a whole, including all the smaller industrial centres where there are no trade unions at all.

Presently, Bombay has two associations of textile workers, the larger counting 7,000 members and the smaller 3,000. This makes a total of no more than six to seven per cent of the total workforce in the Bombay cotton industry, whereas in India as a whole the figure is somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000 trade union members out of a workforce of over 300,000 textile workers, or about 12 per cent.

The larger of the two organisations, the Bombay Textile Labour Union, was only founded in January 1926. It has been headed since the beginning by Joshi, a Brahmin, who is also the current president of the All India Trade Union Association. Joshi is a leading member of the Servants of India, a small organisation, but one that is represented in a number of Indian towns. It was founded in 1905. This organisation consists of educated individuals, mostly from the higher social classes, who aim at promoting a series of social and educational goals: educational work among oppressed lower castes and especially among women; struggle against religious and caste strife while fostering genuine religious life and promotion of the country's industrial development. By setting up schools, including schools for women, savings and loan banks, and by occasional influence on legislators, this society has worked most diligently for the benefit of the lower strata of the people. Its writings that are attacking the system of slavery that still exists in the tea plantations of the north-east are particularly credible as the Servants of India are

known for their extraordinary moderation in political and social debate.

While the social work of the society is indeed very good, it unfortunately happens in almost all cases, including the case of plantation slavery, that its moderation makes it ineffective wherever decisive economic or political interests of the occupier are at stake. Politically, the Servants are for unconditional “loyalty”. It is clear from any glance at their paper *The Servant of India* that the society stands in sharp opposition to even the current liberation movement of the Indian bourgeoisie. At election time, they have often rejoiced at the defeat in some places of the Swaraj party, and praised the victory of loyalists. They don’t take part in Gandhi’s freedom struggle. Due to this attitude towards the British government, they are today distinct from most other public movements in the country. Their political ideas rather represent the resigned mood of the pre-War era, when a strong impulse against imperialist rule was not yet conceivable. Indeed, leading figures in the society belong mainly to the older generation, their complexion still unscathed by the burning heat of the world catastrophe. In the public movement, they decisively represent the right wing and are closer to the British government than the majority of other organisers.

The government was therefore not unhappy when the Servants placed one of their most prominent members, Joshi, alongside some minor officials of the Bombay trade union organisation. On the contrary, the government even encouraged this at first, by appointing Joshi as the only representative of the working-class in its Parliament, and having him represent the cause of Indian labour at the International Labour Office in Geneva.²⁵ It saw the orientation that he represented as the lesser evil, and was also clever enough not to engage in a general combat with the workers’ organisations that had been founded with such great expectations, which would have dangerously disturbed the country and reflected badly to the outside world. For some of the recently grown Indian organisations,

still malleable and lacking the firm skeleton of a programme born out of experience, not to mention their illiterate membership that is hardly able to help determine the shape of the movement, the intellectual orientation of a leader is naturally of decisive, indeed almost boundless, influence. The textile workers' organisation of Bombay thus bears the mark of a mind that is pious towards the government, as impressed on it by the Servants of India. For all this it is not a yellow organisation in cahoots with employers and it does embark on strikes when these are needed. But it does stand, like the Servants, on the basis of unconditional loyalty to the government, and acknowledged this in its attitude towards the new Indian trade union legislation even before this came into force. In a politically free country, with a good complement of social achievements, the tactic of this organisation would be quite acceptable; in a country such as India, with its young workers' movement exposed to all abuses of early capitalism as well as the lack of political rights and foreign imperialist rule, this organisation, still so young in years, all too prematurely shows the caution of old age. But for all this we have to admit that it does act correctly according to its constitution, in order to steer its little ship away from trouble and rocks.

The younger members of the All India Trade Union Congress, and leaders of other organisations, often criticise Joshi – who is personally a very sympathetic individual – in bitter terms. Being faced with opposition from these younger people, it may well be that he only remains at the helm of the overall Indian organisation due to the authority the government has vested in him by means of all kinds of mandates. Nothing is more characteristic of Joshi's attitude than the fact that he remained absent from a session in the Delhi Parliament during our visit that was held over the release of Bengali freedom fighters – banished without any trial or hearing. He explained his absence on grounds that it was a political matter that did not concern him. Never in Europe has political neutrality of a trade union leader, who was also a parliamentarian, been taken as

far as this. On the other hand, we heard of cases when Joshi raised specific workers' questions in Parliament very vigorously. His conservative reticence is also praised by those who are not in agreement with the orientation of his policy on working-class questions. Due to his prominent position as official workers' representative appointed by the government, his textile workers' association in Bombay has been spared many penalties and arbitrary actions to which the Madras organisation, for instance, has been constantly exposed. But this organisation must unfortunately renounce any vanguard role in the freedom struggle of the Indian proletariat, which would otherwise fall to it, being the workers' organisation of the oldest and largest industry in India. Most of the other organisations that we visited in the country are more decisive in their tactics, especially in the struggle against political oppression.

From the Statutes of the Bombay Textile Labour Union Objects²⁶

1. To organise and unite the workers;
2. To secure for workers fair conditions of life and service;
3. To try and redress their grievances;
4. To endeavour to settle disputes between employers and employees amicably, so that a cessation of work may be avoided;
5. To endeavour to provide against sickness, unemployment, infirmity, old age and death;
6. To endeavour to secure compensation for members in cases of accidents under the Workmen's Compensation Act;
7. To provide legal assistance to members in respect of matters arising out of, or incidental to, their employment;
8. To endeavour to render aid to the members during any strike or lockout brought about by the sanction of the Union;
9. To obtain information in reference to the industry in India and outside;
10. To co-operate and federate with organizations of labour, having similar objects in India and outside;
11. To help, in accordance with the Indian Trade Unions Act, the working classes in India and outside in the promotion of these objects.

Membership. All workers in textile mills in the city and presidency of Bombay are eligible for membership. The minimum monthly contribution for a male worker is four annas. Members are obliged to accept the statutes of the league and the changes and additions that may possibly be made to these over the course of time. The contribution for female members is two annas per month.

Honorary members. Officials of the association and other persons not belonging to the workforce, as far as they are accepted by the managing committee, are honorary members of the league and their number may not exceed 20. The managing committee co-opts these honorary members for the duration of their appointment and other members for a period to be determined by the managing committee.

Business management. The association has a president, a maximum of four vice-presidents and a general secretary, as well as secretaries and two treasurers. Apart from the secretaries, all these persons are to be chosen by the annual general assembly and may be re-elected.

Business management of the committee. The financial and other business of the association is conducted by a managing committee consisting of the above-mentioned leaders of the association together with the representatives elected by the members. One representative is elected for each 200 members. This managing committee meets once a month. For its sessions to be quorate, the presence of at least one-fifth of the committee members is required.

District committees. In each district of the association, a district committee will be elected from the mill representatives, chaired by the president and general secretary of the association. A representative will be elected to this committee for each 100 workers. His functions are only advisory and extend to questions that pertain to the particular district. Proposals of the district committee go forward to the managing committee.

Factory committees. Factory committees are to be formed within the districts, with the president and secretary of the district committee also belonging to them. The functions of the factory committee are of an advisory nature. They deal with questions of labour relations, contributions, etc., and can put forward proposals to the managing committee of the association, via the district committee which can also make its own proposals.

Support. Receipt of any kind of support presupposes a membership of at least six months. A member who is three months in arrears with his contribution is not eligible for support. Besides catching up with contributions, he must pay at least for a further two months before he is again eligible for support. If the member has met the conditions mentioned, he is eligible to receive the support provided for in the by-laws and approved by the annual meeting.

General meeting. The general meeting is held each year in April and has the following tasks: a) adoption of the business report and accounts; b) election of the association's officers for the current year; c) handling of any other business proposed by the chairman. The president can call extraordinary general meetings as he sees fit, or at the request of at least one-twentieth of the total membership.

Changes to statutes. The statutes may be altered or supplemented by a majority of the members of the business committee, to be subsequently approved by the general meeting.

Division of the association. At the request of at least 1,000 members to break away from the association and found a new organisation, following an application to the business committee, the association may be divided, and the new association will receive on its constitution a proportion of the finances of the organisation according to the number of members who go over to it.

We were unable to establish in any detail whether the smaller competitor of the Joshi association is more resolute in its struggle, lacking as we did the opportunity to extend our acquaintance with this trade union beyond a single courtesy visit.²⁷ This visit, however, was the occasion for convening a mass meeting of the association, at which we were introduced to a number of industrial invalids who had received no compensation despite the accident law and displayed frightful mutilations. This was the most impressive meeting that we attended in Bombay, its participants thronging the streets in dense masses and even the roofs of buildings. Some idea of the organisation's spirit is provided by the fact that the meeting was opened and closed with cheers for Gandhi. We were told that this

association's leaders also played a prominent role in the anti-Brahmin movement of the Bombay Presidency.

This being the case, the lamentable split in the Bombay trade union movement would be completely explicable. The anti-Brahmin movement in India, which is particularly concentrated in the districts of Bombay and Madras, is directed against the privileged position of this caste, which often exploits its traditional rights very vigorously. In the north of the country, where the Muslim element of the population is numerous, the British government promotes these oppositions and the hostility between Muslims and Hindus. In the presidencies of Madras and Bombay, Islam is too weak to be successfully played off against the other camp. There the rift runs through the Hindu population itself, and many cases can be noted in which the government on the one hand protects and promotes privileges of Brahmins, while it on the other hand favours the popular movement against them. In Madras, as we shall see, this division in the population has at least not affected the trade unions so far.

Perhaps the greatest event in the Indian workers' movement was the textile workers' strike of 1925 in Bombay, in which 150,000 workers took part. It was sparked off by a wage reduction of 11,5 per cent which employers enforced on September 1, topped by the non-payment of the annual bonuses that had long been customary and were perceived by workers as an integral part of their wages. With tremendous suffering of textile workers, most of whom were already undernourished and starving, a struggle comparable to trench warfare was waged with astonishing discipline. Government bodies and employers were amazed by the courage and comradeship of the struggling workers. Financial help arrived from Britain, from the International Trade Union Federation in Amsterdam and from the Red Trade Union International, though this was still modest in relation to the extent of the strike.²⁸ For these workers, however, who in such hard times give up their homes to reduce their needs to nothing more than food, and reduce even this to a minimum, this

help had a fairytale-like character. Their own organisations' finances, and the help that their Indian fraternal organisations courageously gave, was used for the wholesale purchase of rice. It is customary for Indian trade unions in times of struggle to distribute a food reserve to striking workers. Strike support in cash is something unknown to Indian trade unions. They see the method of support in kind as more economic, extensive and advantageous. The ensuing trade union congress of 1926 mentioned the assistance from unions overseas in terms of deep gratitude, and wherever it is reported by union leaders at a meeting, it arouses stormy applause, a welcome lesson for our Western trade unions as to how even with modest means, great material and still greater moral support can be offered to the young trade unions of the East!

Indeed, this palpable sign of solidarity from the West was not the least important factor that strengthened Bombay textile workers in persisting with their heroic struggle for a full three months. Many struggles ended with strikers being starved out, as even official government reports admit. But this strike was conducted with toughness and supreme heroism to a successful conclusion. A remarkable situation for textile workers arose from the fact that in the midst of their struggle, and despite the bitter conflict, they agreed with employers on one point: to demand from the government an abolition of the 3,5 per cent special levy on Indian cotton production that has existed for years. This levy has hindered the Indian cotton industry (as opposed to the jute industry run by British capital) in its struggle against British competition and given the latter a secure advantage. The Bombay textile workers' strike, in defence against the planned wage cut by the employers, also brought an end to the special levy, which, after being reduced a number of times over the years to 3,5 per cent, was already only a fragile relic of the iron constraint it had once been.

2. The Ahmedabad textile workers' organisation

The most typical portrait of Indian trade union organisation, and perhaps the one whose present form permits a series of conclusions to be drawn as to the future form of organisation of Indian unions in general, is offered by the great textile workers' organisation of Ahmedabad, which together with its branch in neighbouring Indore counts a total of 24,000 members, and whose adviser and spiritual father is Mahatma Gandhi himself.²⁹

Whereas all other trade unions in India that we visited present a structure and tactics that copy more or less closely European models of organisation, even on points where the European trade union system does not correspond to the particularities of the Indian proletariat and its problems, the Gandhian organisation is a first attempt, comprehensive and already well developed, to adapt ideas of trade union organisation to Indian conditions, the Indian way of thinking and Indian requirements. To anticipate a little here, this is already clearly visible in its extremely strong emphasis on education and welfare, which in India is an especially pressing social necessity, as well as the forceful way in which it takes up the particular Indian problem of raising up and liberating the so-called "untouchable" population, who are numerous among the industrial proletariat.

Even the government's official *Labour Gazette* in Bombay has admitted this in the following terms:

This Union is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable outgrowths of the Trade Union movement to be found in India. Its organization differs, *toto coelo* from the organization of Trade Unions as understood in other countries. In fact, it might almost be said to be modelled on the organization of a District of British India. The special feature on which the above comparison is based is the system of personal complaints. The Office maintains a series of complaint books in foil and counterfoil; and so numerous are the complaints that a special clerk is engaged almost wholly on recording them. Every conceivable type of complaint appears on the counterfoils, from an allegation against a jobber or *mukadam* of having smacked the complainant's head to a complaint that the other workmen hamper the complainant in drawing water from a tap or well. Each complaint receives personal attention, and the Mills appear to afford a surprisingly large degree of power to the Secretary, who enters the

premises, records statements, and passes orders, much as a District Officer might do. The system is therefore essentially a development of indigenous customs, the personal complaint (often of a trivial nature) being an essential and characteristic feature of Oriental administrative methods. It is not of course to be understood that the complaint book is the sole activity of the Labour Union. On the contrary its office in the Ahmedabad bazaar is divided into numerous sections each of which presents a considerable body of files and records. Amongst other things, the Secretary, who is an ex-Economics student, is conducting rental enquiries, and contemplates collection of family budgets.³⁰

Other Indian trade unions embrace all workers in their industry regardless of trade. The Gandhi union, on the other hand, is a federation or league of particular trade associations. There are for example in both Ahmedabad and Indore distinct associations for weavers, spinners, carders, unskilled workers, etc. It should be noted however that this form of organisation does not amount to a mere federative combination of autonomous trade associations. Rather all power and initiative is embodied in the overall league.

The object of this organisation by trade is to recruit workers by using the already existing caste membership of people doing the same work, which is particularly strong in Ahmedabad. As distinct from Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and other places, in the textile plants of Ahmedabad the workers in particular workshops and departments are still divided by caste. Thus, there are whole departments on the weaving side where the workforce is completely Muslim, while other workshops are filled with a Hindu caste of weavers. The spinners in one mill or even an entire town make up a distinct caste, as do most other groups of workers as well. It therefore seemed appropriate to recruit workers to the trade union likewise by caste, and this alone is the meaning, object and significance of the Ahmedabad organisation being termed a trade association. The organisation takes the name *Mahajan* which in the Gujarati language means a trade organised by origin or caste, and the organisation's shop stewards, who are also a

kind of dignitary of their particular caste, are known as *pratinidhi mandal*.

It would be wrong to conclude from this that the Ahmedabad organisation is designed to support or maintain the system of caste exclusion. It rather seeks in the most varied ways to bring together different castes, and especially to overcome prejudice against untouchables and the disadvantages to which they are subject. Out of the organisation's 24,000 members, 14,000 are in Ahmedabad itself and a further 10,000 in the Indore branch, which is led and administered from the central office in Ahmedabad. As Ahmedabad has a total of 55,000 textile workers in all, and Indore only 12,000, the percentage of organised workers in the former is relatively low, while that in the latter is very high. The 14,000 organised workers in Ahmedabad include 2,000 women.

Something that on first hearing has a disconcerting effect on the European trade unionist is the fact that a large part of the organisation's finance comes from donations of wealthy nationalists and supporters of the Mahatma, and likewise that the leading member of the advisory council, a rich woman, is the sister of a textile industrialist in Ahmedabad.³¹ But this is ultimately a function of the phenomenon to be found throughout India, i. e. that a considerable part of the most progressive and enlightened bourgeois Independentists (*Swarajists*) lay more value on the social improvement of the people as the first precondition for the national freedom struggle than they do on the strengthening of local against foreign capitalism.

The association has sought to pre-empt any danger of a corrupting effect from funds coming from bourgeois sources by administering members' contributions and donations quite separately, the latter being used exclusively for the purpose of trade union struggle and the former to a large extent for social work (education, medical help, hospitals and general administration). The availability of other funds than those drawn from the members

enables the association to develop a further activity, one at first sight foreign to us, i. e. social assistance to non-members on a considerable scale. When asked why they do not devote all the funds at their disposal to the needs of the membership, and so increase the attractiveness of the organisation, the response is to ask whether we would ask a drowning man in need of our help if he was a union member. The association in fact views its work for social improvement of the entire proletariat of this sizeable Indian town as a preliminary stage to organising larger masses.

After the preceding discussion of the association's finances and range of activity, the reader will not be surprised to learn that the dual organisation of Indore and Ahmedabad counts no less than 200 officials under its head office, of which 25 conduct the organisation's office work in its simple but roomy and well-erected building, while a larger number are employed in recruitment and other outside work, along with 80 as teachers for its 20 schools (favouring especially the lowest class of "untouchables") and a further 25 as doctors in the organisation's hospital. The association also employs a legal adviser and an advocate, who are paid from case to case.

The organisation's relationship to the companies is curious, and reminiscent in some ways of conditions in America. Almost all mills in Ahmedabad are either completely organised or not at all, just as in America there are union shops and non-union shops. Only very recently has individual recruitment begun in unorganised mills and factories, as experience has taught that five engaged people in a large mill are sufficient to lay the growing seed of a comprehensive organisation. A minority of employers have already come to terms with the organisation's existence and have given its officials access to their factories, sometimes going as far as to make available to them statistics that they request and to collect contributions on site. The Ahmedabad association can in no way be called a yellow or employers' organisation, not just because even today the majority of employers hate it bitterly, but also because of the undeniable fact

that the association never flinches from struggles when these are necessary.

The leaders of this organisation do, however, acknowledge the tactic of exhausting all means of negotiation and going to the end of all peaceful paths before they launch a struggle. In this, they do not differ fundamentally from recognised European unions. Considering how numerous and almost uncontrollable individual complaints by workers are, being faced with the arbitrary behaviour of Indian employers, and, consequently, Indian workers' inclination to break out in wildcat strikes with a very questionable outcome, it is easy to understand why in recent years the organisation has refused to recognise strikes of this kind several times.

In cases of strikes, the organisation devotes its funds drawn from membership contributions to support affected workers. As everywhere in India, where purchase of food from one day to the next is almost the proletariat's sole expenditure, this support is provided not by handing out cash, but rather by distributing rice and corn, which the organisation purchases in large quantities and dispenses to strikers. It also seeks to obtain for them work in the municipality or in agriculture and even maintains some workshops, however rudimentary, to employ strikers and victims of lockouts, and in order to protect them from idleness. The Ahmedabad organisation has so far not asked for financial help from other associations and is still not a member of the All India Trade Union Congress, most probably because of its peculiar composition.

The organisations' leaders are disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, persons of pronounced intelligence and youthful vigour. They have generally worked in mills and factories themselves, before studying economics in difficult circumstances. In their offices you can find books of Ricardo, Marx, Lassalle and Lenin alongside numerous historical and other works, including publications of the International Trade Union Federation in Amsterdam, which are not only comprehensively shelved but also eagerly read. Primitive furnishings

of these offices, however, give a very striking effect, as do the many little lizards running all over their walls. Almost all Indian newspapers and a large portion of foreign publications are perused by the personnel in charge of the association for informative articles on industrial, economic and social questions, and the pertinent material is collected and archived. Information on the price of cotton and finished goods, the trade cycle, the reserves of commodities on the world market or in the hands of large companies, wages, living costs and so on is worked up into tables for reference, statistical compilations, etc. The association's annual report which we draw on here contains a discussion of raw material prices, prices of finished goods, the trade cycle in the cotton industry, dividends, wages, productivity, management and technical progress; in short, a comprehensive survey that would not shame any trade union in Europe.

Members' contributions are levied according to trade and income. The highest contribution was formerly eight annas but has recently been reduced to four annas following the heavy blows that the industry has suffered. Shop stewards receive receipt books in various colours for contributions of one to four annas. Membership cards have been abolished, as members lost them too often. In those mills where the union is recognised, copies of contribution receipts are displayed. A further curiosity for the European trade unionist is that many members pay no contribution at all. Weavers earning less than ten rupees per fortnight, and other workers earning less than seven rupees, are dispensed from contributing.

The organisation was formed during the great strike of 1918. A further strike followed the dismissal of two shop stewards in 1924. Since sufficient strike-breakers could be found for almost all departments, the association went over to a different method of striking, by organising a strict and successful walk-out by weavers. In this way, it achieved the reinstatement of two of its organisers. This method is reminiscent of European strike tactics in the cotton

industry, where trade unions have on occasion closed down spinning, weaving, or other important departments, something that has often by itself been sufficient to achieve the demands being made.

The organisation of associations for particular trades into a union is very simple, these being in fact only sub-sections of the overall body. Each trade association has a president and secretary elected by its own membership, both honorary and continuing to work in the mill.

The composition of the federation or the overall body is interesting.

Each 50 members of the association elect a shop steward. Due to diligent efforts of the leaders of the Gandhi movement and their trade union over the years, more people can read and write [here] than in other regions of India under British rule. It, thus, has been possible to ensure that most of these shop stewards have a certain level of reading and sometimes of writing skills. Shop stewards form the connection between the higher administration of the union – full of individuals of higher education and the great mass of workers. Shop stewards also form the electoral body which appoints the organisation's higher officers, its executive board and advisory committee.

The shop stewards often hold meetings, for each of which they are paid eight annas. It is also to them that the organisation's officials give account. The executive elected by these shop stewards consists of five to nine representatives of each trade. These executive members are in every case mill workers. Alongside them an advisory committee is chosen, which has no decisional power. By virtue of its influence and personal qualities of its members, the advisory committee is nonetheless the organ that inspires the leadership of the organisation. Its authority is entirely a moral one. It is sufficient to mention that Mahatma Gandhi himself belongs to this committee, and there is no need to stress that his voice prevails in

almost every case without having any statutory authority. It is good, however, that strenuous everyday activity suffices to impose a sharper tactic on the officials and shop stewards of the association (one based more on class struggle) than the idealistic Mahatma (always inclined towards reconciliation) would promote. Strikes have even been launched against his will.

The members of the organisation's leadership thus far mentioned are honorary officers. The shop stewards' assembly also appoints a general secretary, a deputy for him, and a financial officer, as paid officials of the association. The so-called propaganda officers are not elected but appointed. They fall into two classes and receive a monthly salary of 40 to 50 rupees, i. e. scarcely more than the better-paid workers. There is then the office staff, who are similarly paid, and the teachers, whose incomes range from 40 to 80 rupees. The general secretary and his deputy submit their business report to a joint monthly meeting consisting of shop stewards, executive and advisory committee. This report is also referred to the factory assembly, at which minutes are taken. Strict records are kept on working conditions in each individual mill. Once a year, a general meeting is held. The function of this is not administrative, but simply that of information and recruitment. The annual report is read out to this general assembly, which amounts to a mass meeting of the members, but it is up to the shop stewards' meeting to accept it. It is traditional for Gandhi to always preside over this annual assembly.

The European trade unionist may find the lack of democracy and the imprint of a system of tutelage, as expressed in the institution of a nominated advisory committee with great moral influence, as well as the annual report being approved only by the shop stewards, to be not to his liking; but we should warn against prejudice based on this impression. It must be borne in mind that most likely the great majority of members of this union belong to a class of the population that has suffered for centuries from backwardness, neglect and

oppression, in both body and mind. To give an organisation of such people the aspect of perfect democracy would lead either to utter chaos or complete hypocrisy.

The association maintains a press organ, *Majoor Sandesh* (Labour Herald) in the Gujarati language, which deals in an original and readily understandable fashion with the problems of the Indian workers' movement as well as general Indian questions and is used as reading material for instruction in schools. Education work is directed not just at young people but also at adults, especially the oppressed class already mentioned. The total costs of this educational work in 1925, including the upkeep of libraries and reading-rooms, came to 26,600 rupees. Thanks to these efforts, the organised workers of Ahmedabad have a literacy rate of five per cent, a figure that is not attained elsewhere among the Indian proletariat, apart from in those princely states with compulsory education, and by the workers of a few mills that have schools attached to them.

The pupils of the organisation's schools are entrusted with providing information on the price of foodstuffs in the city. Investigations of this kind have shown that workers spend a disproportionate part of their meagre incomes on tea, tobacco and alcoholic drinks. The strict followers of Gandhi reject tea not only because of the damage it causes to health, but also because tea is produced by foreign exploiters under conditions of slave labour. With the object of curtailing the drinking of alcohol and tea, the union has obtained permission to establish milk bars in mills, and it has achieved good results from the sale of these products.

For children between three and seven years of age, the organisation maintains a kindergarten, a spacious establishment arranged according to hygienic standards with play spaces and women carers to supervise children. In this institution, it is already clear how the Gandhi trade unions combat in their own way the caste division: here in the kindergarten, as later in the assemblies of

members and shop stewards, people from all castes are brought into contact together. Even in this charitable work, the organisation is not disposed to exclude children of people who, whether from ignorance or other reasons, are not trade union members. The reason for this is clear from the facts of infant mortality, which in Ahmedabad is neither higher nor lower than in other industrial towns of India. This amounts to 38 per cent in the population at large, rising to 60 per cent in the working class and as high as 80 per cent in the lowest class of “untouchables”.

Among its other social provisions, the association maintains housing tenements (*chawls*), food shops and eating establishments. It has a savings bank with a loan facility attached, so that workers can escape the clutches of usurious moneylenders. The association lent 22,861 rupees in its last accounting year to members in need at an annual rate of 6.25 per cent, while 11,680 rupees from earlier loans was repaid in this time. With this loan activity it puts a stop to professional moneylenders, who in Ahmedabad (according to the association’s report) take at least 300 per cent on loans to workers, and sometimes as much as 1,000 per cent.

In cases of strikes, the association assists strikers, as already mentioned, by distributing rice and when individual members are dismissed for union activity it pays their full wage until they are reinstated. In 1925, nine dismissed shop stewards were paid a total of 666 rupees. In cases of sickness, the association provides free medical treatment by doctors it employs, and in legal disputes arising from work or organisational activity its legal representatives are available free of charge.

In addition to general trade union tasks that it has in common with European unions, the Gandhi organisation defines its specific aims as: 1) the abolition of untouchability; 2) combating alcohol and opium consumption; 3) educational work among its members as well as “untouchable” non-members. The organisation has often approached the provincial government of Bombay with the request of

reducing the number of liquor-concessions but has regularly received the response that this is a question of government income and not open to discussion.

Another particular feature of the Gandhi organisation is the extensive work of individual recruitment which it has carried out, especially in recent times. Admitting that speeches at meetings do not have the same effect on their colleagues outside the organisation as the personal influence of members that are aware of the organisation's aims, the organisation has set up a deliberate door-to-door recruitment to good effect. This measure and the way it has been carried out shows once again how young and idealistic organisers of Ahmedabad have a masterly judgement of the Indian popular mind. Another form of recruitment is through evening gatherings of members from different castes, at which "untouchables" are the most numerous. Here, stories are read and music is performed. We have ourselves attended gatherings of this kind. They are held on corners of the wider streets, with the audience sitting on carpets spread out on the bare ground, the players and performers in their midst. With these apparently sideline activities, the Mahatma's organisers show that they are not only capable of drawing rich lessons for their economic struggle from the reading of Marx and Marxist writers and the study of trade union publications from Europe, but that they also have a better grasp than other trade union leaders in India of how to adapt their recruitment methods and their tactics to the specific characteristics of Indian conditions, and the particularities of the Indian population.

In their recruiting work in mills and factories, the organisation's shop stewards are advised by the Mahatma to limit themselves to convincing and winning over their unorganised fellow workers without duress. Here, however, we have seen that when necessary these trade unionists can behave in a completely European fashion. They do not confine themselves to presenting the need for organisation, but go beyond this wherever they can. In order to

compel fellow workers, who are unwilling and insist on remaining outside the organisation, shop stewards refuse to work with them. The leaders say that this is not a principle acknowledged by the organisation but results from practical necessity. This is a very happy example, in our view, of how the devout and in its way certainly very fine doctrine of the Mahatma is not worn down when at the conveyor belts, but grows as hard as the material of the machines itself, and as hard as life and the struggle in the machines' realm. On the other hand, however, even the Mahatma demands that any worker should refuse to work on a machine from which a colleague has been unfairly dismissed.

Influence on the management is also exerted by organisers in a very clever and individual fashion. They confirmed to us that on the basis of personal contact they get on very well with most foremen in the mill, even in cases where employers are violently against the union. The organisation's achievements so far, as its leaders admit, lie not so much in securing large wage increases, but rather in preventing reductions. This is explained by the fact that a few months after the organisation was formed, the industry's growth already faltered and the offensive passed from the workforce to the employers, as the workers had to spend all their energy in countering wage cuts which the employers' offensive aimed to impose.

Moreover, every Indian organisation, that of Ahmedabad and Indore included, has much more to do with individual cases than is the case with today's large European trade unions. This is in the nature of its early stage of development, whereas work of European trade unions is a result of developed legislation and regulation of working conditions. They are in a position to represent the workers' cause more decisively and on a wider scale. The general representative functions, intervention against dismissals, struggle against individual wage reductions, struggle for accident compensation for individuals and in general the representation of

workers on individual matters, take a great part of the time and energy of trade union leaders of Ahmedabad and Indore. The clever and intensive handling of these cases is a particularly striking feature and strength of this organisation.

In 1925, the association dealt with a total of 1,004 complaints, of which 616 were settled successfully, 36 ended in compromise, 16 with defeat, and the rest could not be concluded. Two hundred and fourteen of these remaining cases were still unresolved at the time of the annual report. The number of complaints raised by employers against workers in general, or against groups or individuals was smaller. Workers' complaints, in order of frequency concerned: unjust penalties; prejudiced or bad conduct by the management; the manner and timing of wage payments; health and safety issues; working conditions in general; working time, holidays and other matters.

No less than 33 wildcat strikes, mostly affecting a particular group or department, broke out during the year, and failed to meet the approval of the association, as this sees strikes only as the last means after all possibilities of negotiation have failed. It is a remarkable phenomenon, not just in Ahmedabad but throughout India, how workers, especially since the end of the War, have with such confidence taken up the practice of strikes from the West, and often use this as immediate means of resistance against injustice they have suffered. For trade union leaders in India, it is less difficult to take every single worker in a mill out on strike than to get them back to work following an impulsive stoppage. The organisation's report cited here says that 90 per cent of stoppages that took place were against its will and had their origin in quite minor complaints. Work was resumed without any opposition once these were resolved. All that is new in India is the particular form of union-organised strike on the European model. The practice of collective and disciplined stoppage of work and production known as *hartal* has long been known in both city and village and is a means of

political struggle that has often been employed against the foreign government, particularly as defence against attempts to impose new tax burdens over the decades.

This organisation too, struggles against the penalising of workers for absence of work in cases where management has itself granted a worker's leave. The mills that the Ahmedabad organisation covers lie on British territory, where the accident law is in force and the 60-hour week is likewise established. What is at issue here for the organisation is simply the enforcement of legal provisions, obtaining compensation in individual cases and preventing work beyond legal hours in particular mills. Out of 78 compensation claims that the organisation prosecuted under the accident compensation law in 1925, 77 claims were successful. Its report gives high praise to the government commissioner in charge of the scheme in this district, which can unfortunately not be said in Madras, where trade unions have met every kind of resistance from the equivalent official.

The situation is different in the town of Indore, the other branch of the Ahmedabad organisation. Indore lies in the territory of a princely state. Here the labour protection laws of British India do not apply. In general, industrial development in the native states is very weak, hence the pressure and necessity for labour protection is not as strong as in British territory. Social legislation here owed its origin to the impulse of workers' and popular movements that rose up immediately after the War. The native states are following this course only slowly, whereas with respect to popular education, as we have already noted, they have done decidedly more than the British government in the regions it controls. The Indore division of the organisation therefore set itself the goals of struggling for the 60-hour week in that state and demanding the introduction of general accident compensation.

The first of these goals, the introduction of the 60-hour week in the princely territory, was obtained following a successful strike, reducing working time from a general day of 12 hours. It is now on

the way to extending accident compensation here by confrontation with employers. The Ahmedabad organisation has an influence on the city administration that is scarcely rivalled. This however is easier for an organisation in a purely Indian city such as Ahmedabad than in the municipalities of Bombay, Madras or Calcutta that are ruled with a strong hand by the British element, and where scarcely any heed is paid to the wishes of “natives”, let alone workers. In 1925, the organisation dealt with 99 workers’ complaints against the city administration. Fourteen of these concerned street lighting, 18 dealt with water supply, 13 with sanitary installations, 12 with rents and housing, ten with latrines and lavatories, four with roads and paths, 19 with security and other matters.

While the European trade unionist will not find it hard to appreciate these achievements and efforts, it will be less easy for him to assess the great effort made in the area of breaking up the fateful barriers between different castes without special knowledge of local conditions. In India, however, this is one of the most important areas, and one of the first preconditions, not only for a general rise in people’s well-being, but also for the united formation and strengthening of the workers’ organisation. In this area, the Ahmedabad organisation has done an extraordinarily great deal through instruction and example. It found, in this struggle in particular, the full support and collaboration of Mahatma Gandhi, who sees in the destruction of abusive caste restrictions of today the first precondition for the liberation and welfare of the Indian people. Gandhi himself, though belonging to a high caste, diligently pursues contact with “untouchables” and with his great moral authority compels his supporters in all parts of the country and in the highest strata of the population to do the same.

If in the course of centuries caste institution made an indispensable contribution to the great sense of solidarity and cohesion that is present within particular groups of the Indian population, on the other hand, the exclusion of groups is an integral

part of the caste system. This forms one of the greatest obstacles to the progress, elevation and freedom of the Indian people. If this bulwark falls, people's freedom and the liberation of the working-class will make a powerful stride forward. The degree to which the workers' movement in general, and that under the Mahatma's influence in particular, contributes to the destruction of the caste barrier cannot be sufficiently stressed and acknowledged.

In conclusion, let us hear what the president of the All India Trade Union Congress (to which the Ahmedabad organisation does not belong) said about it at its Madras congress in 1926:

Textile workers of Bombay should follow the example of the textile workers of Ahmedabad in forming strong Unions. Ahmedabad Labour Union is the federation of five different textile Unions. It is recognised by the Mill-Owners and has conducted many a local strike and has come out successful on more occasions than one. It gives its members strike benefit, lets tenements to its members at cheap rates, has been conducting 20 schools, maintaining a hospital and lending monies to members at cheap rates of interest etc. All Trade Unions in India should follow the good example set up by the above organisation. I do hope it will not be presumptuous on my part to throw a humble suggestion to that talented lady Mrs. [Anusuya] Ben Sarabai[,] its President to consider the desirability of their Union affiliating itself to the Congress which will in fact be a rare honour and support to the Trade Union movement in India.³²

3. The Madras Labour Union

While Bombay could boast the first workers' organisation in India, Madras has the oldest of those organisations of the post-War era that exist today. Like almost all Indian trade unions, this too came into being in the context of a major strike, shortly before the end of the War in 1918. Two years later, this organisation, founded by the prominent Indian trade union leader Wadia, faced a heavy test of fire on the occasion of a struggle with the largest British cotton spinning plant in Madras, the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills.³³ As is often the

case in the confused Indian situation, it is not possible to say exactly whether this began as a strike or as a lockout. The firm in question launched a civil suit against Wadia, as founder and leader of the union. It won damage claims of 90,000 rupees with the proviso that Wadia would be relieved of this penalty (which in any case was impossible for him to pay) if he gave up all connection with the workers' movement and ended his activity in the struggle that had flared up. Wadia was unable to pay the fine. He agreed to be silenced, as he was liable to a prison term in lieu in case of non-payment – probably with an exile of several years to Burma or Assam, from where imprisoned political leaders generally return with tuberculosis. This method is common or rather it is among the mildest of the characteristic methods with which the British do battle in India.³⁴

In addition to the defeat which this British company imposed on this first of the post-War trade unions (without however striking it dead), the firm itself started a yellow union under the protective hand of the employers. The company even demands that European trade union leaders should recognise their “trade union” creature as a proper workers' organisation, the only one corresponding to “Western principles”, since it is led by workers from the mill, and not like the original organisation, by outsiders. The real situation is that the employers get a few poor devils from the workforce to lend their names to the organisation, which in fact is controlled by them alone, and which is in every respect their own factory organisation. A whole series of measures are undertaken to maintain allegiance to this “union”: rooms in the mill are put at its disposal for theatrical performances, individuals are required by their foreman to join the organisation, and sometimes pressed into it by threats. Dismissals are withdrawn if workers declare themselves ready to join the “union”. This “union” naturally makes nothing in the way of demands on employers or has any specific goals that it struggles for. Spokesmen for this “union” met us on the mill premises in the

presence of employers and with praise of the firm on their lips, along with accusations against the Madras workers, emphasising their “sense of responsibility towards the situation of the textile industry” (!). It is evident that this is a typical yellow works association. Its only goal is to keep the workforce from joining the first modern trade union organisation in India, and one genuinely tested in struggle.

Today the Madras Labour Union, despite all the difficulties and harassment it faces, counts 7,000 members in battle with the employers’ association. This association is not thriving despite all the protection it gets. In the conflict against the yellow employers’ union, the Madras Labour Union sent a protest to the British Trades Union Congress, via Annie Besant, and the executive of the All India Trade Union Congress too, protested at a special meeting in April 1926 against the practice of the Madras employers in obstructing the development of a proper trade union movement by promoting yellow workers’ associations. Complaints can still be heard today about the attempt to forcibly deduct contributions to the yellow association from workers’ wages.

Just as at its beginning, the Labour Union is still headed by “outsiders”, i. e. the most intelligent and interesting figures among the educated Indians of the younger generation, who devote their whole work and their whole life to the freedom struggle of the people and to the workers’ movement in particular. In the lead stands the young Brahmin Shiva Rao, a clever and forceful leader, who in no way sees himself too superior to champion with his whole energy the rights of the humblest working man and woman.³⁵ Organising Madras workers is no easy task, probably more difficult in fact than in other parts of the country. For in these southern regions of India, the pre-Aryan race of Dravidians is preponderant, containing a tremendous number of “untouchables”. Indeed, in the Presidency of Madras these “pariahs” form the great majority of the working class as a whole. Among these people, the work of education and

enlightenment has to start with the absolute basics and great efforts are needed to shake them out of their dull resignation.

But Shiva Rao and his friends, whose names we unfortunately cannot give in all cases, do not flinch from any work or effort to raise these people to a level that enables them to embark on genuine organised self-help. When we were present, 10,000 people followed the call of the young leader to a mass meeting, an impressive and romantic sight, with people sitting on bare ground, on walls and roofs and in trees. Only a section of the Madras proletariat understands the Hindustani language of the region; another part only speaks the Dravidian Tamil and Telugu tongues, strange and difficult for the foreigner. This is a further difficulty that organisational work has to confront. But the young and educated organisers have mastered all three of these Indian languages as well as English. This achievement is providing a service for the motley proletarian mass of this region without which these very poor people would have found it hard to reach the beginnings of organised self-help so early on.

In contrast to the workers of Ahmedabad, those in the Madras mills are not divided by caste. Caste separation of this kind exists here only in form of the ritual obligation to separate at mealtimes, a practice that is quite unobjectionable even from the standpoint of social struggle, as long as it does not rouse feelings of hatred and exclusion against members of other castes and confessions, which here as everywhere in the workers' movement is happily not the case.

The holding of a trade union congress in an Indian city always has a powerful recruiting effect for local unions. The comings and goings, all the arrangements and the many visitors from outside, attract the attention of the mass of workers to the organisation and demonstrate the power of unity even to the illiterate. Thus, the Madras Union, by virtue of the 1926 Congress being held in its city, experienced a considerable rise in membership. This, fortunately, offset the sharp fall this organisation had experienced after the strike

of 1920, which was caused by joint struggle against it by the employers and the government. For purposes of recruitment, the union held 60 mass meetings during 1926, similar to the giant meeting that we ourselves attended. In this year it had only three strikes and associated struggles to wage, none of which were of great significance. It could, thus, manage its activities with a modest income and an expenditure of 6,500 rupees. Its reserves at that time only amounted to 4,000 rupees.

Like the organisation in Ahmedabad, the one in Madras has to expend the greater part of its energy on championing individual cases and complaints. Only in certain periods can it progress to major actions, culminating generally in wage negotiations, strikes or lockouts. One of the broadest areas of its activity is struggle over pensions for victims of industrial accident. It also faces difficult struggles against individual wage cuts, non-payment of remaining wages in cases of dismissal, the generally wretched mistreatment of workers and many other things. The spacious offices of this organisation are never empty and serve as a place of refuge for complainants from the various textile mills of the city. Since this organisation receives little funding from outside – unlike the Gandhi associations, it cannot provide the kind of support that the latter offers. Its help is chiefly limited to strike aid, support against dismissals and legal assistance. In the past year, for the first time, the union has decided to provide other kinds of support also: first, death grants for family members of deceased workers, and [secondly] maternity benefits.

Legal advice and representation of its members in court consumes a large part of the union's energies. Its lawyer represented 30 claims for accident compensation in the past year, alongside other cases. Of these, only half were brought to a successful conclusion. The real catch in this legislation is the six-month deadline for the registration of claims, which has very often already passed by the time the victim discovers the existence of the

law. Nonetheless, the 15 successful cases taken up by the Madras Labour Union brought a total of 4,540 rupees in compensation. Recently, the union has also taken up compensation claims for non-members and appointed additional legal advisers for this purpose. To recover a part of the costs involved, it now takes in successful cases a fee of 2,5 per cent of the sum awarded. Even before the legal establishment of an hour's midday break [in India], the Madras Union achieved this gain for workers in its area. It, further, considerably increased wage levels, and by a ceaseless string of court appearances reduced considerably the number of cases of mistreatment and arbitrary discrimination against individual workers.

The union has made the following demands as a way of influencing the Madras provincial government in favour of its members: 1) the labour inspector should be responsible for the reporting of accident compensation claims; 2) representation of the workforce in the legislative bodies as per the proposals made by the All India Trade Union Congress in Madras in 1926; 3) establishment of a permanent accident compensation commissioner for the Presidency after the model of Bombay. These demands were rejected out of hand by the government.

The Madras Labour Union involves itself in politics in an open and deliberate fashion, by committing candidates of various parties to its demands, in order to exert pressure on influential milieus within its district, to push for the nomination of these candidates as deputies by the government and to win votes of bourgeois well-wishers. The candidates in question are invited to address mass assemblies called by the union and present their political and social programme. The aim at the same time is to explain to the mass of workers the connections between their condition of life, the colonial oppression by the foreign power and the great political events in their country, in a simple and enlightening way. Useful and necessary as this activity is, given the state of affairs in India, it is mistrusted by the government organs and the white employers' circles to the extent

that we were vigorously “warned” against this union, just like we were warned in Ahmedabad. Instead, the yellow employers’ union were recommended as meriting our attention. As a counterweight against this aspect of the union’s activity, it is notable that the authorities barred it from assembly halls which it was previously able to rent.

Some statutory provisions of the Madras Labour Union:

Aims

1. Provision of help of every kind to members.
2. Securing of decent conditions of life and work.
3. Registration of complaints.
4. Help in cases of sickness, unemployment, old age and death.
5. Peaceful settlement, wherever possible, of disputes between employers and workers.
6. Representation of compensation claims under the accident legislation.
7. Legal help for members in all disputes arising from conditions of work.
8. Provision of help in cases of strikes and lockouts, as far as these have the approval of the Union.
9. Collection of information about the textile industry in India and abroad.
10. Collaboration and confederation with workers’ organisations that share its aims in India and abroad, especially in the textile industry.
11. General promotion of the social, cultural, economic, civic and political condition of its members.

The Leaders of the Union. The Union has a president, one or more vice-presidents, one or more secretaries and a treasurer. These are all elected for the duration of a year at general assemblies of the Union’s members.

Executive Committee. The business of the Union is conducted by the executive committee, this committee consisting of at most 24 members elected by the assembly of members, together with the Union’s leaders. No more than half of the committee members should be honorary members (outsiders).

Changes to the statutes can be made by a majority of the annual general meeting or by any extraordinary assembly of the members.

Contributions. The contribution is set at two annas per month and four annas for supervisory workers. If a member is more than three months in arrears with contributions, his membership will lapse. The re-acceptance of such a member will only ensue after payment of his arrears.

Support. Support is only provided after a membership of at least six months and then as follows: 1) Legal representation of claims under the accident legislation, with a fee of 2,5 per cent payable to the fund for legal representation in case of success; 2) Free legal aid for any other case that the executive agrees to represent; 3) Payment to the next of kin in case of death (in cases that do not fall under the accident legislation) of 20 or 40 rupees according to contribution; 4) Childbirth support for members who do not receive this from their employer, on condition of at least one year's membership. This support is set at half pay for three months.

Meetings. The annual general meeting is held in April, with the following tasks: 1) Adopting the business report and accounts; 2) Electing the Union's officers; 3) Conducting other business that is placed on the agenda by the President. Extraordinary members' meetings can be called by the President as he sees fit. He is required to do so on the demand of at least one-quarter of the members, or of 200 members of the Union. The sessions of the executive committee are held twice a month as a general rule.

4. Organising attempts in the Bengal jute industry

Before we report on the organisation of workers in the Bengal jute industry, it is necessary to note that this is more a question of describing the foundations and future prospects for the workers' movement in Bengal than of what presently exists in way of workers' organisations in the textile industries. On various occasions, we have already remarked how Bengali workers, being mainly artisans, generally occupy skilled posts in engineering, the metal industry and the building trades. The 300,000 and more jute workers who are employed in and around Calcutta, however, are almost all from outside Bengal, drawn instead from a whole range of provinces: Madras, Bihar-Orissa, Chota-Nagpur, Central India and the United Provinces to the north. These are naturally the lowest strata of

workers in the provinces in question, and in time of hunger they migrate by the thousand into the misery of the Bengali jute industry. They differ completely in language, race, culture and caste, have scarcely anything in common with one another and are almost unable to understand each other. This makes organising the workforce in jute mills a most difficult task. This is why out of 300,000 workers in this industry only some three to four thousand are at present contributing members of a union.

But even these organised workers are divided between two different organisations, with a certain amount of friction between them. They are, however, not principally hostile to one another and are both members of the Trade Union Congress. The first organisation is called the Kankinara [Labour] Union and reports a membership of 3,000, a large portion of whom are only nominally registered.³⁶ The second union, the Bengal Jute Workers' Association, has perhaps still fewer members, but on all appearance is making headway. One of the young intellectual champions of this union is the nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, who has visited Germany to study workers' organisations there.³⁷

Besides the difficulties that arise simply from the human material to be organised, there are a number of obstacles that obstruct the advance of workers' organisations in Bengal. First of these is the fact that Bengal is the key point at which British rule is enforced and consequently the centre of political struggle. This is an exclusively political struggle, due to necessity at times even terroristic and reminiscent of that in tsarist Russia. It absorbs the greater part of the young intelligentsia, who in other provinces work for the liberation struggle in the context of the workers' movement and would be especially needed for this purpose in Bengal. What remains for the Bengal workers' movement in the way of leading personnel are people who like to have a position of authority at the head of a sham organisation, without being really suited to promoting the interest of the working class. There are even cases in which such people,

rewarded by some kind of “appointment” by the government, strive to lead the movement on to a path that the government would favour, once it can no longer be completely repressed. Nowhere is the complaint about the abuse of the workers’ movement by ambitious politicians heard more often than in Bengal. It would be unjust however to class all organisational leaders in this province under this heading. Besides the young Tagore, there are many other celebrated examples. But these exceptions are unfortunately not numerous enough at the present time to provide sufficient leadership material for a comprehensive movement.

In the Calcutta jute industry, we also heard for the first-time complaints from workers of employers using black lists against the workforce and the trade union movement. These industrialists, who are almost all from Scotland, many of whom even boast about having been unionists themselves, have imported this tactic from Europe.

In addition to the two jute workers’ organisations, there is also another small textile workers’ union in Bengal, which recruits its members from knitting factories, but we could not ascertain the existence of any kind of union in the cotton industry, which in comparison with the enormous jute industry in Calcutta is on a much smaller scale. It is welcome how the workers’ movement, especially in Bengal, finds enthusiastic champions and strong support for all its struggles in the bourgeois Swarajist press.

No obstacle would be strong enough to stem the trade union movement of the textile workforce in Bengal, if the Bengalis themselves made up even a relatively small proportion of this proletariat. As we have said however, this is not the case. Bengali workers’ organisations only arose in the years 1922 to 1924, which explains their restricted scale and influence, and gives some consolation. Contributions are set at one to three annas per month, a fee that hardly allows the organisations to help its members materially. These unions must therefore largely be satisfied with

taking up the most scandalous cases of injustice in the courts or with public opinion, the constant readiness of the Swarajist press to devote space to trade union matters being of great help here. On a smaller scale, the organisations also carry on educational work among workers' children, having rudimentary instruction facilities with poorly paid teachers in which children are taught to read and write.

5. Textile unions in Kanpur and elsewhere

In Kanpur, a city of cotton preparation, we found a happier situation with the workers' organisation than in Bengal. In 1919, after a strike of several months, a textile workers' organisation was formed in Kanpur, and reached 3,400 members in its heyday of 1921.³⁸ It was headed by Dr Murarilal, a college teacher and diligent politician, whose idealism and active participation in Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement took him to prison in 1921. The leadership of this union also includes a number of other enthusiastic freedom fighters of both confessions, Hindu and Muslim. In 1924, the union led a strike of three months to a successful conclusion. This was unfortunately a pyrrhic victory, as once the employers had gathered their forces they embarked on a bitter revenge. By means of persecution and dismissal they scared large numbers of workers away from the organisation, so that its membership fell back to just 800. Recovery from this blow was difficult and today the union still counts no more than 1,000 members. Thanks to the toughness and support of the core members of the organisation, who have carried on functioning despite the persecution, it is now moving forward again. Work for the organisation is all the more difficult as the ample presence of labour-power in the region of Kanpur and the United Provinces, which even supplies workers to other parts of the country, gives employers an advantage in their struggle. Very few women work in the textile industry in Kanpur and each weaver operates only one loom – both

factors witness ample presence of human material, even more than in Madras (the United Provinces, in which Kanpur lies, is the most densely populated region of India outside Bengal).

It is interesting that the Kanpur organisation levies dues according to wages, at a rate of one anna per four rupees. Since workers' dwellings are spaced far apart and since it is forbidden to collect contributions in company housing, shop stewards have to take dues at the mill gate, despite the risk of dismissal. We had a specific opportunity to see how competent and watchful these union organisers are. When we inspected mills at the invitation of employers, union members gave us notes at the mill gates on which we were asked to seek out particular places and departments in which abuse was greatest, and from which we would otherwise most likely have been kept away.

Because of harsh persecution that the union has suffered, it has in some struggles been assisted financially by the All India Trade Union Congress, of which it is a member, and which is attentive to the exposed position in which this union finds itself. One of the most interesting figures in the organisation is its "propaganda officer", as he is called. He is the only paid official of the union. He was previously a weaver and today still draws a meagre weaver's wage in return for which he conducts the union's propaganda work. Though a Muslim, he enjoys the same confidence from adherents of both religions, and when he addresses the masses in his native Urdu, he is a most effective and spellbinding speaker. Not flinching from any danger, he works tirelessly for the organisation.³⁹ Alongside the honorary president Dr. Murarilal, there are two honorary vice-presidents and two secretaries, all of whom are workers from mills. The union executive comprises 44 members, of whom 34 are workers and ten are sympathising bourgeois Swarajists.

It is a peculiarity of this union, based in Indian conditions, that it accepts honorary members from circles of bourgeois well-wishers,

who pay voluntary contributions, sometimes quite considerable amounts. This is very useful, especially in times of struggle. The union is too careful and sparing to maintain administrative headquarters and sets up its "office" in the open air. The office consists of four posts with a thatched roof, and beneath them a table and two chairs. In cases of strikes, the sympathisers' role is to attract support of public opinion by way of meetings. The funds raised in this way, together with the union's regular resources, are used for the distribution of rice. The union is not, however, in a position to provide other support at this time. Like the Madras Labour Union, this is very much an organisation focussed on struggle in the best sense of the term. Many of its members, Muslims as well as Hindus, are followers of Gandhi.

The textile workers' union of Nagpur, a cotton-spinning town in central India with a total of 14,000 workers, has organised only a thousand workers. Here too, the very motley composition of the working population presents a considerable obstacle to organisation and once again the "pariah" class, whose organisation requires such painstaking preliminary work, forms the majority of the proletariat. The efforts and personal qualities of Ruikar, the leader of this small organisation, bode very well for the future of the movement.⁴⁰

Apart from the previously described Indian textile workers' unions, there are two further organisations in this industry that merit a mention here, but which we unfortunately did not have the opportunity to get to know personally: first, the Coimbatore Labour Union, which organises textile workers in the south Indian city of that name. This organisation counts 4,000 members,⁴¹ and levies monthly contributions of four annas for men and two annas for women. The union was founded like many others soon after the War. In 1925, it led a bitter and defensive strike against a planned wage cut of 20 per cent. The outcome of the strike was the establishment of an arbitration office, which was fairly favourable to workers. The name of the union's president, Rangaswami Iyengar, testifies to the

spirit and quality of the organisation even in the absence of any further detail, as he is one of the most competent Swaraj leaders of the Madras Presidency, and a member of the Delhi Parliament.⁴² The Workers' Union of Pulgaon in the Central Provinces is much smaller and again we did not get to know the union in person.⁴³ This union is also led by a figure familiar to us, whom we already got to know as leader of the Nagpur workers' union, the lawyer R. S. Ruikar. It is quite customary in India, in fact, for one and the same person to run two similar organisations in the same place, or in two neighbouring cities.

6. The workers' organisation in the Tata Iron and Steel Works

The Tata works is named after its founder and is the only major Indian company in heavy industry. Situated in the north-east of British India, on the border of the province of Bengal, there are rich iron deposits and many coal mines. The first excavations took place in 1907 and the first iron was obtained as far back as 1911. The young metallurgical business experienced a tremendous upturn with the World War, when it went over to the production of war materials, like all companies of this kind. The scale of the business and the capital invested grew rapidly. When the World War was over and the British continued military operations in Mesopotamia, the plant was able to undertake new war contracts with greater productivity. Today, the Tata works and its ancillary plants, which are located right in the middle of the jungle, count 40,000 workers. The town in which they live together with the technical staff and managers, belongs to the company right down to the last hut, and has been constructed step by step with the works itself.

In 1920, workers complained that a price rise of almost 100 per cent since the pre-War era had not been followed by even a proximate corresponding rise in wages. This led to a two month strike, in which employees of the firm fired on the strikers. Finally, however, the wage struggle was victorious, or at least brought raises of between 20 and 45 per cent. The organisation of the Tata workers arose together with this first strike.⁴⁴ The firm however saw this organisation as endangering its previous arbitrary rule and set all kinds of difficulties in the way of the newly arisen union. This was all the easier to do as the company owned all the buildings, meeting-places and land in a wide orbit of this deforested jungle landscape, as previously mentioned. The company could thus forbid any meeting of workers, whether indoors or in the open air. In addition,

the company dismissed the main leader of the organisation, an Indian employee.

A second strike thus followed in 1922, which was chiefly around the issue of union recognition and ended in the reinstatement of the dismissed leader Sethi. Spaces and rooms were made available for meetings and permission was given for union dues to be collected in the mill. Subsequently, the firm itself deducted dues of union members from their wages and handed them over to the organisation, in order to save time. It was a definite advantage for the organisation in times of strike that the firm was compelled to pay some attention to public opinion, as it stands under the special protection of the state. Between April 1924 and March 1927, the Tata works received subsidies to a total of 20 million rupees and when these were ended, it received protection in a different guise.⁴⁵ In the conflict with the workforce, therefore, the company at times has to accept the mediation of Indian Swarajist parliamentarians. The union's considerable successes were then followed by defeats and the number of members fell for a while below 4,000. At the time of our visit, the figures were moving upwards again. There were then more than 6,000 members and today the level stands at nearly 10,000.

As far as we are aware, this union is the only organisation whose leader and general secretary (who in the meantime has also served as Indian workers' representative at the International Labour Conference in Geneva and attended as a delegate the trade union congress in Paris) is himself employed in the mill, albeit in a senior position. He is one of a very small number of people among Indian workers who by dint of favourable circumstances was in a position to attain mastery of the English language and go on to achieve an all-round education.⁴⁶ The organisation includes both men and women (the latter make up some ten per cent of the workforce), as well as all trades represented in the works, i. e. not only metal workers, but also woodworkers, building workers, unskilled labourers, etc. The

union was founded under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, who is a personal friend of the current leader. Similarly to the situation in Bengal and Nagpur, organising in the Tata works is impeded by the mixed composition of the workforce and the different languages spoken. Tata too recruits its workers from the most varied provinces of India. The largest contingent come from the double province of Bihar-Orissa, in which the plant is located, but even here there are two quite different races and types who cannot understand one another, the Kolar tribal people, black as Africans, and the later arrivals, the Aryan element with their higher level of culture. Next in line are those from Bengal province, who are almost all skilled workers, followed by those from the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, the Central Provinces, Madras, the Punjab, even the Bombay Presidency and a small number of Gurkhas from Nepal. In this still fairly young company, annual turnover of labour remains quite high: partly because housing has not kept pace with the expansion of the works and partly because the workforce includes so many villagers who have just migrated from the countryside. According to the firm, this turnover is 30 per cent, another fact that makes it hard to maintain a stable level of union membership. A further ten per cent or so of the workforce, those hailing from the surrounding region, go back each year to their village at harvest time and not all of them then return to the mill.

The union executive of 30 members is elected from the workers' ranks, in fact by the entire membership. This executive in turn chooses the union's honorary leaders, who consist of a President, two Vice-Presidents, the General Secretary and a second Secretary. Recently, the union has appointed a full-time paid secretary in charge of its office, an executive member, and for some time it has had two paid staff. The executive members are themselves shop stewards in particular departments of the works. Previously the shop stewards were also entrusted with collecting dues in the workshop. A general assembly of members, which elects the executive, also

accepts its report. The firm allows the organisation to take votes on the premises, and to put up notices and wall slogans on prior request. The monthly contributions to the union are graded according to the workers' monthly income as follows:

Table 20: Jamshedpur Labour Association, monthly contributions.

Income in Rs.	Contribution in A.
Below 15	1
Above 15 and below 30	2
Above 30 and below 45	3
Above 45 and below 60	4
Above 60 and below 75	5
Above 75 and below 100	7
Above 100 and below 125	9

The union does not have any statutory provisions for assistance. It does however, extend support to dismissed workers on a case-by-case basis, as well as strike assistance in the form of rice distribution in traditional Indian fashion, corresponding to its ability. It also, like previously mentioned organisations, offers legal aid for cases arising from conditions at work or membership of the union.

This union, which is chiefly a metal workers' union and indeed the first and only such in India, has in many respects a considerable advantage over other organisations, especially those in the textile industry. As its domain is a single town and company, lying completely isolated in virgin forest, it is less affected by political struggles than big city organisations of textile workers, and consequently does not need to take part in the struggle against political oppression and for political liberation to the same degree as these. This offers a certain guarantee for its peaceful development. It has the further advantage that in a town built and governed by an

Indian firm, there is no public alcohol consumption promoted by the government, as a result of which the struggle against this evil does not absorb the organisation's forces.

Claims for accident compensation at Tata are also more rarely contested than in the textile industry. The company maintains, on top of the statutory injury compensation which it has to finance, a special welfare fund for sickness and injury, to which its workers are automatically entitled when they have been in employment for a certain amount of time. A major complaint at Tata, on the other hand, is the lack of a regular weekly rest day, despite this being embodied in law. The system of workers having to bribe foremen to get taken on is completely absent at Tata, as all workers are engaged through the company's regular procedure and then allocated to different foremen. As a result of these special conditions, the labour organisation here is in the somewhat favourable position that labour questions can be dealt with and represented at a higher level and in a wider perspective. Instead of having to beat around and take up numerous individual complaints with the company, it can focus on negotiations with a view to collective settlement. The extensive educational system at the Tata plant, moreover, spares the union the pressing task of inducting its members and their children in the most basic knowledge and of having to engage in a political struggle with the government for the establishment of schools.

7. The two Indian seamen's organisations

a) The Seamen's Union of Bombay

The seamen's unions of Bombay and Calcutta are two of the best and strongest trade union organisations in India. The Bombay union counts some 12,000 members at the present time.⁴⁷ It was founded in 1919. Despite its large membership, it still embraces only the so-called "saloon staff", i. e. waiters and cabin stewards on passenger

liners. It is only just starting to extend its jurisdiction and recruitment to the other categories of ship workers. The majority of its members are not British subjects, but stem from the small Portuguese colony of Goa to the south of Bombay. These men are marked by their high stature and physical strength. They also do not belong to the Hindu religion but are Roman Catholic, following the missionary work that the Portuguese conducted early on in their colonies. We were most surprised before we realised this to see at a mass meeting of union members a large picture of the Virgin Mary decked with garlands and burning candles, the meaning of which was unclear to us until the above explanation was given. Unfortunately, we did not have time or opportunity to learn further details about the union organisation. The well-disciplined speeches at the meeting we attended, however, made clear to us the particular problems that the union confronts. It too has to struggle against the system of work being given out on a basis of bribes and is strongly pressing the government to set up public labour offices.

There is great complaint about unequal payment in relation to the European staff, even those doing the same work. It is well worth recording that the Indian seamen's organisations are perhaps the only trade unions in the country for which the problem of unemployment has a major significance. A large fraction of the workers, sometimes as many as half the total in this trade, are at any one time idle in the port and receive no kind of help or support during this period of unemployment. Membership dues come to six rupees a year or eight annas per month – among the highest in the country. Support provisions for members are correspondingly extensive, and are not limited to legal aid, compensation for dismissal and occasional support in disputes, as is the case in most other Indian organisations. The provisions extend from accident, unemployment and family assistance to funeral expenses, etc.

Indian seamen who work on ships that are registered in Great Britain have no claim to compensation under Indian accident

legislation, a disadvantage that both seamen's organisations, as well as the All India Trade Union Congress, are waging a bitter struggle against, basing it on the government's promise to extend this compensation also to seamen, which it made a long while ago but has still not honoured.

b) The Calcutta Sea Men's Labour Union

The godfather of the Calcutta seamen's union is the recently deceased freedom fighter C.R. Das, the Sun Yat-Sen of the Indian anti-imperialist struggle who died at an all too early age.⁴⁸ It was he who brought this union to life and only he who could have written into its programme words such as these:

The supremacy of capital over labour will meet its end as soon as the workers stand together in a bold and single front. In countries that have not yet found political freedom, the difficulties are that much more numerous. The International Labour Organisation is the fruit of the peace treaty with Germany. High-sounding promises have been made to the world's workers at international labour conferences. But as far as India is concerned, these promises cannot be honoured. The organisation of workers can only be pursued on the basis of individual countries, what is needed is a synthesis of the demands of the classes and the masses, and the realisation of this ideal depends to a great extent on our political liberation.

The Calcutta seamen's organisation also arose in 1919,⁴⁹ and has already much to show in way of achievements for its members. Its first short strike in 1919 was successful and raised its profile and its membership quite considerably. Two years after its formation, it won significant wage rises, as well as certain measures for welfare and family assistance on the part of employers. From the very beginning, the organisation has struggled against the unequal payment of white and brown staff, in those cases where they both perform the same work. Questioned in the British Parliament in March 1924 as to whether Indian seamen were British subjects, the minister of that

time, Sidney Webb, answered that Indian citizens were naturally also citizens of the British Empire. When James Sexton MP then declared that wages of Indian seamen were incompatible with the dignity of British citizenship, Mr Webb responded that the government could hardly deal with this question, as it was a matter for trade unions and employers.

The various struggles of this large and well-functioning organisation are highly instructive, as they cast a light on the conditions that exist in India and the way in which workers' organisations are treated. The Calcutta seamen's union waged a particular struggle in 1922 over the distribution of prospective German reparations payments. The British Treasury had announced that 20 million from the War reparations would be allocated to the next of kin of the 17,000 merchant seamen killed in British service. Since these 17,000 victims included no fewer than 3,427 Indian seamen, of whom 47 died during internment in Germany and the rest at sea, the union claimed its share of this fund. The government's reply, from the mouth of Mr. C.A. Innes, amounted to a tortuous lecture on the different categories of war victims and concluded:

It is therefore clear that the Government of India and His Majesty's Government are making full provision for the dependents of lascars who died during the war, and if any money is recovered from Germany it will go to recoup these Governments for the expenditure they have already incurred. It is very unlikely that either they or we shall get anything like the full amount, and it is therefore obvious that there is no question of pensions being increased merely because we get certain payments on account from Germany. From resolution passed by the Indian Seamen's Union, Calcutta, and from comments which have appeared in the Press, there seems to be some misunderstanding in the matter, and the Government of India are therefore glad of the opportunity pensions clear.⁵⁰

Representatives of the British government in India, however, had on a whole number of occasions warmly praised the Bengal seamen for their record in the War, and the erection of a memorial planned by

the government was designed to inscribe them immortally in stone. The seamen's union protested against this militarist flummery and demanded that the money for the memorial should instead be spent on a seamen's hostel. This alone would demonstrate to the seamen the lasting gratitude of the glorious Empire, by raising them from the filth of their hovels into a dwelling fit for men, an alleviation of their existence that even the greedy jute manufacturers and railway companies had provided for some of their employees, but which the filthy rich ship-owners did not deign to imitate. The government was not prepared to honour its heroes in even such a modest way, so it persisted with its stone war memorial, and the seamen were left in their hovels.

In 1920, the seamen's situation was discussed at the International Labour Conference in Geneva. India was also represented there, but not its great Bengali seamen's union, despite its pressing request.⁵¹ Rather, it had to wage a bitter struggle against its members being refused hire by the employment office and demanded in vain the registration of all those seeking work and their employment in order of application. Just as fruitless was its demand for consideration of those who had served at sea during the War. The protection of Indian seamen against demeaning treatment by white superiors was and remains a current demand and the ability to make complaints about professional matters on ship remains a right that is painfully withheld. In 1921, once more a strike was called for an increase in wages and a change in the hiring system, leading to negotiations with the head of the shipping department.

Meanwhile, in June 1920, the International Labour Conference in Geneva had demanded improvements and an extension of employment opportunities for seamen, as well as the application of the Washington convention on unemployment and unemployment insurance for seamen.⁵² The British-Indian government, instead of ratifying this convention, gave the bill for debate to its sham parliament. The way this was dealt with is so characteristic of how

seamen's demands have generally been treated over the years that it is worth reporting here. Mr C. A. Innes, representative of the British commercial class in this "parliament", first of all stated that what was needed was not "ratification" of the reform proposals, but rather investigation of the present methods of staff recruitment. He did indeed concede that the recruitment system was 'theoretically wrong' – being run by private interests, who force seamen to hand over a disproportionate part of their pay in order to obtain a badly paid job, with their "attitude" sized up into the bargain. Instead of abolishing a recognised and admitted evil, however, he proposed a lengthy "investigation".

This delaying tactic and refusal to act led the seamen of Calcutta and Bombay to a joint meeting, a resolute protest, and a telegram addressed to Joshi in Geneva for the International Labour Conference then in session. The government was now forced to establish a new commission of inquiry, to which the union leader Daud, a Muslim, was also invited, even against the protest of shipowners as expressed through the Bengal chamber of commerce. This commission took evidence from experts and those involved in different capacities and reached a clear conclusion as to the abuses of the private engagement system. The government wished its report not to be published but to remain "confidential". The part of the report that was withheld from the public was that describing the present system and its abuses, so that both in India and abroad it remained quite unclear what seamen's grievances and demands actually were. On May 27 1922, the report was at last published in the *Gazette of India* and a second commission was now to start work on drafting reform proposals.⁵³ The trade unions had in mind a system of engagement on a parity basis, to be staffed and run by representatives of workers and employers. Fearing that they would not achieve this, they demanded instead the "state control of engagement with certain guarantees". In the meantime, however, representatives of employers and the government, led by the

Calcutta Labour Intelligence Officer, a certain Gilchrist, had already drawn up its proposals for the Bengal district, bypassing the trade unions.⁵⁴ The union now produced a proposal as well: creation of a single engagement system for all shipping, and establishment of an advisory committee for engagement, which was put forward to the Bengal government. This was in January 1923. The following year saw repeated protest meetings of seamen against the delaying tactic, which was conducted in such a way that at one time it was declared that labour legislation was a matter for the provinces and could not be undertaken by the central government, another time that merchant shipping, which was affected by it, was very much a central affair. Questions on how the matter was progressing were countered quite cynically by government representatives who referred to information that had already been given earlier.

Joshi, the only workers' representative nominated by the government, waged a courageous struggle in Parliament, but what could he do with the best will in the world against the whole phalanx of white shipowners, big traders and government agents? In March 1924, when Joshi asked for the tenth time how far the regulation which thousands of seamen had been waiting for year in, year out, was progressing, the government, after four years, made a petty and questionable admission. Its response was indeed instructive:

The views of the local governments have been received. The only two ports which are greatly concerned are Bombay and Calcutta, and the report of the committee shows that much greater abuses exist in the latter port. The Government of India therefore proposes to tackle the problem first in Calcutta. They are making certain suggestions to the government of Bengal, and on the receipt of that governments' reply hope to be able to make a statement on the subject.⁵⁵

The trade unions now began to fight for an extension of the concessions that were to be made to both ports, Bombay as well as

Calcutta. In 1926 – 27, when we visited India, this struggle had not yet ended, and is most likely still under way today.

For Calcutta, in the meantime, a public employment office has been opened, but this is completely under the thumb of the shipowners and does not have the controlling committee of workers' representatives that the trade unions proposed. Bombay did not have a public employment office in 1927 and apparently does not have one today. Seamen there are still exposed to bribe-taking and exploitation by private contractors. Despite many successes, this organisation has unfortunately split in recent time over the question of political struggle and today faces a minority union as a rival with a rather different political orientation. The differences, however, are handled with respect and moderation. In 1924, the organisation also held a general conference of Indian seamen, and it is to be expected that in the course of a few years, Indian seamen will manage to establish a single, large central union for their trade. It is to be desired and hoped that the opposition that split away will also find a place in it.

The specific nature of the problems of Indian seamen in comparison with members of other trade unions are also clearly shown in the aims given in the statutes.

Demands and aims

1. Abolition of the present system of engagement by private contractors.
2. Abolition of bribery and corruption in service and in work relations.
3. Permission for the trade unions to undertake engagement themselves.
4. Assistance for the members in seeking suitable jobs.
5. Securing appropriate working hours and wages for the members.
6. Improvement in working conditions and protection of the interests of all members both at sea or in port.
7. Creation of a fund for assistance to members in cases of sickness, special need, old age and unemployment.
8. Legal aid in all disputes connected with working relations.
9. Formation of adequate crews for the companies and shipping lines.
10. Extension of general and vocational education among the members.

11. Efforts to change the law on merchant shipping and similar legislation as deemed necessary to promote the interest of seamen.
12. Promotion of collaboration with the shipping companies, agents, shipping offices and port commissioners, as far as this is compatible with the dignity and self-respect of the members.
13. Struggle for a better political situation for the members by constitutional and legitimate means.
14. Regulation of relations between employers and workers.
15. Organisation of the entire body of seamen on a trade-union and cooperative basis.
16. Conclusion of association with other fraternal unions and similar organisations.
17. Membership of other workers' organisations.
18. Establishment of branches in each port, with the goal of bringing Indian seamen together into a common organisation.
19. Securing appropriate representation of Indian seamen on all questions of an economic, political and international kind that affect their interests.

Membership. Membership of the union is open to: 1) Indian seamen working on the high seas or in coastal shipping; 2) Seamen working in port on ships that take to sea, seamen on harbour boats and the like, as well as everyone whose work has anything to do with ships and shipping; 3) Female dependents or representatives of Indian seamen and other women who have a connection with shipping; 4) Persons who sympathise with the aim and the principles of the association and wish to collaborate on their promotion can be accepted as honorary members of the association. Such acceptance requires them to be sponsored by two members of the executive council at a meeting of the union.

Support. 1) Accident support. Members who have suffered an accident on board a ship in performance of their duty will be offered a certain support by the executive council. 2) Unemployment support. The executive council can offer unemployed members loans, taking into consideration their length of membership as well as contributions paid, these being repayable under conditions that the executive council establishes. 3) Help for education. The executive council can offer educational help for poor children of members, if the need of the beneficiary seems proven and is confirmed by at least two members of the executive council. 4) Family help. In so far as financial means permit, the executive council extends assistance to families in need while the union member is away at sea. This will be in the form of loans which are repayable by the member on his return. 5) Legal aid. The union will provide legal aid to any member who has a legal dispute arising from his work

situation, as far as the executive council has approved this. 6) Support in case of shipwreck. In case of shipwreck, support will be extended to the injured party, to be determined from case to case by the executive council. 7) Old age support. This will be provided as far as finance for it is available. 8) Death grant. The union will make a contribution of up to ten rupees towards burial costs, the level to be determined by the general secretary.

The union officers. The union's officers will be elected by the general members' meeting and hold their office for the period of a year, i. e. until the next general meeting. They continue in office if after a year a general meeting has not yet taken place. The union's officers consist of the following persons: one president, five vice-presidents, one general secretary, two deputy general secretaries, four secretaries, eight assistant secretaries, one secretary for outside agitation, one chief treasurer, one deputy treasurer and one auditor. The president manages the union's meetings. He has full authority in all questions of the agenda and order of business and his decisions are final. He advises the secretaries and inspects the union office. The general secretary conducts and controls the general business of the union and represents it to the outside world. He deals with important correspondence and supervises printed matter, reports and the union's property, as well as its office and its activity.

The general meeting elects the union officers as well as the members of the executive committee. It listens to and approves the annual report and accounts and has full power to expand, renew or alter the statutes. The costs of the annual general assembly are to be met as far as possible by a special contribution from the members.

The executive council consists of the union's 25 officers as well as 35 other members, to be elected in proportion to the various branches and divisions. These should in each case include two members of the branch committees. They are elected at the annual general meeting and should meet at least once per month. Members of the executive who miss these meetings without satisfactory excuse lose their position as executive member. At least 13 members must be present to make decisions. The executive council fixes the time and place of the annual general meeting. It handles all questions of support according to the preceding articles of the statutes. It deals with all disputes between members or between members and employers. It decides on acceptance into the union and has the right to approve or reject major expenditures. The establishment of local departments and offices is its responsibility, as is the appointment of undersecretaries, auxiliary staff, emissaries, etc. It is likewise entrusted with the union's propaganda work.

Union finances. At least one-fifth of the union's finances is to be kept in a reserve fund for special needs, and its expenditure may only be decided on by an extraordinary general meeting convened for this purpose. Such expenditure must be agreed by three-quarters of the members present.

Political fund. The general meeting or an extraordinary general meeting may decide to allocate part of the membership contributions to particular ends. This forms the union's political fund. Contributions to the political fund are voluntary for each member. The political fund is controlled by the executive council.

Members' rights. Every regular paying member has the right to examine the union's accounts and books. Complaints against a member or officer of the union are to be made in writing giving the allegation and the membership number.

Membership dues follow a complex formula in terms of trade, activity and service. In restaurant service for a ship's crew on the high seas, they vary between eight annas and three rupees per month, and for the deck and machine crew between four annas and two rupees. These contributions, like those of the Bombay seamen's union, are on average the highest union dues in India.

Simply from the programme and aims of the union, it is clear that its most important problem is that of engagement and hire.

Unemployment also plays a larger role than in organisations of other industries in India, as the statutes and reports of the organisation show. The seamen's union has the institution of honorary membership which is unknown in Europe. Given the great interest that even the bourgeois freedom movement takes in the young workers' organisations, on account of their significant influence on civic and political conditions, this arrangement is quite explicable and appropriate. Many unions seek for a significant extra income from voluntary donations this way, without their activity being restrained or influenced in any way. That the union's statutes do not provide definite sums for support is not attributable to any intent to give the leading body any greater freedom for decision. Rather, for purely financial reasons, definite sums cannot be fixed, given the low level

and fluctuating amount of money available and the frequency of struggles.

8. Unions of post and telegraph personnel

Still more than seamen's organisations, those of post and telegraph personnel offer a living example of what is needed in India for the development of strong organisations. A large number of workers and employees joined in these unions received some education, which is the first thing required to make enduring organisational work possible. The result of this is shown by the fact that the postal staff are organised in a higher proportion than any other group of workers in the country. To a higher degree than among seamen, organisational work among these employees is facilitated by their knowledge of English. For if most of the seamen have only a spoken knowledge of the language, the postal staff can read English, which makes it possible to distribute the same leaflets for recruitment and for promoting trade union solidarity throughout the country. Moreover, since all the workers and employees in this group have a common employer, i. e. the government, their social problems are the same across India. This industry is therefore most suited to the formation of a large, national central union extending over the whole country and it has already begun.

As early as 1906, the lower ranks consisting of messengers, runners and workers in the sorting office in Bombay took the first steps towards forming an organisation. This organisation took strike action that year and again in 1917. It then reconstituted itself into a new form that exists today, with 1,600 members and a well-run newspaper, *The Postman*, published in both English and Marathi. This is an outstanding rarity for an Indian workers' organisation. We visited this union and also saw its reading room, open to members, with numerous English and Indian books. This is, again, a facility that few Indian organisations can boast. In 1920 the union launched a

strike that lasted no less than 42 months until it was brought to a successful conclusion. In addition to regular members' dues, the union accepts voluntary contributions towards an insurance fund, which offers support in old age and for dependents of deceased. It is headed by a Parsee, Ginwalla, a provincial deputy and prominent member of the All India Trade Union Congress. Apart from the book-printers' organisation formed in 1905, this is the only Indian trade union formed before the War and still in existence. The example of junior postal workers in Bombay was followed in Madras with the formation of an association in 1919. This now counts some 4,500 members, raising monthly dues of two and four annas and maintaining 40 branches in the Presidency. The union is linked with that of Bombay and with a few smaller ones, in a federation that has its headquarters in Lahore.

The step towards a big central national organisation, however, was taken not by these organisations of junior employees but by senior personnel. In a larger number than the junior staff, they established organisations between 1918 and 1920 in almost all provinces of India, eventually coming together in 1920 to form the All India Postal Union with its dual headquarters in Calcutta and Delhi. Since this association, consisting entirely of government employees, was forbidden to join the All India Trade Union Congress, it forms, like the textile workers' union in Ahmedabad, a federation of its own. In reality, however, it is more like the central body of a trade union, maintaining relations of friendship and solidarity with the All India Trade Union Congress, just like the Ahmedabad federation does.⁵⁶ Its membership is distributed over different provinces as follows:

Table 21: Membership distribution of the All India Postal Union.⁵⁷

Name of provincial association	Date of foundation	Membership	Number of district branch associations
Bengal and Assam, Calcutta, 1920	1920	10,224	32
Bihar and Orissa, Munger	1919	3,205	37
Bombay	1920	3,764	18
Burma, Rangoon	1920	1,868	12
Central Circle, Nagpur	1919	1,012	9
Delhi	1919	300	–
Madras	1920	3,895	33
Punjab and N.W.F. Provinces, Lahore	–	2,559	45
United Provinces	–	2,300	44
Total		29,127	

There are also other organisations of senior staff in the post office, with a total of 10,000 members, which are so far only local and stand outside the major national organisation. This is the tightest, most effective and best-led trade union in India. It holds annual congresses and publishes a monthly correspondence sheet for all members. Like the organisations of junior staff, it provides support for dependents of deceased members and for special cases of need. The organisation's executive is composed of representatives from various provinces.

The example of these associations shows that the organisational capacity and strength of Indian organisations at present corresponds to the level of education and the type of workers they comprise. The real enemy of workers' organisations is therefore the government, which withholds this education from the people.

9. The railway unions

The workers of the Indian railway companies also have the advantage of knowledge of English, less so than seamen, let alone postal employees, but far more than for instance textile workers. The unions in this sector are without exception industrial unions and take the name of their respective railway. The total number of organised railwaymen in India is about 100,000. The largest unions are as follows:

Table 22: Organised railwaymen.

Company	Head office	Members
Bengal & Northwest Co.	Gorakhpur	8,000
Bengal-Nagpur Co.	Kharagpur	9,000
Bombay-Baroda Co.	Ahmedabad	5,700
East Bengal Co.	Lalmonirhat	8,500
East India Co.	Lucknow	10,500
Great Indian Peninsula Co.	Bombay	5,200
Great Indian Peninsula Co.	Bombay	950
Madras & South. Mahratta Co.	Madras	5,000
Northwestern Railway Co.	Lahore	25,000
Northwestern Railway Co.	Karachi	3,500
Northwestern Railway Co.	Sukkur	3,500
Oudh & Rohilkand Co.	Lucknow	10,000
Total	94,850	

Only some of these railway unions are affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress; the rest are combined in a separate railwaymen's federation. This federation was established in its present form in 1924 and has its office in Calcutta. A series of joint

conferences of representatives of various unions, from 1921 onwards, preceded its foundation. This federation, like the Trade Union Congress itself, is only a loose association of individual unions affiliated to it. It has the aim of gathering and distributing information, management and supervision of major negotiations, and organising solidarity and assistance for unions in a struggle situation. There is no kind of political, tactical or other opposition between the railwaymen's federation and the Trade Union Congress, and its foundation seems principally to be due to the fact that some railwaymen's organisations are also prevented by the companies or the government from joining the general Congress. The reason for this is quite evident, as with postal workers: these two main representatives of the Indian communications network could present a greater threat than any other to the continuance of imperialist rule in the country, if they acted together in a planned and deliberate way.

The railway unions have quite often been provoked to strike action by their very low pay and the humiliating treatment of Indian workers by Europeans. Many of these organisations have a history of hard-fought but successful strikes. At the time of our stay in Nagpur, in Central India, 10,000 of the Bengal-Nagpur railway company were in conflict. The company armed its European supervisory staff and attacked striking Indians with bayonet charges. This volunteer corps was led by the same company officials that the strikers had complained about and whose behaviour had triggered the strike. It was only after the government was pressed by the Swaraj opposition in the Indian Parliament, where this outrage was the occasion for a stormy debate, that these thugs were replaced by government police. In this parliamentary debate, Joshi spoke with particular passion for the cause of the strikers. He defended the leader of the railwaymen's organisation, Mr [V.V.] Giri, as a calm and moderate man, and explained that the workers on the Bengal-Nagpur line earned a mere nine rupees per month and had no security of employment. The government for its part applied

paragraph 144 of the Indian Penal Code, as it regularly does. On the basis of this paragraph all assemblies and meetings can be broken up by the military. The end of the conflict, in which the workers countered the brutal ruthlessness of the government and the railway company with the full strength of their solidarity and willingness to sacrifice, was a partial success, leading to the abolition of some of the worst evils. Whether wage increases that were also demanded have been fully or partly obtained, we cannot say at the present time.

The membership dues of the railway unions vary between one and eight annas per month and support provisions are confined in the majority of cases to strike support and help for individual members in special need, as determined from case to case. Only a few organisations have provisions in their statutes for further support. Almost all the unions publish a weekly or monthly paper, generally in the local language.

In 1926, the All India Railwaymen's Federation held its annual congress in Madras, presided by Rai Saheb Chandrika Prasad.⁵⁸ We reproduce here the most important parts of his opening address, as they cast a good light on the facts and figures we have given, as well as on the situation and problems of the Indian railwaymen and their trade unions:

Fellow Workers and Gentlemen,

Nearly five years ago I had the privilege of addressing the delegates assembled at the First All India Railwaymen's Conference at Bombay in February 1921. The unsatisfactory conditions of railway servants in India then described remain much the same, though a few changes have been made. On the whole the position of the subordinate employees is no better, while the position and emoluments of the higher officials have been unduly raised beyond all reasonable limits. The excesses allowed to higher officials act to curtail the dues of the subordinate employees, and therefore we object to the excesses. Autocracy has been tightened and the men are left to the tender mercy of those under whom they have to work. Were the superior officers sympathetic to Indian aspirations, it would not have made the matters so unsatisfactory as they are today, but almost all the high officials are non-

Indians, bent upon maintaining the supremacy of their own community; what sympathy could Indians expect from such bureaucracy?

The condition of Indians is deplorable. Wherever we go we find Indians in humiliating circumstances which force them to yield to the injustice and to content themselves with what the bureaucracy pleases to give. The prevailing unemployment in the country and the imperfect organisation of the railway employees largely contribute to their helplessness.

Unfortunately, many of our countrymen have not realised the necessity of combined bargaining. And the bureaucracy is not slack in keeping the men disunited. Those of the subordinates who are in better positions than their comrades will not muster courage to take the lead in forming a Union or even to join a Union already formed. Railway subordinates are especially wanting in this courage. Our comrades of the Post and Telegraph Department have done much better in organising their Unions. Should not the Railwaymen follow the example of this sister service?

What keeps the railwaymen from organising themselves properly? As far as I gather, the men labour under the impression that they would incur the displeasure of their superiors if they formed or joined a Union. It is difficult to drive this fear out of their minds. The higher officials advise the men to join the Staff-Councils dominated over by the superiors, where no individual can freely express his opinions. If these Councils be constituted like the Joint Industrial Councils⁵⁹ in England consisting of railway officers and elected representatives of the men, backed up by a Central Wages Board and a National Wages Board constituted of independent gentlemen, according to the English Railways Act of 1921, we should certainly welcome the Councils. In any case the men should have their Trade Unions besides the Joint Councils. In a resolution passed at the Second Conference of All India Railwaymen in 1922, we have asked the Government of India to amend the Indian Railways Act so as to embody the provisions of the English Railways Act of 1921 for the Joint Industrial Councils, the Central Wages Board and the National Wages Board. We should repeat this request now and push on the Unions of Railwaymen. The railway administrations have their own union, the Indian Railway Conference Association, and there is no valid objection to Railwaymen forming their Unions. The right of Association has been accorded to workers by the highest authorities.⁶⁰

And demanding a parliamentary representation of trade-union interests, the speech continues:

The Railwaymen have now a fair organisation of their own, with local Unions on almost all the principal railways throughout India and a central body, the All-India Railwaymen's Federation. For want of such an organisation in 1919 – 20, the Railwaymen did not get their representation on the Legislative Assembly when the present rules for the Councils were framed. [...] As the railways are under the Government of India, representation of Railwaymen should be in the Central Legislature.⁶¹

According to the most recent statistical survey (1924), the Indian railways employ a total workforce of 727,093. As far as the various provinces in which the railway companies are based, this total number breaks down as follows:

Table 23: Railway employees.

Bengal	176,411	in 5 railway companies
Bombay	177,013	in 3 railway companies
Madras	81,686	in 3 railway companies
United Provinces	60,304	in 3 railway companies
Punjab	103,093	in 1 railway company
Central Provinces	76,359	in 2 railway companies
Rajputana	8,988	in various railway companies
Burma	23,418	in 1 railway company
Assam	11,976	in 1 railway company
Total	727,093 ⁶²	

From the same report we can take some further interesting figures: out of this workforce of 727,093, 708,942 or 97.50 % are of

Indian race; 11,509 or 1.58 % are Anglo-Indian or Eurasian; 6,642 or 0.92 % are British.

While the British make up less than one per cent of the total personnel of the Indian railways, they occupy 80 per cent of the senior positions, with Indians and Eurasians making up the remaining 20 per cent. The position of Anglo-Indians is scarcely better than that of Indians, as far as rank and wages are concerned. The Indians demand an appropriate share of higher positions, as they form 99.92 per cent of the total population, the British only five per 1,000 and the Anglo-Indians three per 1,000. Despite the percentage of Indians with any education being dismally low, as we have already explained, even this small percentage of such an enormous population is several times the total number of Britons living in the country, the number of English-speaking Indians being about 2.2 million as against a total of 170,000 Britons. The Indian railwaymen therefore demand that the high positions that are presently occupied by colonial Europeans drawing exorbitant pay should cease to be given to members of the ruling caste as sinecures but awarded by competitive examination and regardless of race. They complain that not a single Indian was present at the railway administration conference.

As far back as 1870, the railway expert at the India Office in London, Sir Juland Danvers, wrote that the principal burden on the Indian railway service was the high cost of European management, and that it was necessary therefore to train Indians themselves for these posts. "These words", we read in the opening speech of the president at the railwaymen's congress in Madras, "are more essential today than they were in 1870." In November 1921, the Indian government replied to a petition from the union on this question that major changes were not envisaged in the foreseeable future, and to a further petition of 1925 that "Mechanics for specialist purposes will continue to be recruited from England".⁶³

The establishment of a commission, which the railwaymen demanded in order to investigate the ceaseless complaints of workers of all railway companies, has been rejected outright by the trade minister, and so the struggles continue. One of the most important struggles was the great strike on the Bengal-Nagpur railway in spring 1927; others have since followed. While the government refused the great mass of railwaymen, it immediately set up a commission on the demand of the senior British bureaucrats, which granted them a considerable increase in salaries, even though these have long been the highest official salaries in the world.

It was the management of this British officialdom that led to a deficit on the Indian railways between 1850 and 1924 amounting to 3,228 million rupees. This enormous sum has to be repaid to the imperialist power by Indian taxpayers, on top of their other burdens. But it is not just as taxpayers that Indians contribute so unjustly to the maintenance of the railways, the prime function of which is to deliver booty to merchants and tax collectors in port cities. If poorer classes of Indians use railways at all, they sit packed 30 – 50 together in a compartment and pay for this bare space, devoid of all amenities, about ten times what the white traveller pays for a first-class compartment fitted out in all comfort. Thus, Indian people not only bear the burden of high salaries of white railway managers; they also pay the lion's share of travel costs for the white man himself.

The foreign bureaucracy has established rigid boundaries of rank, setting an upper limit to the posts that an Indian can occupy in the railways. Above this line European privileges begin: a month's annual leave; short working time; large pensions and profit shares. Meanwhile, several hundred thousand Indian railway workers go hungry, fall to pieces and die, and are victims to the world slavery of imperialism, just like the other millions of the Indian industrial proletariat and the 200 million peasants ground down by tax collectors.

10. Other trade union organisations

In Bengal and its capital Calcutta, with its busy commerce, where many years back a considerable portion of the native population were already employed by the East India Company in banks and offices, there are today quite a large number of unions in this sector, one of these having 1,200 members, the other 2,600. Similar organisations can be found in Bombay, India's other major commercial centre. Each of these great cities also has a union for engineers and technicians, though these are both quite small.

More impressive is the Calcutta Union of Provincial and Municipal Employees, which has grown to a membership of 8,000; besides all kinds of junior staff this also includes employees in public service, typists, etc., and has already won significant improvements in working conditions from the government, the city and the province. The Union of Tramway and Transport Workers in Calcutta also shows a membership of 3,000.

Calcutta, Madras, the north-western town of Lahore in the Punjab and the university town of Pune all have unions of book printers. The first of these, stemming from the pre-War time, is of some historical interest, but even in total, these unions only count a few hundred members, book printing as such still not being very developed in India.

Bombay dock workers have a union of 1,000 members, and those in Calcutta one of 1,500.⁶⁴ In mining, as on tea plantations, it has not so far been possible for any union organisation to take root. The north-eastern frontier province of Burma, finally, has a general workers' union with 10,000 members. This includes the most varied kinds of textile, milling and transport workers.

The coal industry is of major importance and steadily growing, its production having doubled between 1911 and 1921. According to the Census Report of that year, it already employed around 182,000 workers, and this number has since grown close to a quarter of a

million. But there is still no union for coal miners. Indian coal mining is centred in four provinces: Bengal, Bihar-Orissa, the Central Provinces and the native state of Hyderabad. Out of a total of more than 200,000 miners, some 180,000 are employed in the first two provinces, Bengal and Bihar-Orissa. These two provinces, bordering each other in the north-east, form the real coal district of India.

As to the reasons for the lack of any workers' organisation in these regions, we were unable to make a visit there ourselves and had to be content with what we were told in Calcutta, as follows:

1. The European, i. e. British, mine-owners maintain an absolute rule there and, as distinct from the textile barons of big cities, are still in a position to take immediate measures against any agitation for the formation of a workers' movement, without fear of political repercussions.

2. In this, they are helped by the fact that the majority of miners are migrants from different origins speaking different languages, drawn from distant provinces, or else very poor peasants from the surrounding regions, who work only seasonally and irregularly and are thus not an element that can easily be won for union organisation.

3. A further factor is the high number of women employed, who make up more than a third of the workforce, as we have shown in the chapter on women's work and work underground as well on the surface. Then there is the employment of large numbers of children from ten to fifteen years old, who also form a considerable part of the total workforce.

The strong position of employers in the mines is already evident from the fact that the employment of children is legal here from the age of ten. Even the jute industry in Bengal is not so openly able to flout legal provisions on the employment of children, since public criticism is too strong for this in a centre of the popular movement. There they depend on the rarely visible factory inspector turning a blind eye, if not two, to the failings of the employer. It will take much

trouble and sacrifice for leaders and organisers of the Indian workers' movement to lay the foundations of a union in coal mines, where two-fifths of the workers are women and children, with the rest made up of migrants and casual workers. Fortunately, however, the development and transformations in the life of states and peoples over recent decades has greatly accelerated and a turn for the better can also happen today more quickly than before.

11. The All India Trade Union Congress

The total number of distinct trade unions in India is around 160, with a membership of some 300,000. Forty unions with between 125,000 and 150,000 members are combined very loosely in the All Indian Trade Union Congress. No fewer than 75 Indian trade unions organise workers in the central, provincial and municipal governments and many of these do not belong to the Congress for reasons we have given. Outside the Congress lie around a half of the organised railwaymen and almost all unions in the postal service. The large textile workers' organisation of Ahmedabad, by far the best union in this industry, also remains outside the Congress, as we have explained above. It should be repeatedly stressed here that there is scarcely any kind of opposition between these organisations which exist alongside each other. And even when such opposition does exist, arising from a different view of tactics or political orientation, it is conducted with the utmost reservation, always bearing in mind the general duty of union solidarity. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the courtesy with which Joshi ushered us into the great meetings that were held for our reception by unions headed by people with a different way of thinking from his own.

Apart from a part of the railwaymen, postal employees and Ahmedabad textile workers, all other major unions in the country belong to the AITUC – though the former together may well make up

a considerably larger number than the latter organisation. The AITUC embraces in particular all textile workers' organisations apart from that of Ahmedabad. Of the remaining unions we have described here, there is scarcely one that is not affiliated.

The connection, though, that the Congress maintains between individual organisations is a very loose one, at least at present. This should not be of great surprise, as Indian unions are very recent and the Congress still more so. It was formed in 1920, two years after the establishment of the first post-War union. From this we can see that under the influence of European models, the central organisation, rudimentary as it is, followed on from the first major workers' unions far more rapidly than was the case in our countries. The number of organisations joining this central authority is growing from one year to the next, as harsh practical experience drives home the advantages that the general solidarity of other unions affords to an organisation that very frequently finds itself in a conflict situation.

The Indian TUC does not have an office or headquarters of its own. In this respect alone it differs not only from such a firmly based edifice as the German General Trade Union Federation, but also from the looser model of the British TUC, which at least has an office and staff under one roof. The president and executive members of the Indian Congress live in the most far-flung regions of the country and can regularly meet only at the annual congress. The president is Chandrika Prasad, who lives in Ajmer (northern India); one of the vice-presidents is E. L. Iyer of Madras, who also heads the transport workers' union there; the other vice-president lives in Coimbatore, two of the secretaries in Calcutta, and general secretary Joshi in Bombay. The residence of the general secretary, i. e. Bombay, is the notional seat of the Congress.

The object of the Congress, according to its statutes is:

to co-ordinate the activities of all labour organisations in all provinces in India, and generally further the interests of Indian labour in matters economic, social

and political.

The AITUC's annual assemblies have been held successively in Bombay, Jharia, Lahore, Calcutta and Madras, and led by eminent personalities of Indian public life, such as Lala Lajpat Ray [sic!], Joseph Baptista and C. R. Das, the great Indian popular leader. The left Swarajist Chaman Lall, a well-known friend of the workers, has also attended all these congresses and contributed strikingly to them, as has Dr. Thengadi from Nagpur. Besides the President, Vice-Presidents and Secretaries, the leading body of the Congress is made up of representatives from the board of delegates sent from different parts of the country.

The All India Trade Union Congress is now recognised by the government as the representative body for workers' interests. Besides maintaining the connection between its component members, its activity consists in propaganda work and bringing influence to bear on the government and legislature. In times of major strikes, it takes the lead, manages solidarity actions of assistance and sometimes conducts negotiations. The Congress publishes each month a well-produced 30-page information paper, dealing with all questions of workers' movements and social legislation. This is written in English and designed therefore only for a limited circle of union leaders and officials.

The Congress is financed by annual contributions from member unions at the following rates:

Up to 1,000 members	10 Rs.
1,000 to 3,000 members	20 Rs.
3,000 to 5,000 members	30 Rs.
over 5,000 members	50 Rs.

How modest the material existence of the All India Trade Union Congress still is today is shown in Table 24.

Table 24: AITUC account of income and expenditure for the period from April 1 1925 to January 10 1926.⁶⁵

<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>		
Contributions from affiliated organisations	460	Printing costs	257.5
Interest on bank deposits	2.5	Salaries	62
		Office and writing supplies	32.3
Miscellaneous receipts (sale of Congress photographs 85.00; surplus from collections by the reception committee for the previous Congress 19.90)	104.9	Postage expenditure inland and abroad	148.3
Sale of Trade Union Directory	64.2	Telegram fees inland and abroad	93.1
From the secretary of the assistance committee for textile workers	45	Other expenses	44.3
		Cash in hand	39.1
Total	676.6	Total	676.6

The affiliated organisations must commit themselves not to act against the resolutions of the Congress.

In four large Indian provinces, Bombay, Bengal, Madras and Central Provinces, the Congress has subordinate provincial executives headed by prominent local trade union leaders. The Congress issues principles and guidelines for the politics and tactics of the Indian trade unions at its annual sessions and lays down the general principles for working-class politics. While those large organisations that remain unaffiliated to the Congress are not

explicitly committed to these principles, there is no known case in which they have ever placed themselves in deliberate and open opposition to them.

The Trade Union Congress stands in particular for the following demands of particular trade organizations.

Railwaymen continually complain of their treatment by European superiors, demand a central body for wage rulings and arbitration with authority over all the railway companies, and councils composed on a parity basis after the British system. They demand access for Indians to the higher technical and managerial posts on the railways and educational opportunities for appropriate training for these. For the workshop workers they demand monthly instead of weekly payment, with all the benefits of this type of employee status: 208 working hours per month for railwaymen, 144 working hours for office staff, with appropriate deduction for public holidays, additional pay for all hours beyond this limit, full compensation for loss of work on account of accidents suffered in service and transformation of the annual bonus from a gratuity into an entitlement.

Wage demands for unskilled railway workers: Bombay 40 rupees per month; other large towns 35 rupees per month; smaller places 30 rupees per month; inclusive of all local extras. Minimum wage for skilled workers: 60 rupees per month. Abolition of racial discrimination in payment for the same work. Recognition of unions.

Seamen. Introduction of unemployment insurance for seamen, who in India suffer chiefly from unemployment. Extension of the accident compensation legislation to seamen (who today do not fall under this law in so far as they are employed on ships registered in Great Britain).

Abolition of private recruitment against payment and introduction of a public recruitment office controlled by workers' committees on the basis of the principles elaborated by the International Labour Conference in Geneva. A legal eight-hour day for seamen in coastal trade (at the present time the working day here is 12 hours at sea,

and 16 hours in port). Decent shipboard accommodation. Rest days (especially in coastal shipping).

Textile workers. Rational organisation of mills. Abolition of maladministration in the mill. Control (limitation) of agents' profits in favour of workers' wages. Thorough state investigation of the condition of the textile industry in Bombay and other parts of India and elaboration of proposals for the rational organisation of mills.

Workers in state armaments and gunpowder factories. Monthly payment and permanent employee status for all workers with more than three years in the company. Granting of leave as for workers on the railways and payment of public holidays. Provision of support in old age.

Bengal jute workers. Abolition of the system of engagement by bribing of foremen and introduction of proper hiring practices. Support of the workers during the two days per week not worked because of the speculative restriction of production by the proprietors of the monopolised jute industry in Bengal. Adequate housing provision for the many workers who are presently forced to sleep outdoors.

Press and book printing workers. Abolition of the harassing piecework system in government print works. Change in the draconian laws that make printers punishable and responsible for all banned utterances in the newspapers, books or leaflets that they print. Increase in wages for workers in the Madras printing shops from 30 rupees to 55 rupees per month for unskilled workers, from 10 rupees to 20 rupees per month for women, from 40 rupees to 75 rupees per month for skilled workers, from 75 rupees to 125 rupees per month for foremen, and corresponding increases in other provinces. Provision of annual bonuses for several years' service in government print works.

Provision of leave and payment for sick days. An end to the harassment of workers visiting the toilets.

Post and telegraph workers. Fulfilment of the minimum demands of the post and telegraph workers' union made in March to the Indian government.

The Strikes of 1925

The All India Trade Union Congress reported on three strikes conducted by affiliated organisations in the year 1925. The first of these was by the workers of the Northwest Railway Company, in which 20,000 workers took part. This lasted from April 10 1925 to the end of June, and sadly ended in defeat. Assistance of some 6,800 [c. 4,500 Rs.] marks provided by the British TUC only arrived after the strike was over, so was subsequently spent on the great textile workers' strike. Another great strike, also with 20,000 participants, took place at the same time in Burma but again failed for lack of money, despite skilful and cautious leadership and great discipline of those involved. But these losses were easily offset by the great victory of the three-month struggle of 150,000 Bombay textile workers at the year's end. It was not just the textile workers' organisations, but the whole Trade Union Congress that immediately took up the cause of textile workers, who despite a weak organisational and financial basis showed admirable energy and ability. The propaganda effect of this strike deserves the respect of unions in Europe.

Political representation of the Indian working class

The reforms made in the Government of India Act of 1919 give working people very modest representation on the provincial legislative bodies. This consists of members being appointed by the government in a number of provinces and it is expressly provided for by the Act. For the central Parliament, however, it is up to the government to appoint one or more workers' representatives. Up till now, the government has only nominated one workers'

representative, Joshi. Provincial representatives have been appointed under the Act in the following districts: one for Assam; one for Bihar-Orissa; two for Bengal; one for Bombay (paragraph 72a of the Government of India Act). What is remarkable here is that for the plantation district of Assam, where the Act provides for the nomination of a workers' representative, the government actually appointed a European employer, a plantation slave-owner to officially represent workers. To European minds this might be of a cultural curiosity; but in Indian conditions it is very characteristic of the blessings of British rule!

The census provisions exclude the working class almost completely from suffrage, whereas the British traders, industrial and plantation-owners' associations have parliamentary representation by direct nomination. The demands of the Trade Union Congress in respect to political representation are: 1) Increase in the number of representatives of the working class in the central and provincial legislative bodies. 2) Until the establishment of universal suffrage, regular representation of the workforce through its organizations by district or constituency in the same way as the employers have now. 3) Eventual abolition of the system of nomination and its replacement by universal suffrage.

As to the position of the trade unions towards politics, the Congress president expressed himself as follows:

It is a well-known fact that labour is exercising great control over the administration of their respective countries in the world and only a year ago, the British Labour Party was in office and I can safely prophesy [sic.] it will take the reins of the administration soon again. Surely Indian labour is equally entitled to take its due share in getting political emancipation for its country. To achieve this object[ive] it would be most desirable and politic at the same time that the workers of the country should take lively interest in the matter of politics so far as their own matters are concerned and with this end in view the formation of a Labour Party within the Trade Union Congress appears to be a judicious course.⁶⁶

The connections of the All India Trade Union Congress to workers' organizations of continental Europe are currently limited to occasional correspondence and collaboration with the Geneva conferences of the International Labour Office and with workers' leaders of these countries and to occasional visits of Indian delegates to Germany, France, etc. Corresponding to the country's situation, trade union connections extend first of all to other Asian and colonial countries and to the British trade unions.

Representatives of the Indian Trade Union Congress, Joshi and Chaman Lall, took part with the British unions at the labour conference for the British Empire that was held in London in July 1925. Among other questions discussed, there was the very important one of emigration within the dominions, as well as the special point of the condition of Indian workers in the British colonies. The conference declared in a resolution that it supported the immediate granting of self-government to India. The Indian unions also maintain very close relations with the equally young workers' organizations of South Africa, where many tens of thousands of Indians work today and are significantly represented as members and leaders of the unions there.

Connections of the Indian trade unions with those of more remote lands such as China, Japan and Java are still embryonic. By correspondence and speeches, leaders of the Indian unions have already made contact with leaders of organizations in all these countries and most recently a kind of pan-Asiatic trade union federation is being planned. The unions of Europe would do well to pay great and unprejudiced attention to these efforts and wish them well. Whatever the feeling among European trade union circles to the formation of an expressly Oriental trade union international, it is certain that the unions of these countries will confront numerous comparable problems that are quite different from those in our industrialised and parliamentary political West; and it follows that trade unions of the East need and are entitled to our mutual

sympathy and collaboration, in the form of both regular conferences and organised information service. Based on the knowledge we gathered during our visit, we can rule out that such common work would bring them into any kind of opposition to the trade union international of the West. We rather believe that the trade unions of the Far East would much appreciate and value the need for collaboration with organisations of the West, more than might generally be realised in Europe. The organisations in the west are so much older and richer in experience and material strength. It only remains to be hoped that we in Europe will always bear in mind how urgently necessary it is to follow the advances of the workers' movement in every country, as the struggles they wage will always have an effect on us as well; to the degree that European capital is shifting its production increasingly to Eastern countries, hoping to be able for the foreseeable future to exploit a helpless proletarian mass to the detriment of the industrial workforce of its own homelands.

Statutes of the All Indian Trade Union Congress⁶⁷

1. *Name.* The name of the organisation shall be the All India Trade Union Congress.

2. *Object.* The object of the Congress shall be to co-ordinate the activities of all the labour organisations in all provinces in India, and generally further the interests of Indian labour in matters economic, social and political. It may also co-operate and federate with organisations of labour having similar objects in any part of the world.

3. *Constituents.* The All India Trade Union Congress shall consist of the delegates of the affiliated labour unions in India, President, one or more Vice-Presidents, one or more General Secretaries, one or more Secretaries [and one or more Assistant Secretaries], the Treasurer, the members of the Executive Council [and such other officers as the Trade Union Congress thinks it necessary to appoint from time to time].

4. *Affiliation.* Every organisation of labour [under whatever name it may be known], shall be entitled to be affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress by the Executive Council on the following conditions:

(1) That the Union seeking affiliation shall agree to pay the All India Trade Union Congress an annual contribution on the following basis:

Rs. 10 for unions having a number of members up to 1,000;

Rs. 20 for unions having a number of members between 1,000 and 3,000;

Rs 30 for unions having a number of members between 3,000 and 5,000;

Rs. 50 for unions having a number of members above 5,000.

(2) That the union seeking affiliation shall agree to pay to the All India Trade Union Congress the amount of a special levy of a contribution approved of by a majority of two-thirds of the members of the Executive Council in the same proportion as (a).

(3) That the Union seeking affiliation shall agree not to act in any manner prejudicial to the collective interest of the All India Trade Union Congress.

(4) That the application for affiliations shall be forwarded through the Provincial Committee to the General Secretary, with the decisions arrived at by it; that no application for affiliation shall be withheld by the Provincial Committee.

(5) That no Union shall be affiliated to the Congress without being first affiliated to the Provincial Committee. That no Union shall be affiliated which has not been in existence at least for one year and has not had its accounts and statement of paying members audited by a qualified auditor or an authorised representative of the All India Trade Union Congress.

5. *Responsibility for Administration.* The affairs of the All India Trade Union Congress when not in session shall be regulated and administered by the Executive Council which shall not act in any manner inconsistent with resolutions of the All India Trade Union Congress.

6. *Annual Session.* The All India Trade Union Congress shall meet once every year at such place and time as may be fixed at the previous session and, when not so fixed, at any place fixed by the Executive Council and at such time as may be fixed by [the Reception Committee in consultation with and subject to the approval of] the Executive Council.

7. *Special Session.* The Executive Council shall have power to call a special session of the Congress besides the ordinary annual session whenever it deems necessary.

8. *Delegates.* Each affiliated Union shall be represented at any session of the Congress on the following basis:

5 delegates for unions with a membership up to 1,000;

10 delegates for unions with a membership between 1,000 and 3,000;

15 delegates for unions with a membership between 3,000 and 5,000;

20 delegates for unions with a membership above 5,000.

9. *Registration.* The affiliated unions shall send the names and addresses of their delegates to the Secretary of the Reception Committee at least a fortnight before the date of the meeting of the Congress.

10. *Business at the Annual Session.* The annual session of the Congress shall, on the recommendation of the Executive Council, elect the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman (or Vice-Chairmen) of the Executive Council, the Treasurer, the General Secretary or Secretaries, the Secretary or Secretaries, the Assistant Secretary or Secretaries, the Auditor and not more than ten additional members of the Executive Council shall receive, discuss and adopt the annual report and audited statement of accounts and may pass such resolutions as are placed on the agenda.

11. *President and Ex-Officio Delegates.* The Chairman of the Executive Council of the past year shall be the President and the Vice-Chairmen shall be the Vice-Presidents of the Congress. The General Secretary or General Secretaries, the Secretary or Secretaries, the Assistant Secretary or

Secretaries, the Treasurer and all ex-Presidents of the Congress shall be *ex-officio* delegates of the Congress.

12. *Resolutions and Agenda.* Any affiliated Union has the right to send to the Reception Committee not more than five resolutions and the Reception Committee shall place these resolutions before the Executive Council which may place all or any of such resolutions on the agenda [The Executive Council may place on the agenda any resolution not sent by the unions. The Executive Council shall decide the order in which resolutions shall be placed on the agenda].

13. *Amendments.* Any delegate shall have the right to duly move an amendment to the resolutions and have it seconded.

14. *Discussion.* A delegate shall be allowed to speak only once on any proposition except the mover who shall have the right of reply.

15. *Closure.* Should the President of the Congress consider that there is no practical difference of opinion among the delegates, he shall have power to stop further discussion and submit the proposition to the vote of the Congress. The President shall have power to accept or refuse a motion for closure if he thinks the matter has not been sufficiently discussed.

16. *Voting.* On a motion being put to the Congress, the President shall call for a show of hands in favour of and against the motion and declare the result. But if any delegate challenges a division, the voting shall be by unions, each union casting as many votes as the number of delegates it is entitled to send.

17. *Reception Committee.* [(a)] The Provincial Committee for the province in which the Congress is to be held shall take steps to form a Reception Committee at the place where the session of the Congress is to be held for the purpose of making arrangements for the holding of the Congress. The Reception Committee shall collect a special fund to meet the expenses required for its work. [(b)] Out of the surplus money in the hands of the Reception Committee, 50 per cent shall be handed over to the Executive Council for the general purposes and 50 per cent to the provincial labour organisation.

18. *Executive Council.* The Executive Council of the Congress shall consist of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman or Vice-Chairmen, the Treasurer, the

General Secretary or General Secretaries, the Secretary or Secretaries and the Assistant Secretary or Secretaries as *ex-officio* members and not more than ten additional members [including the ex-Presidents of the All India Trade Union Congress], elected at the annual session of the Congress and the representatives elected by the affiliated unions on the following basis:

- 1 Representative for unions with a membership up to 1,000;
- 2 Representatives for unions with a membership between 1,000 and 3,000;
- 3 Representatives for unions with a membership between 3,000 and 5,000;
- 4 Representatives for unions with a membership above 5,000.

19. *Plenipotentiary Power.* The Executive Council shall have the power to act on behalf of the Congress in so far as its acts are not inconsistent with the resolutions of the Congress.

20. *Sessions.* The Executive Council shall meet ordinarily at least once every six months at such place and time as the Chairman in consultation with the General Secretary or General Secretaries may decide.

21. *Immediate Action.* When a meeting of the Executive Council cannot be held, the General Secretary or General Secretaries with the permission of the Chairman may circulate to the members of the Executive Council for opinion on such matters as require immediate action and the opinion of the majority of the members shall have the same force as if they were passed at a meeting of the Executive Council.

22. *Notice.* A clear fortnight's notice is necessary for all meetings of the Executive Council.

23. *Special Meeting.* A special meeting of the Executive Council shall be called within one month on written requisition by ten members stating the business for which the meeting is convened or by the Chairman in consultation with the General Secretary or General Secretaries for any urgent business.

24. *Quorum.* The quorum at ordinary meetings of the Executive Council shall be 11 and at special meetings 21.

[24 A] A meeting of the Executive Council adjourned for want of a quorum may be held after a fortnight's notice whose decision shall be valid even though there be no quorum.

25. *Vacancies.* Should the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman [or Vice-Chairmen], the Treasurer or the General Secretary [or General Secretaries], the Secretary [or Secretaries], the Assistant Secretary [or Secretaries] resign or should a vacancy occur otherwise before the end of the period, the Executive Council shall fill the vacancies till the next meeting of the Congress.

26. *Provincial Committee.* In every province there shall be a Provincial Committee of the All India Trade Union Congress consisting of the representatives of affiliated unions or branches of affiliated unions having their quarters in the province, elected on the same basis as the representatives on the Executive Council. "The Provincial Committee shall elect a Provincial Secretary."

27. "*Statutes.*" Every Provincial Committee shall frame its own rules, but they must be approved by the Executive Council.

28. "*Tasks.*" The Provincial Committees shall take all necessary steps to further the cause of labour in their respective provinces under the guidance of the Executive Council.

29. *Autonomy for Unions.* The All India Trade Union Congress recognises the right of each affiliated union to manage its own affairs according to its rules.

30. "*Support.*" No affiliated Union shall be entitled for any support from the All India Trade Union Congress during any strike for which the approval of the Executive Council was not previously obtained.

12. The local trade union federations of Bombay and Bengal

If the All India Trade Union Congress shows the modest beginnings of a national organisation, and in its provincial boards we can recognise a kind of parallel with our trade union district executives, the two largest industrial cities of Bombay and Calcutta also boast a local grouping of their respective workers' organisations. These however are not subordinate bodies of the Congress but are constituted independently of this. In Calcutta, this local board reaches beyond the limits of the city, and theoretically at least, embraces the organisations of the entire Bengal province. In reality, however, it is like its counterpart in Bombay, a local focus for the city's unions. These boards provide a way of representing common interests of the workforce in all trades, especially to the city government and council. It scarcely needs to be said that these groupings are extremely loose, still more so than those of the national organisation. They occasionally play a mediating role in disputes of competence between two organisations in the same town. Educational and training work is also seen as part of their tasks.

The local federation in Bombay, known as the Central Labour Board, is not a logical organisational subdivision of the Trade Union Congress.⁶⁸ The local subsections of the latter are for their part called Provincial Committees of the All India Trade Union Congress. The Congress does not have any more local instances than this. The local grouping under the name of the Central Labour Board is a federation of unions that exist in that city and which without opposing the district organisation of the trade union federation perform their own tasks. These extend to the area of welfare and education, something that the provincial branches of the Trade Union Congress cannot carry out.⁶⁹ When the Trade Union Congress was held in Bombay, however, the local federation took on the whole function of the so-called reception and preparation committee. This federation is headed by two Parsees, Ginwalla and Jhabwalla, both calm

academics, who play a prominent role in local politics and in the workers' movement.⁷⁰

One of the activities of the Central Labour Board consists in the production and the distribution of leaflets for those few workers in the textile mills who can read. This serves to explain to the workforce ideas and decisions of the organisation's leadership. The written communication to the few literates and the oral distribution of its content by these to their fellow workers is the only possible regular method of contact, apart from mass meetings, that the organisation's leaders have with workers in the big mills. This is how strikes are called, but also how strikes are warned against, if the workers are in a heated mood and about to take action at an unsuitable time – for example, immediately countering misunderstandings in the plant or in departments, or an injustice committed against particular workers, with a spontaneous stoppage of work that endangers the movement.

The local federation saw its immediate task as organising numerous Indians employed as messengers by the postal service, government offices and private firms. It conducts a comprehensive activity in the area of municipal politics, in particular pursuing the building of housing, water supply, hygienic establishments, public transport, etc. Its leaders are well-known members of the city council. Just as interesting, characteristic and useful is the work of education and street propaganda pursued by the federation. It organises for this purpose street parades, sometimes with music, which naturally attract the attention of the whole mass of people in the working-class quarters. These quite noisy parades with drums, bells and musical instruments then distribute leaflets among the thronging masses, either with trade union propaganda or with a generally instructive content. Anyone going for a stroll in the densely populated proletarian quarters of Bombay on a Sunday will immediately come across demonstrations of this kind.

Recipients of leaflets or other writings, mostly curious children pressing forward, immediately seek out people whom they know can

read, who then read them aloud to their family or neighbours, generally on the open street. Like chicks for whom the hen has found a mouthful, the illiterates then gather round the readers and sit down on the ground in a circle. They thus learn about the prospects or dangers of a strike, as well as receiving something of the classical texts of traditional Indian culture, which are likewise distributed by these propaganda processions. To the European stranger in the country, it seems as if things must have been something like this at the time of the Peasant Wars of the middle ages.⁷¹ Besides this activity, the local federation also undertakes the preparation of requests and demands for individual workers to present to employers or authorities, mostly for free. Special street processions are also organised like the propaganda processions, with the object of combating alcoholism. A further method of providing support, especially to the “untouchable” caste, are the federation’s appeals to middle-class people to leave their old clothes at the federation’s office to be distributed among “pariahs”, the poorest section of the Indian proletariat. These appeals are reportedly successful and many individuals supplement them with financial donations.

In addition to the proletariat, India has, as we have recounted elsewhere, a numerous intellectual proletariat. This is quite unfamiliar to us and is made up of bank employees, lawyers, teachers, etc. These suffer particularly from unemployment and the federation has therefore established an employment office for them. The report immediately shows how heart-rending the situation of these people is, when it notes that they often go for months and even years without any regular earnings.

The income of the local federation comes neither from affiliated unions nor from the All India Congress, but rather from donations either from particular workers’ organisations or from private better-off people. In this way, the federation collected a sum of 2,858 rupees in 1924 – 25 and spent this on the objects described above.

Notes

- 2 The above citation has been translated from the German version that Furtwängler and Schrader published in their volume.
- 3 In the following, we have translated the entire table of contents of the comprehensive report by Furtwängler and Schrader. The sections that have been translated and published in this volume have been marked in *italics*.
- 4 The above citation has been translated from the German version that Furtwängler and Schrader published in their volume.
- 5 ON THE FIGURES IN INDIAN RUPEES: IN THE FOLLOWING TABLES ON THE COSTS OF LIVING IN INDIA, WE CALCULATED THE EXCHANGE RATE AT 1,53 MARK PER INDIAN RUPEE. THIS IS ONE OF THE HIGHEST AVAILABLE RATES. DURING OUR STAY, HOWEVER, THE EXCHANGE RATE FOR THE INDIAN RUPEE WAS CONSISTENTLY AT 1,47 MARK. IN A ROUGH CALCULATION, THEN, THE EXCHANGE RATE CAN ALSO BE ASSUMED TO BE 1,5 MARK PER INDIAN RUPEE. IN THE FOLLOWING DATA ON WAGES, WE USED THIS ROUGH EXCHANGE RATE. THE RUPEE CONSISTS OF 16 ANNAS, AND 1 ANNA IS A LITTLE LESS THAN 10 PFENNIG. FOR CONVENIENCE, WE HAVE SET 1 ANNA AT A RATE OF 10 PFENNIG WHEN GIVING THE WAGE RATES OF DAY LABOURERS. MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE EXCHANGE RATE — THAT IS ALWAYS FLUCTUATING, AND HAS LITTLE VALUE FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMPARISONS — IS THE PURCHASING POWER OF INDIAN MONEY. THIS IS BASED ON THE BASIC EXPENSES OF HOUSEHOLDS, THAT ARE GIVEN IN OUR REPORT.
- 6 Furtwängler and Schrader give no information on the two groups of machinists that are listed for the carding department. Given the different wage rates, it is possible that the first entry refers to 'machinists' and the second entry refers to 'master machinists'.

- 7 That is, the strike which started in the Kharagpur Workshops on February 11 1927, after an official of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Union's Kharagpur branch had been victimised by the railway authorities. The strike spread to Nagpur and to sections of the Traffic and the Loco staffs at Midnapore, Adra, Amda, Tatanagar, Shalimar and a few smaller stations. It came to an end on March 10. *Labour Gazette*[b], VII, 4 (December 1927), 338 – 339.
- 8 Cecil John l'Estrange Malone, *New China* (London: Independent Labour Party Publication Department, 1927). Furtwängler translated the second part of Malone's *New China* into German and replaced the first part with his own introduction: Cecil l'Estrange Malone, *Das neue China und seine sozialen Kämpfe*. Übersetzung und historisch-politische Einleitung von Franz Josef Furtwängler (Berlin: ADGB, 1928). On Malone's colourful biography see David E. Martin and John Saville, 'Malone, Cecile John l'Estrange (1890 – 1965)', *Dictionary of Labour Biography* 7 (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 159 – 165.
- 9 Here follows a long digression on the school system in Baroda, a "great work of progress in education". The education system in Baroda already impressed the British Labour MP Keir Hardie when he visited India in 1907: "In Baroda reforms have been and are being enacted which destroy the whole thesis upon which British rule in India is supposed to be based. Take, for example, the caste system. In the State of Baroda education is free and compulsory, and applies to every caste and creed." See Keir Hardie, *India. Impressions and Suggestions* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), 81.
- 10 German family of steel and arms manufacturers who managed the company of the same name until 1945. The founder of the group was Alfred Krupp (1812 – 1887).

- 11 JOHNSTON AND SIME REPORT FROM THE BENGAL JUTE INDUSTRY BRIBES THAT ARE MONSTROUSLY HIGHER THAN THIS, AND EVEN REGULAR “TIPS” THAT ARE PAID TO THE OVERSEER EVERY TIME WAGES ARE PAID. THEY ALSO REPORT THAT THE EMPLOYERS ENCOURAGE THESE OVERSEERS IN RAISING THE SUMS THEY DEMAND, AND REPORT THAT ONE FOREMAN HAD MANAGED OVER TWENTY YEARS TO ACCUMULATE A SUM OF 200,000 RUPEES IN THIS WAY. “SUPERVISORS” OF THIS KIND ARE NATURALLY OF PRICELESS VALUE TO THE ENGLISH JUTE INDUSTRIALISTS, ESPECIALLY AS THEY COST NOTHING EXCEPT A PALTRY WEEKLY WAGE.
- 12 Émile Zola (1840 – 1920) was a naturalist writer, well-known for his portrayal of poverty and social disruption in the Second French Republic.
- 13 The authors refer to the Sholapur Spinning and Weaving Mill. Shaw gives a lengthy description of the social welfare provisions at this company. These provisions included schools not only for some of “the boys and girls who work as half-timers”, but also for “the other children of the workers employed at the mills.” There was a library and reading room, free medical treatment, three creches, a kindergarten school, a restaurant, a savings bank, a dramatic club, a technical school, three blocks of *chawls*, and an Amelioration Fund. These descriptions overlap with the article “Sholapur Mill Welfare Activities”, *Labour Gazette*[c] (Bombay), IV, 10 (June 1925), 1050 – 1053. The owner of the Sholapur Spinning and Weaving Mill was Seth Narottam Morarji, a descendant of Narottam Morarji Gokuldas who founded the factory in 1876. The members of the delegation do not mention that the other side of Morarji’s paternalist benevolence was a repressive attitude towards protesting workers. In 1920 and 1922, general strikes in the company took place and were vigorously suppressed. See Manjiri N. Kamat, “The War Years and the

- Sholapur Cotton Textile Industry”, *Social Scientist* 26, no.11 – 12 (November-December 1998): 67 – 82.
- 14** The Social Service League, founded in 1911, was an organisation of Indian liberals for “uplifting” the poor through education, the teaching of hygiene and the advocacy of thrift.
- 15** This is roughly 225 million Indian Rupees.
- 16** This offers an analysis of the multiple shift system. Amal Das, *Urban Politics in an Industrial Area. Aspects of Municipal and Labour Politics in Howrah, West Bengal, 1850 – 1928* (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1998), 107 – 110; Anna Sailer, *Workplace Matters* (2015), in particular chapters 2 and 3.
- 17** Dagmar F. Curjel, “Women Labour in Bengal Industries”, *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour*, no. 31 (Calcutta 1923): 26; Das, *Urban Politics*, 126.
- 18** This part of the German text is not included in this translation because it contains too little new information for Indian readers. The full text of the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926 is printed in *Labour Gazette*[d] (Bombay), V, 6 (February 1926), 565 – 574.
- 19** R.R. Bakhale (ed.), *The Directory of Trade Union* (Bombay: Servants of India Society, 1925), iii. Bakhale published this text in his capacity as the Assistant Secretary of the AITUC.
- 20** Report of the Trades Union Congress in Madras, 1926.
- 21** George Findlay Shirras, *Report on an Enquiry into Working Class Budgets in Bombay* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1923). As director of the Bombay Labour Office, Shirras (1885-?) also published *Report on an Enquiry into the Wages and Hours of Labour in the Cotton Mill Industry* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1923), and *Report on an Enquiry into Agricultural Wages in the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1924).

- 22** The authors are referring to the *Report of the Commission Appointed to Consider the Working of the Factories in the Bombay Presidency*, Bombay, 1888.
- 23** Simplicissimus: reference to Simplicius Simplicissimus, the protagonist of the novel *Der abentheuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (1669) by H. J. Chr. von Grimmelshausen.
- 24** Jean Antoine (Abbé) Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1817), 35. It is unclear why the authors date Dubois's report "140 years ago". The French, revised, edition was published in 1825.
- 25** N.M. Joshi was Workers' Delegate in 1921 at the third session of the International Labour Conference, where he was accompanied by B.P. Wadia, who acted as his adviser. Both were also at the fourth session of the International Labour Conference in 1922. At the seventh session in 1925, Joshi travelled with Chaman Lal as adviser. Also see Appendix.
- 26** The objects of the Bombay Textile Labour Union are quoted here according to Arno S. Pearse, *The Cotton Industry of India being the Report of the Journey to India* (Manchester: International Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Associations, 1930), 62 – 63. Pearse mentions two additional aims: (1) To try to prevent any reduction of wages, and, if possible, to obtain an advance whenever circumstances allow; (2) Generally to take such other steps as may be necessary to ameliorate the social, educational, economic, civic and political condition of the members.
- 27** The Girni Kamgar Mahamandal, founded in December 1923.
- 28** Sir David Petrie, the then Director of the Government of India's Intelligence Bureau reported: "For the help of the strikers the following sums were received from foreign

countries: (1) Rs. 6,472/10/0 from the British Trades Union Congress, London; (2) Rs. 17,591/5/4 from the International Federation of Trade Unions, Amsterdam; (3) Rs. 6,049 from the International Federation of Textile Workers' Associations, London. Besides this, the Moscow Textile Workers' Union sent Rs. 13,832 through Mr. Saklatvala to N.M. Joshi, Secretary, AITUC." Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India. History of Emergence and Movement, 1830 – 1990*. Second revised edition (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1997), 190.

- 29** The Textile Labour Association (*Majoor Mahajan Sangh* [MMS]), established February 25 1920.
- 30** The quote is according to "Trade Unions in the Bombay Presidency", *Labour Gazette* (Bombay), IV, 7 (March 1925), 739. The authors seem to have been unaware that the Textile Labour Association did not introduce complaint books until 1924 – 25. This was part of a reorientation of the organisation, after its membership had fallen sharply as a result of the strike of 1923, which ended in defeat. An analysis is offered in Sujata Patel, *The Making of Industrial Relations. The Ahmedabad Textile Industry 1918 – 1939* (Delhi [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1987), chapters III and IV.
- 31** Anusuya Sarabhai (?-1972), sister of the owner of Ahmedabad's Calico and Jubilee Mills, Ambalal Sarabhai (1890 – 1967).
- 32** *Presidential Address by V.[a]V. Giri Barrister-at-Law at the Sixth Session of The All India Trade Union Congress[b] held at Madras, on the 9th & 10th January, 1926*, 13 – 14.
- 33** The Madras Labour Union was founded on April 26 1918 by the Theosophist Bahman Pestonji Wadia (1881 – 1958), after he had been approached by G. Ramanajulu Naidu and G. Chelvapathi Chetti, who had drawn his attention to "the

sufferings of the workers” at “the Buckingham & Carnatic Mills of which I had heard vaguely but of which I knew nothing”. See B.P. Wadia, *Labour in Madras* (Madras: Ganesan & Co., 1921), 14 – 15; Eamon Murphy, “Labour Leadership and Politics in India: Profiles of Three South Indian Unionists”, *South Asia*, New Series 4, no. 2 (December 1981), 79 – 93, at 80 – 85. Murphy gives a detailed description of the past history of the Madras Labour Union.

- 34** According to Lakshmanan, the suit was not only directed against Wadia, but also against nine other members of the lockout committee. The owners of Buckingham and Carnatic Mills demanded Rs. 75,000 and permanent injunction. In the absence of a Trade Union Act, Wadia and his supporters were found guilty by the Madras High Court of conspiracy to induce workers to break their contract on the basis of the Indian Penal Code 1913. See M. Lakshmanan, “Industrial Conflict in Madras, 1918 – 1920”, *Indian Historical Review* 22, no. 1 – 2 (July 1995-January 1996): 126 – 156, at 146; A.R. Desai (ed.), *Labour Movement in India. Documents 1918 – 1920* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, and Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1988), 294.
- 35** Benegal Shiva Rao (1891 – 1975), journalist and trade-union leader, actively supported the Home Rule League and published *The Industrial Workers in India* (London: G. Allen and Unwin Limited, 1939).
- 36** The Kankinara Labour Union was established in 1923. It was a moderate organisation promoting arbitration, legal methods and negotiation. Its leaders were K.C. Roy Choudhury and Latafat Hossain.
- 37** Saumyendranath Tagore (1901 – 1974) was elected secretary of the Peasants’ and Workers’ Party, Bengal, at

its second conference held in Calcutta on February 19 – 20 1927. He left for Germany in April or May 1927.

38 The Kanpur Mazdur Sabha. The initiation of the KMS is traced in trade unionist accounts to the initiative of Kamdatt, an ex-worker from Elgin Mills and an Arya Samaj *updeshak* (preacher) at the local Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. Closely associated with Kamdatt in this effort was Lala Devidayal, also an Arya Samajist and worker in Elgin Mills. The KMS was formally registered in July 1920 with Murari Lal as President, Kamdatt and N.P. Nigam as vice-presidents, Wahid Yar Khan as secretary and G.S. Vidyarthi and Abdul Karim as joint secretaries. The executive committee of the KMS consisted of two representatives from each mill. These were elected at meetings held at mill gates. The KMS constitution of the 1920s was explicit that the main aim of the *Sabha* was the promotion of goodwill between labourers and employers and the maintenance of industrial peace through a relationship of harmony. The *Sabha* constitution tried to ensure that workers acted only with its sanction. The KMS leadership also proposed the setting up of an arbitration board, with representatives of employers and workers to settle disputes. Such a board, they argued, would eliminate the need for strikes and prevent harm to industry. Cf. Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds. Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 185, 188, and 203.

39 The authors are probably referring to Ramzan Ali.

40 Elsewhere, the authors characterize R.S. Ruikar as a workers' leader, who is well acquainted with the sociology of the Indian factory proletariat. Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*, 437.

41 At the eighth session of the AITUC in November 1927 the Coimbatore Labour Union claimed 1,500 members.

- 42 A. Rangaswami Iyengar (1877 – 1934), lawyer and journalist, actively involved in the Home Rule League agitation. Co-founder of the Swarajya party in South India. Elected to the Central Legislature in 1924.
- 43 Pulgaon Mills Labour Union. At the eighth session of the AITUC in November 1927 it claimed 300 members.
- 44 That is a reference to the Jamshedpur Labour Association (JLA). On February 24 1920, there was a lightning strike led by TISCO's foundry workers. Emboldened by the nationalist upsurge and a railway strike in Kharagpur, the strikers approached Byomkesh Chakravarty and Surendranath Haldar of Calcutta, who helped found the Jamshedpur Labour Association. The agreement they brokered was repudiated by the workers, who demanded accident compensation, better treatment of subordinates, a service code and strike pay. Government officials were active mediators. On March 13, workers attended pickets armed with sticks. Clashes and firing two days later resulted in five deaths and 23 injuries, amidst slogans such as "Death to the *sahibs*". The settlement announced by Sir Dorabji Tata on March 20 conceded wage increases and leave, but refused strike-pay, fixed pay-scales and recognition of the JLA. Dilip Simeon, *The Politics of Labour under Late Colonialism. Workers, Unions and the State in Chota Nagpur 1928 – 1939* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 38.
- 45 THE TATA WORKS ARE FLOURISHING TODAY DUE TO THE BUSY ARMS INDUSTRY. THE COMPANY DELIVERS MATERIALS TO THE HASTILY CONDUCTED CONSTRUCTION OF STRATEGIC RAILWAY-LINES TO THE NORTH-WESTERN AND THE NORTH-EASTERN BOARDERS, AS WELL AS FOR THE FLEET STATION OF SINGAPUR. THE TATA WORKS ARE ALSO INVOLVED IN

THE PRODUCTION OF AERIAL BOMBS AND
MUNITIONS OF ANY KIND.

- 46** Gurudut Sethi worked at the Electrical Department. He was adviser to the Workers' Delegate (that is V.V. Giri) at the tenth session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, May 25 to June 16 1927, and visited the congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions in Paris, August 1 – 6 1927, as a fraternal delegate of the non-affiliated AITUC. See *Report of Proceedings at the Fourth Ordinary Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions[a] Held at the "Grand Palais", Paris, from August 1 – 6 1927* (Amsterdam: IFTU, 1927), 95.
- 47** This is a reference to the Indian Seamen's Union, Bombay branch. The Union was an amalgamation in 1921 of the Asiatic Seamen's Union and the Portuguese Seafarers' Union, both founded in 1919.
- 48** Chitta Ranjan Das (1870 – 1925), barrister, prominent nationalist and first elected mayor of Calcutta (1924).
- 49** According to V.V. Giri, the Calcutta Sea Men's Labour Union was founded in 1918. "The Union has been formed for the purpose of improving the general conditions of sea-men in obtaining direct employment for them, safe-guarding their interests and giving legitimate help during unemployment, accident and sickness. The main item of activity of the Union which it successfully followed up to its legitimate end is the abolition of the system of recruitment through brokers and "ghat serangs". In addition, it has secured additional wages, adequate pension, bonuses and compensation for the families of Indian sea-men. After five years of strenuous work it forced the hands of the Government to establish a recruitment bureau to facilitate recruitment of Indian Sea-men of Calcutta port. In 1922, a Committee was appointed by the Government after a good deal of agitation on the part

of the Union, to inquire into the present methods of recruitment of Sea-men in different parts of India and Mr. M[ohammad] Daud M.L.C., its energetic General Secretary, was selected as one of the members of the Committee.”

See Presidential Address by V.V. Giri Barrister-at-Law at the Sixth Session of The All India Trade Union Congress held at Madras, on the 9th & 10th January, 1926, 9.

50

The Legislative Assembly Debates (Official Report), Vol. III, Part I, 5th September 1922. Third Session of the Legislative Assembly, 1922, Shimla-September, Government Central Province, 1922, 570 – 71. Innes distinguished three groups of Lascar seamen who were killed or died owing to hostile action during the war: “Firstly, lascars on British ships who were either killed by hostile action, or died of influenza owing to their employment as a war emergency in northern latitudes (in which they are not normally employed) or died during internment in enemy countries. Pensions are being regularly paid to the dependents on scales framed by the Board of Trade and the entire cost is borne by His Majesty’s Government. The second category consists of lascars on Allied ships who were killed by hostile action. The only ship in question is the Italian S.S. Catanai, and pensions are being paid to the dependents of these men on the same scale as the first class. The Italian Government is paying on the scale sanctioned by it for its own seamen, but as that sanctioned by the Board of Trade for lascars on British ships is higher, the Government of India are making up the rate to that sanctioned for lascars on British ships. The third category consists of lascars who were interned on enemy ships and who died during internment in Germany. Pensions are being paid by the Government of India to their dependents on the same scale and they hope eventually to be able to recover the cost or part of it from reparations.”

- 51** The Indian Workers' Delegate at the International Labour Conference of 1920 was A.M. Mazarello, the President of the Asiatic Seamen's Union, Bombay. He was assisted by Bhika Ahmed (Lascar Serang) and Habiboola Elhamdeen (Fireman Serang).
- 52** "Draft Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the Conference", in *International Labour Conference. Second Session. Genoa, 15th June – 10th July 1920* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1920), 572 – 586.
- 53** The history of the two committees is described by F.J.A. Broeze, "The Muscles of Empire: Indian Seamen and the Raj, 1919 – 1929", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18, no. 1 (1981): 43 – 67, at 52 – 55.
- 54** Robert Niven Gilchrist (1888-?) was the Labour Intelligence Officer of the Bengal Government. He authored *The Payment of Wages and Profit-Sharing, with a Chapter on Indian Conditions* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1924).
- 55** *Legislative Assembly Debates (Official Reprint)*, 17th Session of the 2nd Legislative Assembly, 1924, Vol. IV, Part II, February 19 1924-March 12 1924, Reply to question No. 181 (P.1311) by N. M. Joshi.
- 56** "The Union has got its centers in all cities, towns and villages in India and Burma where an employee can be seen. However, it has not yet joined us for reason that its members are Government Servants. But it should not be impossible to find media by which they could engage in labour issues only, while avoiding those of Politics." See *Presidential Address by V.V. Giri Barrister-at-Law at the Sixth Session of The All India Trade Union Congress held at Madras, on the 9th & 10th January 1926*, 14.
- 57** Bakhale (ed.), *The Directory of Trade Union*, 4.
- 58** Rai Saheb Chandrika Prasad was a retired Traffic Manager of B.B. & C.I. Railway and played an important role in the

Indian trade union movement of the early 1920s.

- 59** At the time, the Whitley Councils were discussed by some moderate Indian trade unionists. See “The Whitley Councils and Work Committes”, *Labour Gazette*[e] (Bombay), II, 5 (January 1923), 26 – 29.
- 60** *All-India Railwaymen’s Federation:[a] Report of The Third Annual Convention Held at Madras* (Calcutta: no publisher, no year), 3 – 5.
- 61** Ibid., 6.
- 62** The total sum given here is not correct. The sum of the regional staff is 719,248. Perhaps the authors have omitted the data for other provinces.
- 63** *All-India Railwaymen’s Federation:[b] Report of The Third Annual Convention Held at Madras*, 16 and 20.
- 64** The authors are referring to the Bombay Port Trust Employees’ ‘Union and the Calcutta Port Trust Employees’ Association.
- 65** The figures in the German original were given in Marks and have been converted here into Rupies using a conversion rate of 1.5 M = 1 Re.
- 66** *AITUC Bulletin* II, no. 7 – 8, Bombay, January-February 1926, 58 – 59.
- 67** Adopted at the seventh session, Delhi, March 12 – 13 1927. Quoted here according to Prem Sagar Gupta, *A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress*[c] (1920 – 1947) (New Delhi: AITUC, [1980]), 95 – 100.
- 68** The Constitution of the Bombay Central Labour Board (1920) is reprinted in Desai, *Labour Movement in India. Documents 1918 – 1920*, 352 – 353.
- 69** According to the Bombay *Labour Gazette*[f], I, 7 (March 1922), 14, the Central Labour Board had eight aims and objects: “(1) to carry on propaganda work for the welfare of labour; (2) to open schools, libraries and such other

educational institutions for the benefit of labourers; (3) to collect statistics in order to form a correct idea of the condition of workers; (4) to protect the rights of trade unionists; (5) to organise new unions in different industries and to strengthen the existing unions; (6) to study labour questions; (7) to co-ordinate the efforts of different unions; and (8) to promote the moral status of the working classes by organising temperance and other similar movements.”

70 F.J. Ginwalla and S.H. Jhabvala belonged to the small network of politicians and publicists who controlled a vast number of unions. Ginwalla was “connected with thirteen local unions” in Bombay and Jhabvala “with at least twenty”. According to Jhabvala, he and Ginwalla “had a constitutional understanding that we would nominate each other wherever we thought it necessary to do anywhere and at any time.” See Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics. Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850 – 1950* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 85.

71 Peasant Wars refers to popular uprisings by peasants in southern and central Germany, and parts of Austria and Switzerland, in 1524 – 26.

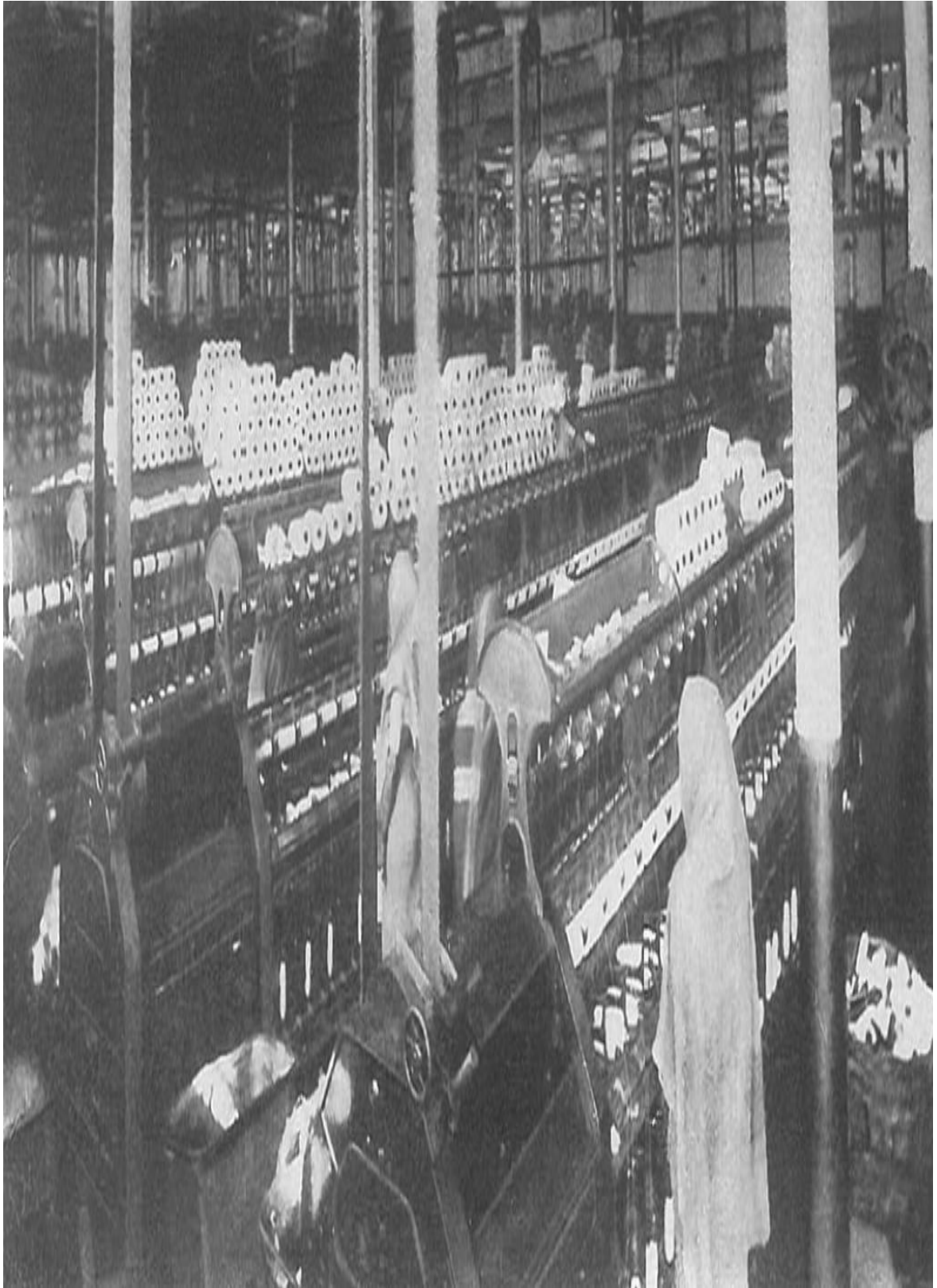
Images of Indian Labour in German Trade Union Publications

The following images were originally published in Schrader and Furtwängler's "Das werktätige Indien" (1928; hereafter: DWI) or in Furtwängler's subsequent travel account "Indien: Brahmanenland im Frühlicht" (1931; hereafter: IBF). All selected photographs appear to have been taken in the course of the delegation of the International Textile Workers' Association in 1926/27. If pictorial material was absent in both Johnston and Sime's and Shaw's reports, the German publications contained numerous photographs, some of which were supplemented with carefully phrased and at times polemical commentaries. Unlike the "semi-official" British trade union reports, these publications reached out to a wider public and Cecil Malone's controversial "New China" (1926) may well have served as a model in this respect. The captions below have been translated by the editors from the original German.

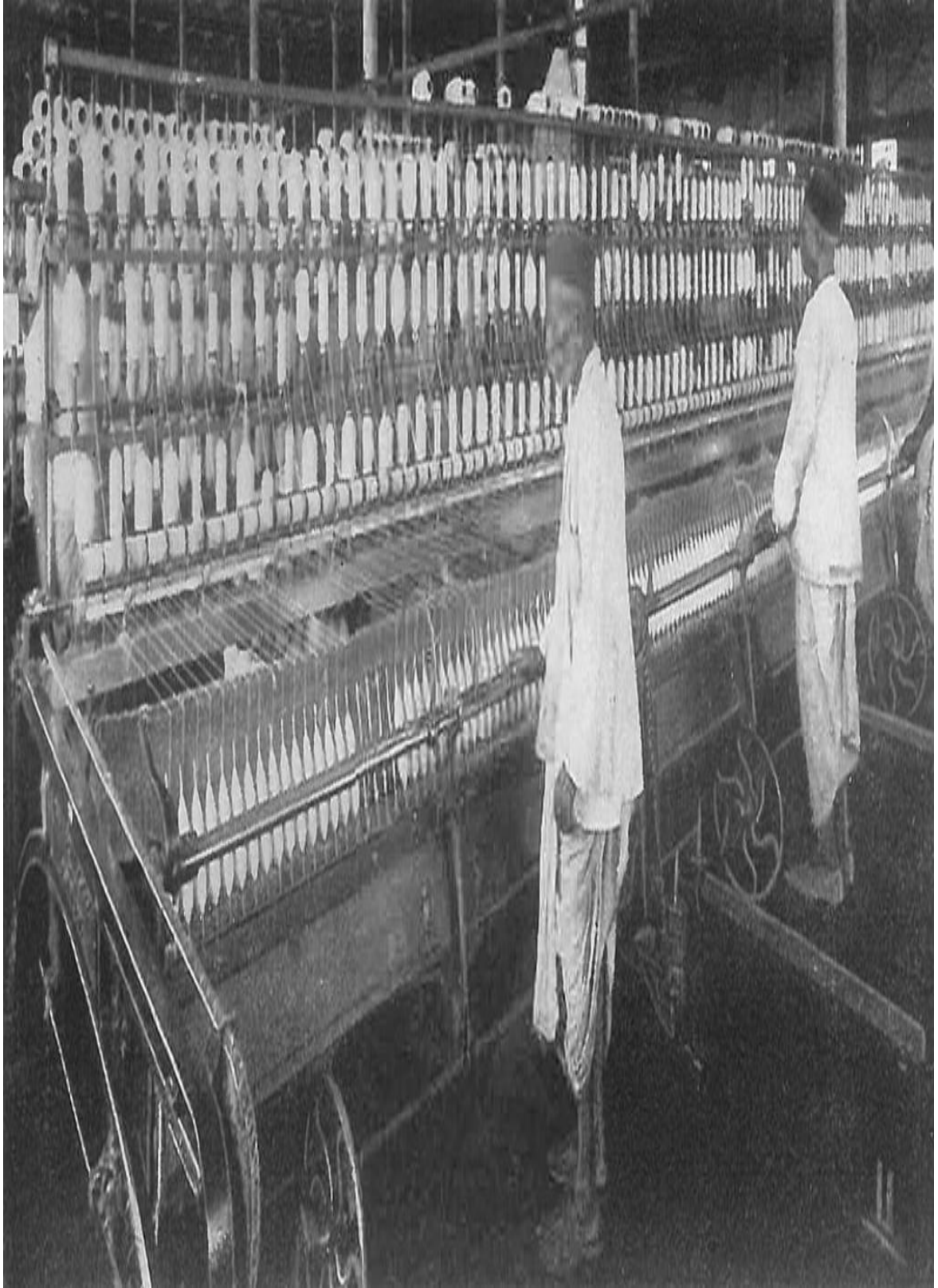
Cotton Factories in Western India



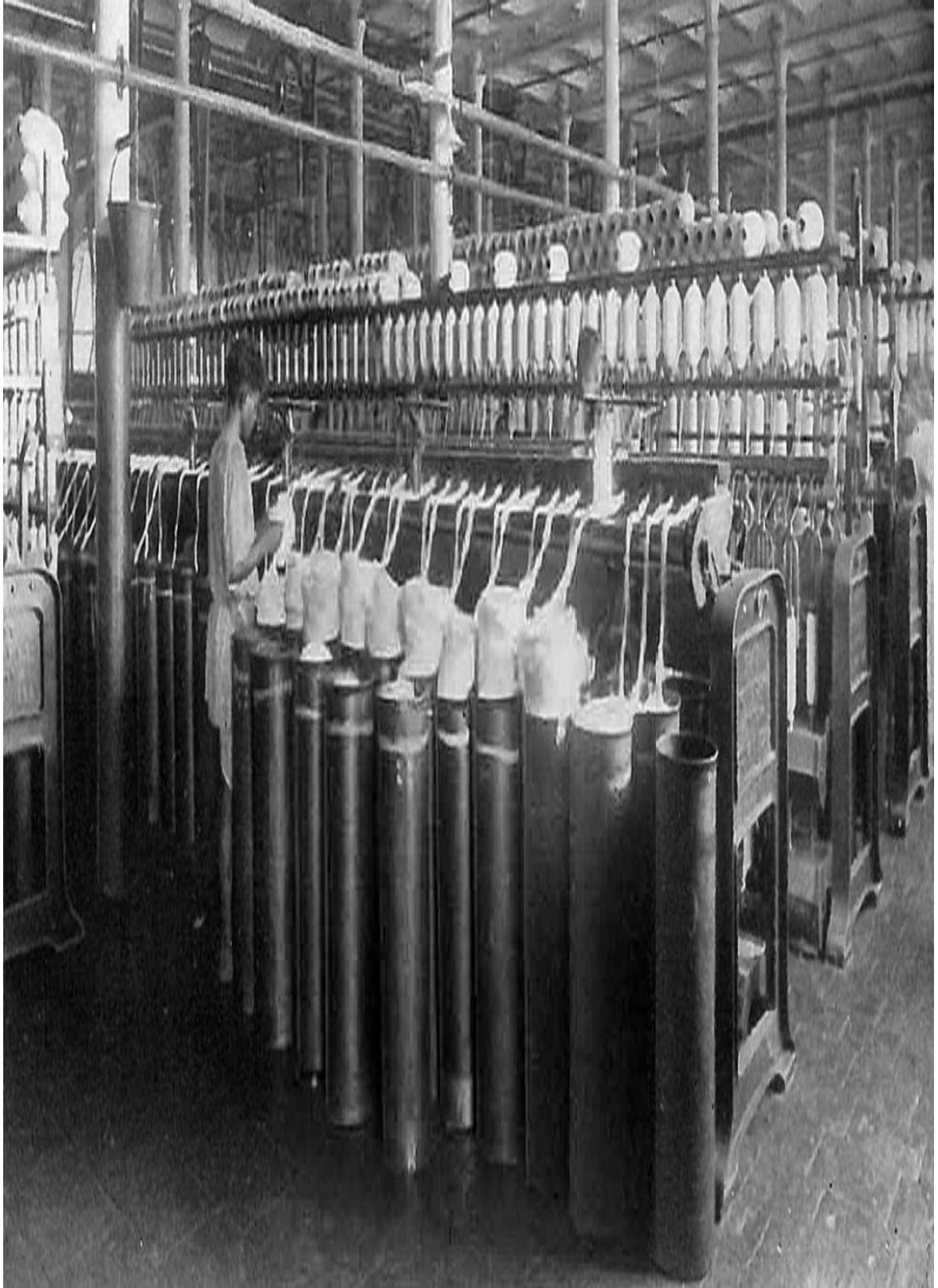
Primitive washing and bleaching plant of one of India's oldest cotton spinning mills (founded 1863) [DWI, foll. p. 224]



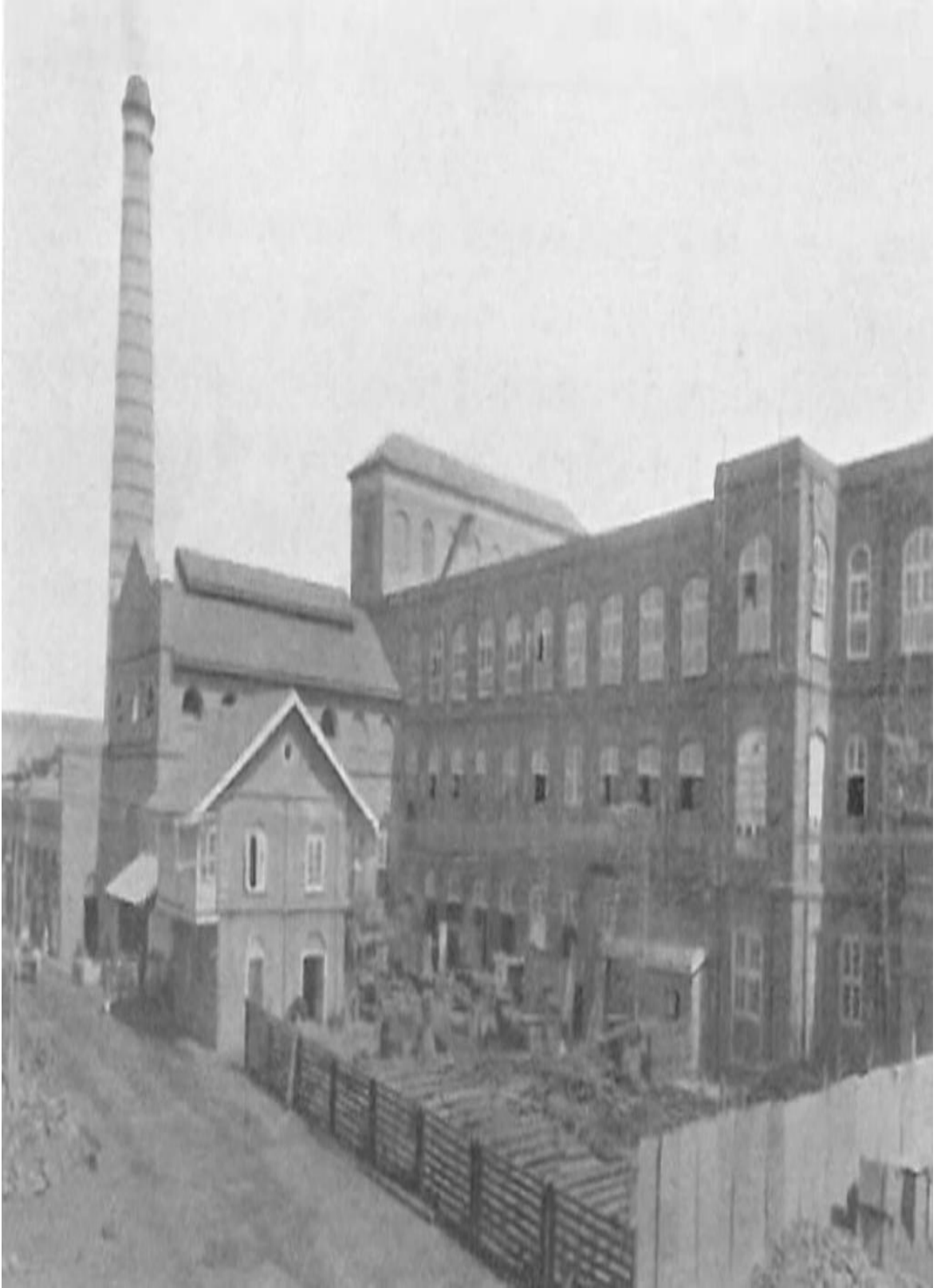
Modern textile industry—doubling mill (Sholapur). [DWI, foll. p. 224]



Ultra-modern mule spinning mill. [DWI, foll. p. 256]



Company: Narottam Morajee [sic!] in Sholapur. Flyer spinning plant.
[DWI, foll. p. 256]



The factory of Mr. Moradschi [Morarji] [IBF, p. 108]

Jute Mills in Bengal



English jute mills on the Ganges near Calcutta. A view from the boat.
[DWI, foll. p. 272]



Women in Bengal's jute industry, sorting of jute fabric and sewing of sacks. [DWI, foll. p. 304]

The Tata Steel Works in Jamshedpur



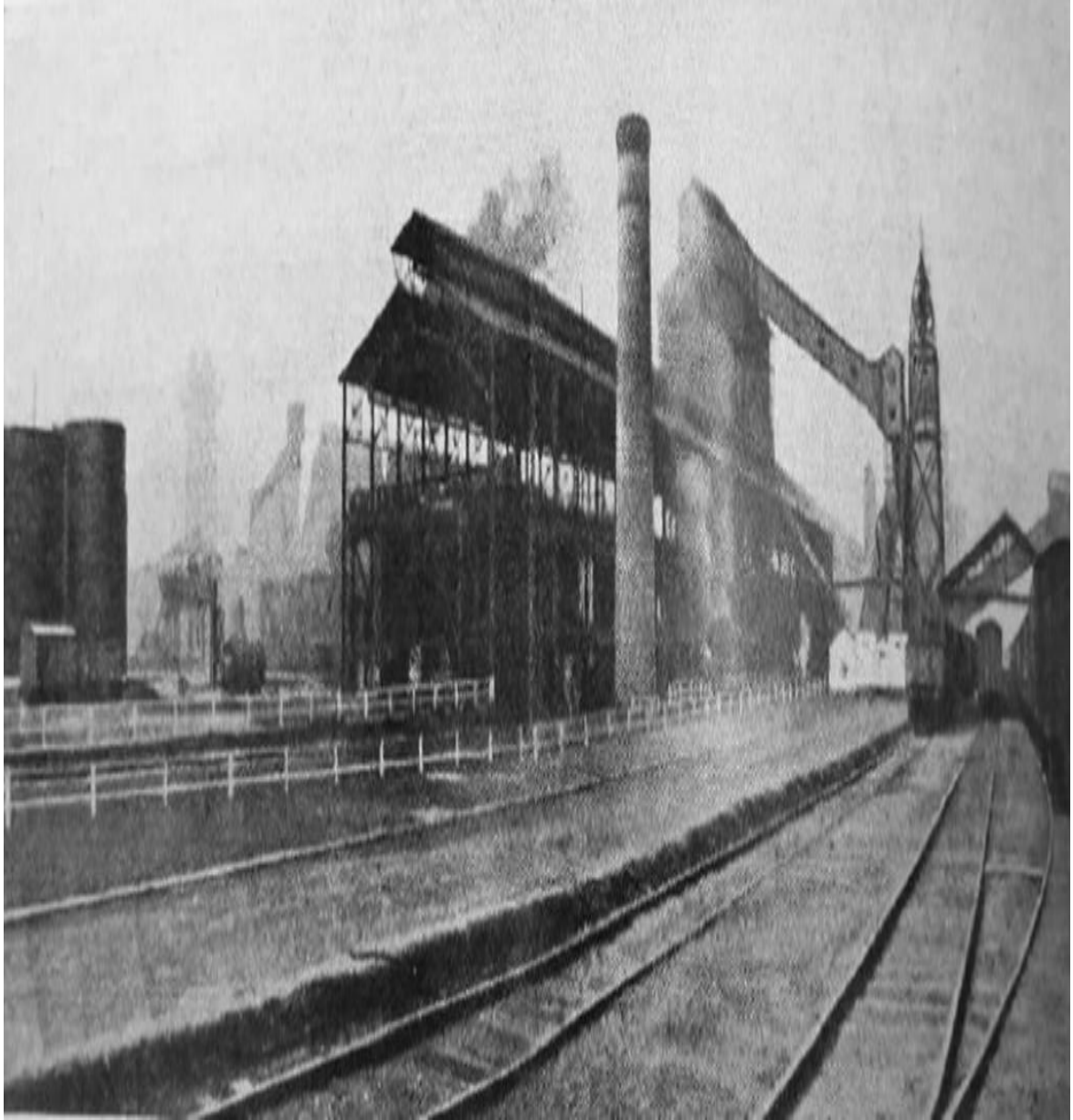
Aboriginal people (“Kolarians”) from the jungles in the environs of the Tata Works. [DWI, foll. p. 64]



Food market of the workforce of the Tata Iron and Steel Works
Jamshedpur. [DWI, foll. p. 176]



India's Krupp. [IBF, p. 178]



Tata Works, partial view. [IBF, p. 172]

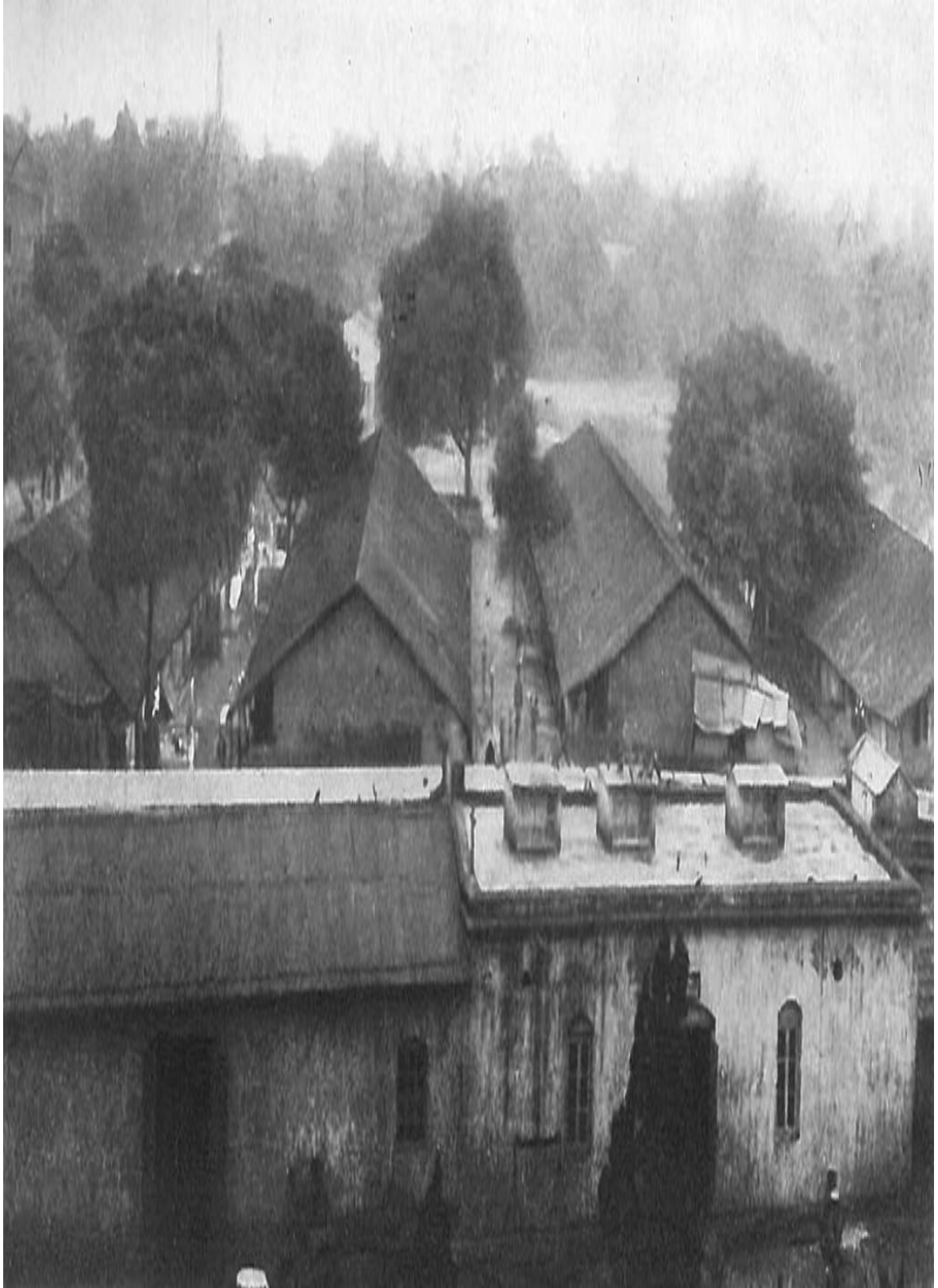
Working-class Housing and Social Conditions



A tenement house (“*chawl*”) of textile workers in Bombay. [DWI, foll. p. 304]



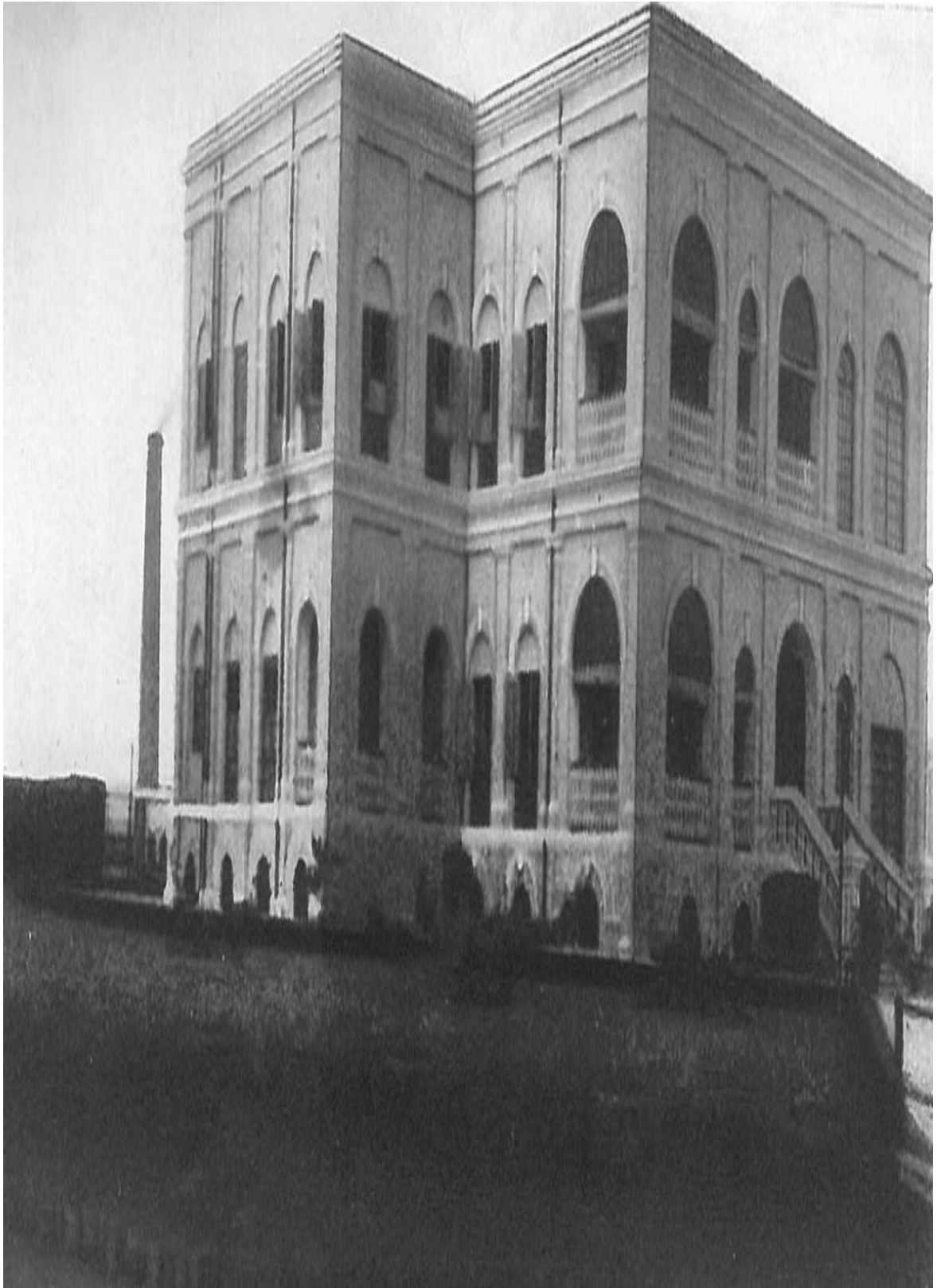
Model tenement house erected by the Bombay municipality. [DWI, foll. p. 368]



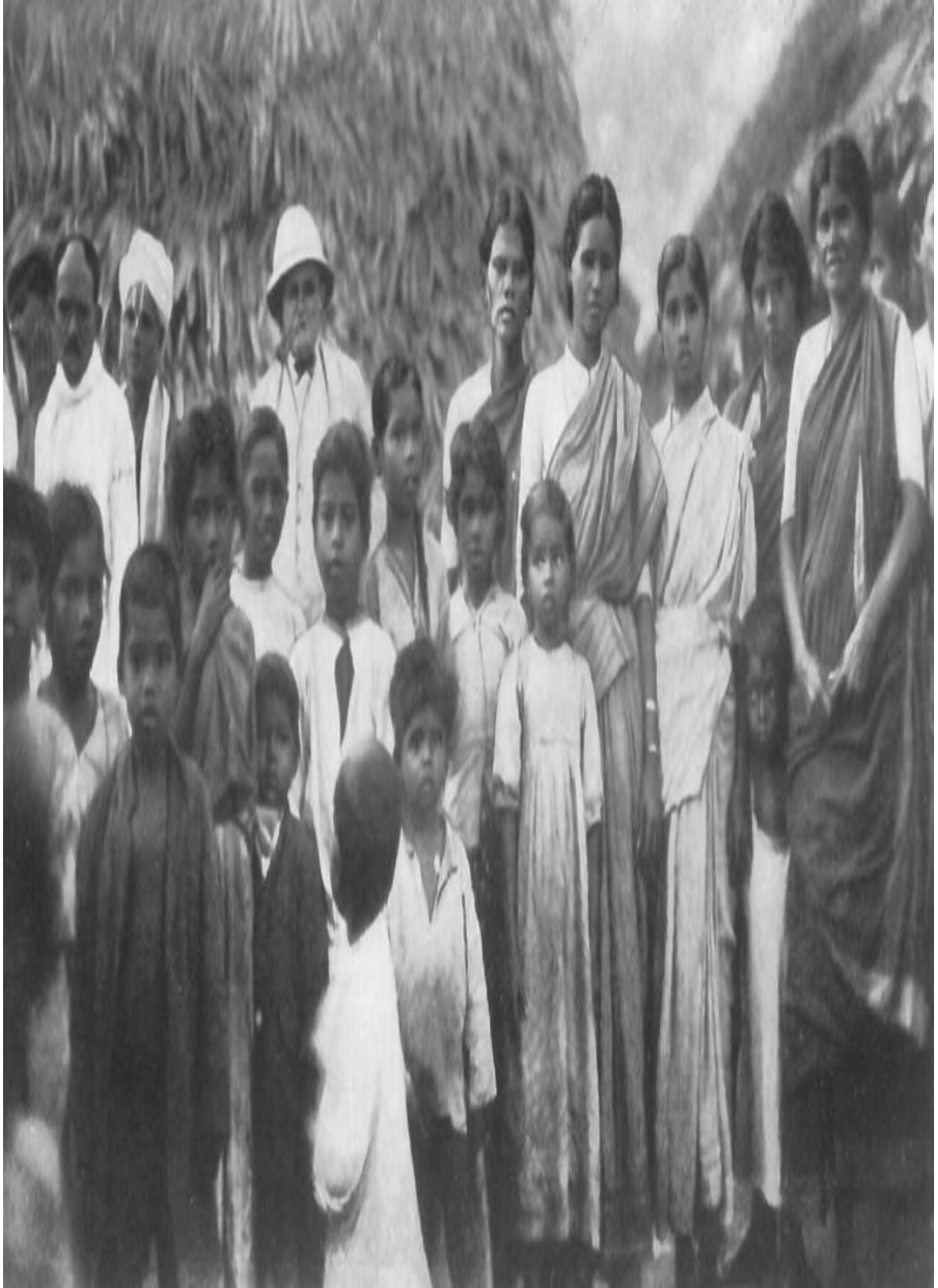
Company housing (“*bustees*”) of an Indian cotton spinning mill near Calcutta. [DWI, foll. p. 320]



“Habitations” of the factory proletariat of English jute spinning mills near Calcutta. [DWI, foll. p. 352]



Director's mansion of an English jute spinning mill on the banks of the Ganges near Calcutta. [DWI, foll. p. 352]



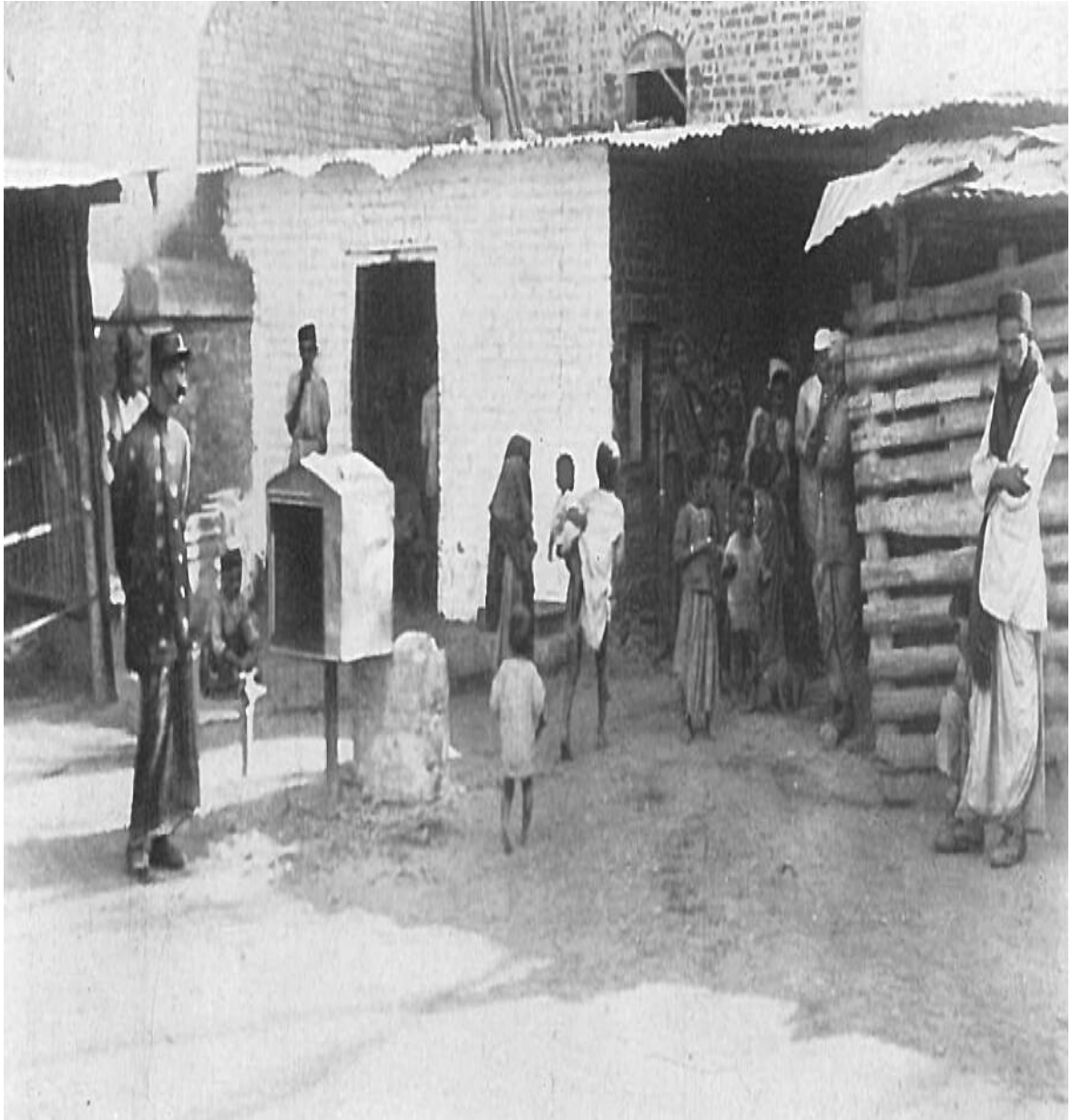
The textile proletariat of Madras (in background self-built palm-leaf huts). [DWI, foll. p. 320]



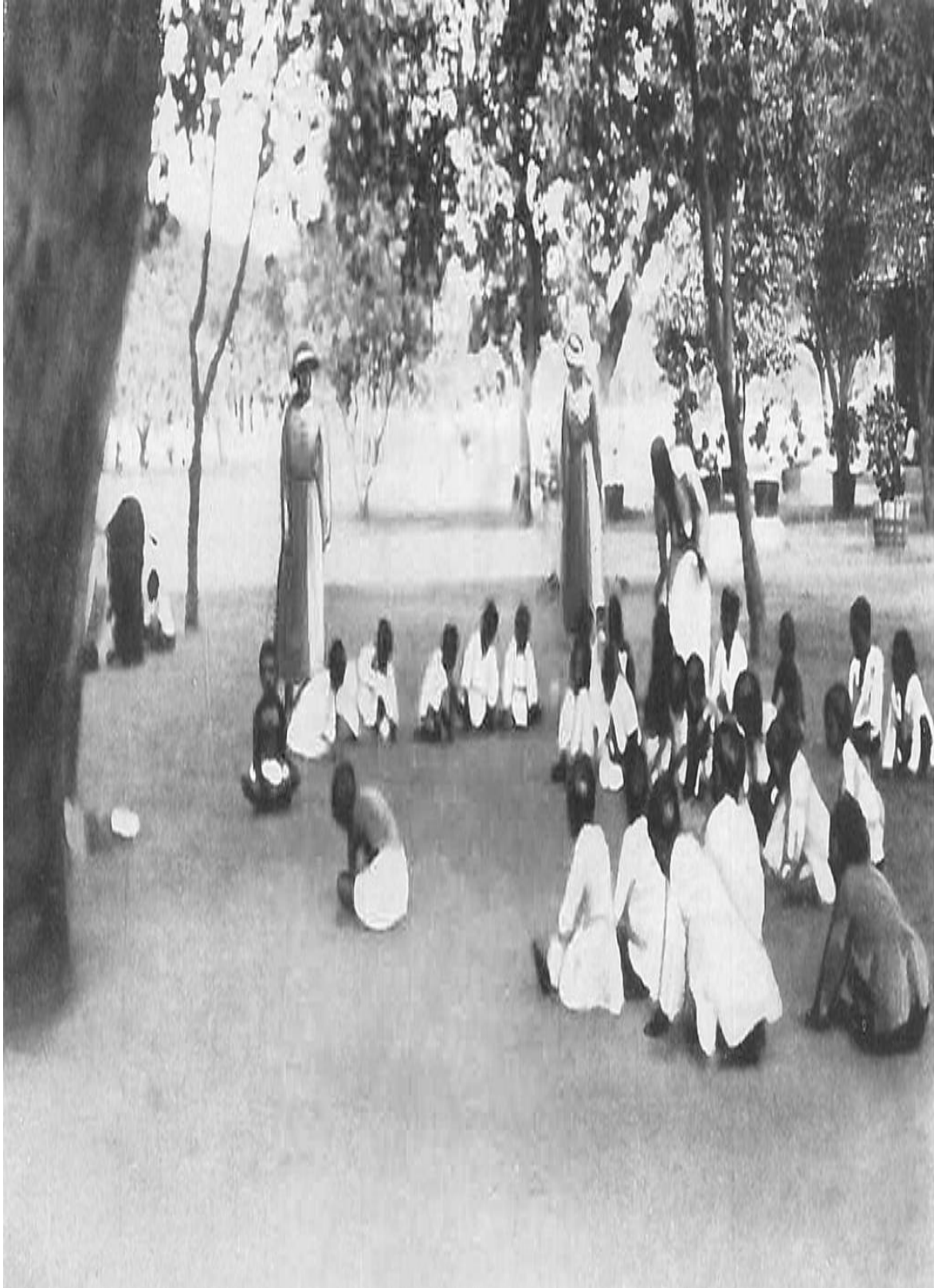
Pariah village near Poona (Bombay District). [DWI, foll. p. 128]



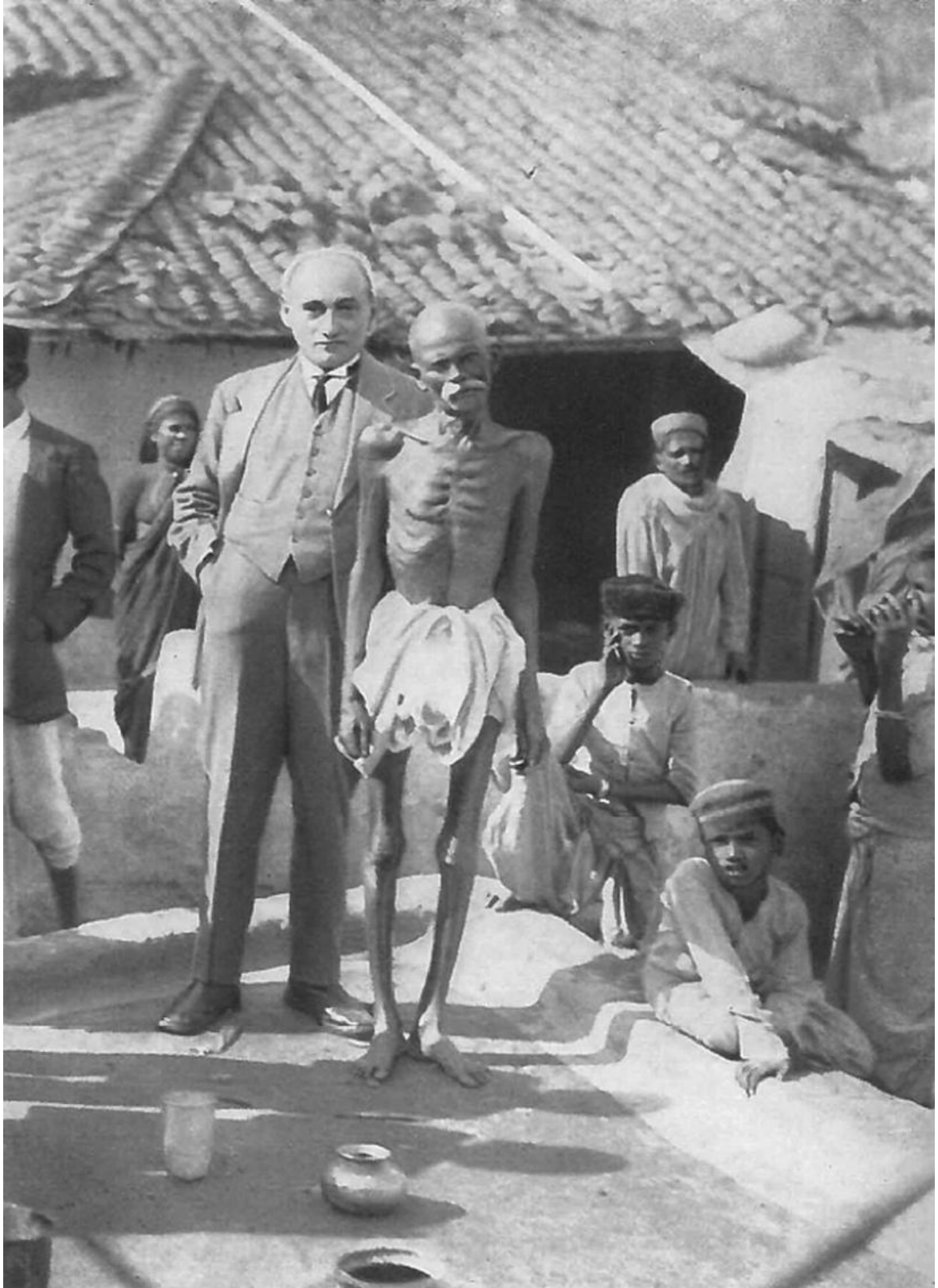
Where the plague dwells. A village near Nagpur. [IBF, p. 244]



Factory yard of a cotton spinning mill in Ahmedabad. [DWI, foll. p. 208]



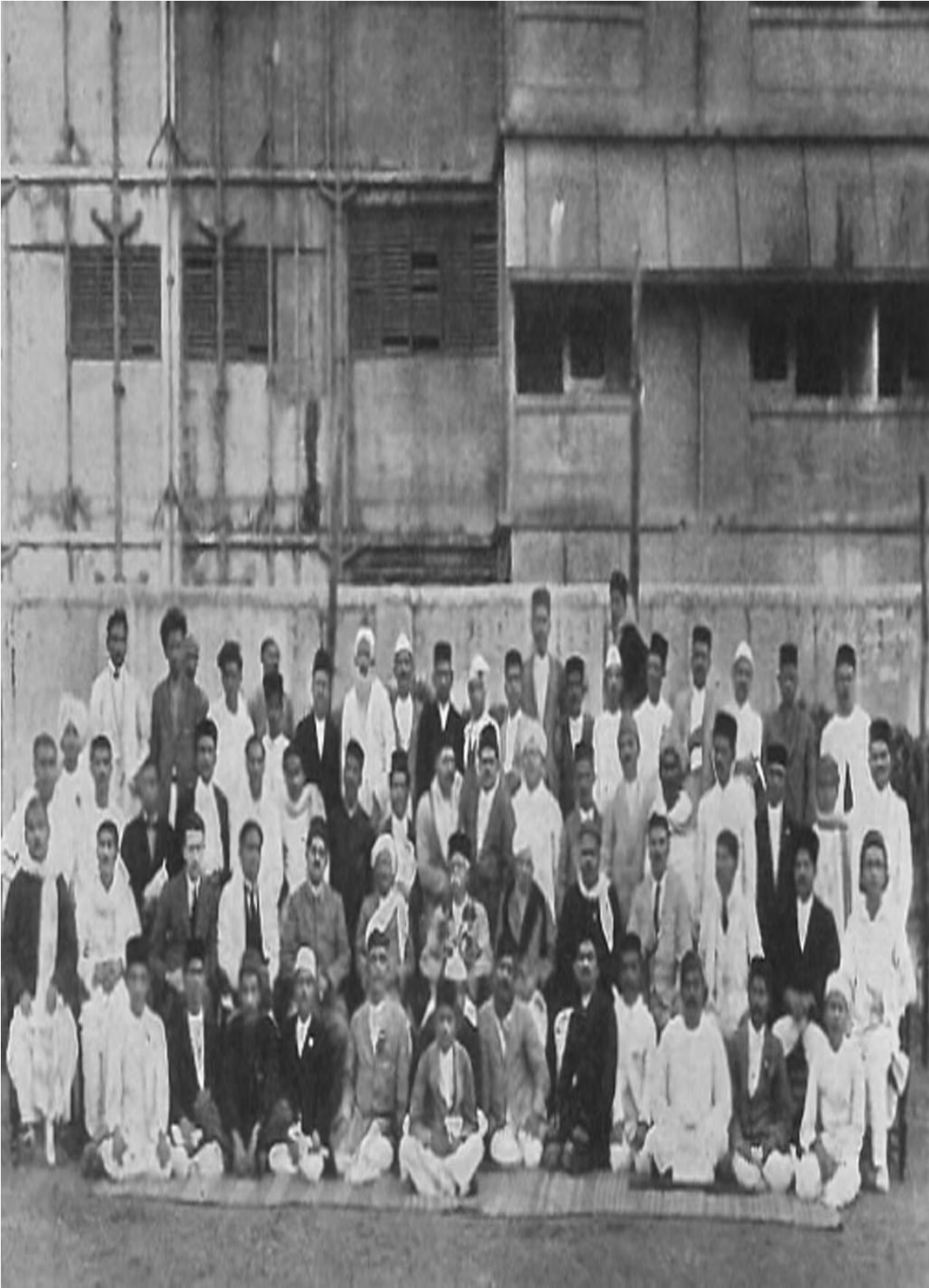
Elementary school of a cotton spinning mill in Madras. [DWI, foll. p. 176]



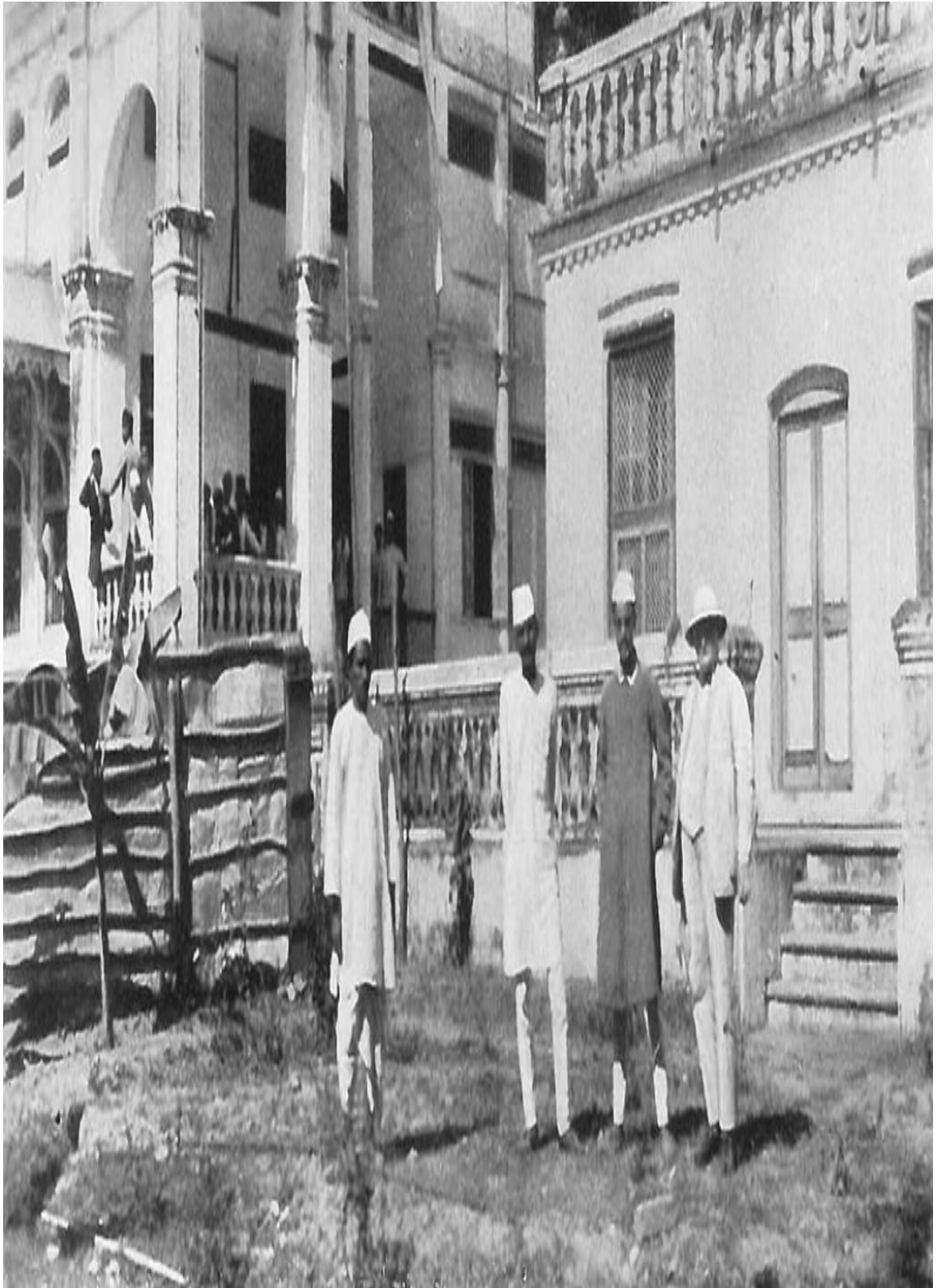
A citizen of the English world empire, too! Emaciated to a skeleton, the Indian on this image is one of many textile workers to be seen in this

state in the factories of India's large cities. [DWI, foll. p. 208]

Trade Unions and Politics



The Indian Trade Union Congress. [IBF, p. 180]



The trade union organizers of the Ahmedabad textile workforce in front of their association's building that includes a school, an elementary

school and a hospital. [DWI, foll. p. 368]



Bombay, meeting. [IBF, p. 37]



India in turmoil—the few, who are capable of reading, pass on the printed

word to the wings of rumour. [IBF, p. 248]

Asian Industrialism, Labour Movements and Cultural Nationalism: Interwar contexts of German trade-union writings on “Working India”

Ravi Ahuja

The present essay¹ examines two contexts of Karl Schrader and Franz Josef Furtwängler’s “Das werktätige Indien” (“Working India”)² and of the latter’s subsequent publications on India’s society, economy and politics. First, it inspects, as it were, the baggage that the two German trade unionists took on board the British liner on their way to India in November 1926: what could they know about India at the time and how could they prepare themselves for their voyage? What were the academic and political imaginations and debates that shaped German perceptions of Indian industry, society and politics in the 1920s? To what extent were these perceptions framed by notions of political economy and to what extent by ideologies of nation and “geopolitics”? The second part of the essay explores the extremely uneven reception of “Das werktätige Indien” after its publication in 1928: on the one hand, the book remained unavailable in English even as it was published in a period when the translation of labour movement writings between European languages was fairly common and swift. The book, thus, had no significant influence on debates in either Britain or India. On the other hand, the monograph met with a remarkable echo in late-Weimar Germany and, curiously, even more in the largely nationalist academic mainstream and among the “völkisch” (nativist-organicist) Right than in the labour movement. If it could play some role, as it did, in establishing lines of communication between sections of the

social democratic German trade union leadership and certain sections of the anti-republican and ultra-nationalist extreme Right, this raises questions on how the “Indian question” could be construed as an area of friendly communication between apparently irreconcilable political currents.

This essay can draw upon two well-researched biographies of the trade-union intellectual Franz Josef Furtwängler, who has been considered “Working India’s” main author and was recognized in Germany, after the publication of the book and well into the 1940s, as an “expert” for India’s political and social development at large. Elisabeth and Nirode Barooah’s biography³ complements Willy Buschak’s⁴ meticulous archival reconstruction of Furtwängler’s life and there is no need to compete with these books in regard to empirical depth. Together, they have covered the bulk of the available material from the preserved part of Furtwängler’s private papers and from German political archives.⁵ In discussing this material, these biographies have chosen to emphasize the uniqueness and the achievements of Furtwängler either as a trade unionist or as a German well-wisher of Indian nationalism. The present essay takes a route, however, in the opposite direction. We are here more concerned, as it were, with the non-unique and with patterns of transnational entanglement or, in other words, with the historical limitations, contexts and contradictions of “Working India” and of Furtwängler’s subsequent writings on India.

I. The Outward Journey: Modern India in German Frames

When Europe mobilized its industries during the World War for the theatre of war, it left to their own devices the extra-European countries it had previously supplied with its industrial products and even bought from them ammunition, textiles and much more. This forced or induced those countries to create industries of their own or develop them in unprecedented speed.

This is how Hermann Jäckel, veteran social democrat and chairman of the German Textile Workers' Association (Textilarbeiter-Verband) began his preface for Karl Schrader and Franz Josef Furtwängler's "Das werktätige Indien".⁶ The reasons why German trade unions felt a greater need, in the interwar period, to engage with the world of labour outside Europe were spelled out in no uncertain terms: the "circles interested in industrial production in Europe (and Germany)" were to find ways of holding their own in the "struggle in the world markets".⁷

A more urgent and wary interest in "extra-European industrialism" had indeed been articulated in Germany as much as in Britain and other European countries since the war, intensifying a tendency that had been observable even in the preceding decade. Thus, the years between 1923 and 1931 have been identified as a period when European labour organizations associated with the International Federation of Trade Unions increasingly sent out delegations to the Americas, Asia and the Middle East.⁸ When Schrader, deputy chairman of the Textilarbeiter-Verband, and his translator Furtwängler, a young secretary of the General German Trade Unions Federation (ADGB)⁹, embarked on a tour of industrial India in the winter months of 1926/27 along with their British textile union colleagues, this was a rare but not a singular activity. A year earlier, a large German trade union delegation that included Furtwängler had travelled extensively in the USA to study industrial organisation and trade unionism. On returning to Germany, they drafted a detailed report that was distributed subsequently by the ADGB's publishing wing.¹⁰ A couple of years later the "Deutsche Verkehrsbund", a German transport workers' union, had one of their officials travel to India twice to prepare a detailed (but unfortunately only partially preserved) report on employment and living conditions of Indian seafarers, a major source of "cheap" competition in the global maritime labour market.¹¹ In Britain, similarly, textiles and

seafaring were the two sectors that mainly attracted trade union attention to industrial India in the 1920s, continued to generate fears of being underbid in the global labour market by more subordinated colonial workers and gave occasion to several delegations as well as other forms of international exchange.¹²

The growing German interest in non-European (and specifically, for our purposes, Indian) society, economy and industrialism was by no means restricted to the labour movement, but also played out in the academic and political arenas. An earlier predominantly philological and philosophical interest in ancient India was increasingly supplemented (though by no means matched or replaced) by a scholarly engagement with India's "modernity"—with its contemporary economic, social and political transformations. The Institute for Maritime Transport and World Economy in Kiel, founded in 1914, was one of the academic centres associated with this tendency.¹³ Its journal "Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv" (Archive of the World Economy) regularly followed Indian economic developments involving also prominent Indian scholars like the economist Brij Narain¹⁴ and the sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar.¹⁵ The latter, closely connected to German academia, began by the 1920s to take up the labour question in his writings.¹⁶ In Berlin, influential scholars like Werner Sombart became intrigued with socio-political developments outside Europe and attracted young research scholars from India and other non-European countries.¹⁷ The "India Institute" of the "Deutsche Akademie" in Munich, set up by "geopolitician" Karl Haushofer and others would facilitate, from 1929, Indian academic presence in Germany by special scholarships.¹⁸ An analysis of India-related doctoral dissertations submitted to German universities in the early twentieth century confirms this trend: while India-related social science subjects had been very rare in the late nineteenth century, almost 70 dissertations, written both by German and Indian students, on contemporary economic, social and political issues appear to

have been submitted between 1900 and 1945. Of these, eight examined industrial development and often included labour issues, while two further dissertations focused on Indian industrial labour exclusively.¹⁹ The first of these latter dissertations, “Indien und seine Arbeiterschaft: ihre Entstehung und Bewegung” (India and her Labour Force: its Emergence and Movement), was submitted to Berlin University and published in 1927 by Abd-al-Jabbar Kheiri, whose engagement with the actual living conditions of Indian workers appears to have been rather perfunctory, however, and overshadowed by a cultural essentialism emanating from his political and religious concerns.²⁰ Kheiri also appears to have taught some Hindustani and the Urdu script to Furtwängler in preparation of the delegation to India; but the latter, in his writings, had little to say about their interactions and nothing about any discussion with Kheiri on the labour question.²¹

Economic motives had clearly spurred European awareness and engagement with industrial development in India and other countries outside Europe: anxieties, both of capital and labour, of being outcompeted in international commodity and labour markets were clearly expressed. When Labour MP Tom Johnston and trade unionist John Sime made the long trip from the Scottish textile town of Dundee to the competing (as well as connected) jute mill belt of Calcutta in 1926 and published a report entitled “Exploitation in India”,²² this booklet was translated into German almost immediately. Interestingly, the Association of German Jute Industrialists was responsible for this translation and its deputy chairman, (Carl Wilhelm) August Weber, a leading spokesman of German industry, explained their interest in a preface: directly referring to the impending delegation to India of German trade union representatives, Weber expressed his expectation that trade unions would change their stance on wages and work-time arrangements in recognition of the “indisputable facts” of cheap competition in India

and elsewhere. German workers, he opined, had to bear their share of the loss of jute factories for the time being. “Nobody,” wrote Weber, “would wish that conditions as the ones prevailing in India spread to our country and everybody will be pleased conversely if the general rise of Germany is accompanied by a progressive improvement of the economic and social condition of the employees.”²³ At the same time, business desires for “new markets” in Asia, both for commodities and for capital, also mattered. “Exportieren oder untergehen” (“Export or Perish”) was the suggestive title of a series of booklets, published by the “Gesellschaft für Exportorganisation” (Society of Export Organisation) a few years later, the first volume of which dealt with “British India”.²⁴

If the economic was, as always, inseparable from the political, this linkage presented itself with particular brutality in this age of world wars and revolutions. In British political discourse, Indian industrial labour, no doubt, had emerged as an issue of enquiry and official reporting since the 1880s²⁵ but the First World War brought a new urgency to these matters. The engagement with labour issues of the Indian Industrial Commission of 1916 – 18 thus reflected a growing concern with India’s industrial capacity and “efficiency” among imperial circles and war planners.²⁶ The “Great War” accordingly triggered changes in colonial labour policy that were not reversed, however, in the interwar period that was ushered in, in India as elsewhere, by a wave of labour strikes. Intensified labour legislation and the establishment, in some measure, of new bureaucratic instruments of labour administration went along with increased reporting. In 1923, the Bombay Labour Office published two reports, for instance, that shed some light on previously undocumented conditions of labour, which would be referred to with appreciation and augmented by their own data in Schrader and Furtwängler’s “Working India” a few years later: a “Report on ... the

Wages and Hours of Labour in the Bombay Cotton Mill Industry” and a “Report on ... Working-class Budgets in Bombay”.²⁷ The latter implied a significant shift in perspective as it amounted to an admission that an industrial workforce had emerged of which at least a significant part resided permanently in the city. Increased bureaucratic engagement since the World War shaped and fed into simultaneously growing academic output. G.M. Broughton’s “Labour in Indian industries”²⁸ and A.R. Burnett-Hurst’s “Labour and housing in Bombay”²⁹, for example, published in 1924 and 1925 respectively, reflected the bureaucratic concern with the management of the Indian labour force and were both based on University of London doctoral dissertations.³⁰ Social issues concerning Indian labour were not only discussed in the administrative and academic bureaucracies of the Empire, however, but also troubled wider sections of the British and Indian public. “Labour in India: A Study of the Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry” was, for instance, the title of a monograph published in 1923 by Janet Harvey Kelman who was closely associated with Scottish missionary circles.³¹ Indian liberal social reformers and nationalists also contributed to the ‘unofficial’ corpus of writings on Indian labour: the theosophist B. P. Wadia’s speeches on occasion of a post-war strike movement in the Buckingham Mills in Madras were published in 1921 as a book (“Labour in Madras”) with a foreword by the British Labour MP Josiah Wedgwood.³² In Pune and Bombay, the liberal reformist Servants of India Society and Social Service League regularly published reports on labour conditions throughout the interwar period.³³ The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), founded in 1920, also had a strong public presence; Schrader and Furtwängler closely interacted with one of its stalwarts, Narayan Malhar Joshi, who published a brief survey of the Indian trade union movement in 1927.³⁴

The now more frequent official and non-official publications from British and “British-Indian” sources were supplemented by a stream of writings emerging from the International Labour Organization (ILO) – to a large extent an institutional product of the post-war working-class unrest and of the revolutionary crisis in many parts of the world.³⁵ The growing industrial importance of “British India” was reflected in its founding membership and also in the establishment of an ILO branch office in New Delhi in 1929, which was to monitor the local labour scene closely and advise on policies.³⁶ By then, Rajani Kanta Das, a US-trained Indian economist closely connected to the ILO from the mid-1920s, had begun to publish a series of monographs on Indian labour ranging from factory labour, labour law and industrial efficiency to labour movements and international migration. Several of these pioneering studies were published in 1923 by de Gruyter in Berlin,³⁷ were thus readily available in Germany and provided an important foundation for Schrader and Furtwängler’s report: the latter studied these writings closely before commencing the voyage to India and even visited Das in Geneva.³⁸ Das’ influence may be traced in “Working India” itself, for instance in regard to the then red hot issue of comparative industrial “efficiency”, where Schrader and Furtwängler appear to have endorsed Das’ largely non-racialist, multi-causal explanation for the lower productivity of Indian workers. Echoes may also be heard in regard to their rather ambivalent evaluation of the social effects of caste hierarchy in Indian industrial relations, which they considered, like Das, to be partly beneficial.³⁹

In Germany itself, Indian industrialism caught the attention of political observers and academics for various reasons. Apart from anxieties about detrimental “Sklavenkonkurrenz” (slave competition)⁴⁰, the exclusion of German business from Indian markets during the war and the continuation of discriminatory practices during the post-war period were among these reasons.⁴¹

Schrader and Furtwängler reacted to this debate by arguing that the dangers from Indian competition in textile production were, by and large, limited and were to be more than offset by the rising demand for German commodities in India's growing markets—provided only that Britain could be prevailed upon to loosen its protectionist hold over these markets.⁴² This strand of the debate was connected to a more widespread German hostility towards the British Empire, which dated back to the World War and was not necessarily associated with the political left nor opposed to colonialism in principle. The importance of imperial resources, and especially those of India, for Britain's combat power had been evident and German policies had sought to systematically undermine the loyalty of their adversaries' colonial subjects—particularly those of Muslims serving in the British, French and Russian armies as well as of Indians of all religious persuasions. A "Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient" (Information Centre for the Orient), jointly run by the Foreign Office and the General Staff, had established connections between state officials, academic experts and radical Indian exiles⁴³ that would survive the interwar period and find a late expression in efforts, during the Second World War, to establish cooperation between Nazi Germany and militant Indian nationalists around Subhas Chandra Bose.⁴⁴

The importance of the "Indian question" was also reflected in various German writings even during the First World War, which included a book by the "Pan-German" and later Nazi ideologue Ernst Graf zu Reventlow⁴⁵ (who, as we shall see, would thoroughly review "Das werktätige Indien") as well as several German-language publications sponsored by Indian exiles, including a translation of writings of Lala Lajpat Rai, a leading Indian nationalist.⁴⁶ India's importance for the British Empire would continue to be an important issue of academic and political debate in Germany—three publications, two before and the third after Hitler's rise to power, may serve as examples: in 1928, a volume of essays based on a series

of lectures at the “Technische Hochschule” (i. e. Polytechnic) of Stuttgart was published that included two articles on India’s industrialism and modern transport by Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Alphons Nobel as well as an essay on the “geopolitical problems of India” by Karl Haushofer.⁴⁷ In 1932, “Indien in der Weltpolitik” was released—the German version of Taraknath Das’s previously US-published “India in World Politics”.⁴⁸ Taraknath Das was a nationalist exile with close connections to the “India Institute” in Munich, and the translation was adorned with a glowing preface by Haushofer. Three years later, the renowned national-liberal historian Hermann Oncken, already stripped of his Berlin professorship, delivered the “Scharnhorst lectures” at the Military Society, which were published two years later under the title “Die Sicherheit Indiens: Ein Jahrhundert englischer Weltpolitik” (The Security of India: A Century of English World Politics).⁴⁹

Indian nationalism found sympathies also in more explicitly republican and less conservative circles. Choosing a popular phrase as the title of his book, Walter Hagemann, a journalist working for the paper of the catholic “Zentrum” party, published “Das Erwachende Asien” (“Asia Awaking”) in 1926 with a sympathetic account of nationalist movements in Arabia, India and China.⁵⁰ The best-informed survey of India under British rule that emerged from German academia in the interwar period was authored by Josef Horowitz, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Frankfurt.⁵¹ It was released, like “Working India”, in 1928 and included a short chapter on industry and labour.⁵² A year later, another though rather basic and less perceptive “Länderkunde” (roughly, “country report”) on “British-India” and Ceylon became available on the German book market—authored by the Königsberg-based indology professor Helmuth von Glasenapp.⁵³ While the philologist Glasenapp had visited India for the first time only recently, Horowitz had taught at the Anglo-Muhammadan College in Aligarh

for eight years until 1915, when he was expelled from India as a German citizen. Horovitz remained in close communication with his former colleagues, however, many of them Muslim Indian nationalists, until his death in 1931.⁵⁴ Both scholars had been involved with the “Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient” during the First World War—Horovitz more as an informant and Glasenapp as an active agent.⁵⁵ “Regional expertise” in Germany on India, at the time, thus tended to be based on philological scholarship, and could well involve some “embeddedness” in political and military structures of the German state but only in rare cases a longer exposure to India itself. Haushofer considered these writings an insufficient, as yet underdeveloped base for the “geopolitical” studies he promoted.⁵⁶ They also do not seem to have influenced Furtwängler’s later writings on India.

To the left of the political mainstream, the interwar period also saw a growing output of political literature on India both in Britain and Germany. Manabendra Nath Roy’s anti-imperialist analyses of the political situation in Asia were quickly translated into German—his “Indien”, published in Hamburg on behalf of the Communist International in 1922,⁵⁷ contained extensive sections on the Indian economy and working classes that compiled information from colonial sources and offered anti-imperialist interpretations. Roy’s work was considered important by Schrader and Furtwängler, even though they disagreed strongly, as we shall see, with key aspects of his political assessment of Indian nationalism and specifically of the relative political potentials and efficacy of communism (“nothing is more alien in its essence to the Indian”)⁵⁸ and Gandhianism under Indian conditions.⁵⁹ In Britain, communists like Shapurji Saklatvala, M.N. Roy, Clemens Dutt or Philip Spratt wrote regularly on Indian industrial workers and trade unions for a mainly British audience in the *Labour Monthly*.⁶⁰ Rajani Palme Dutt’s first book-length analysis of Indian politics, “Modern India”, was translated into German and

published in 1928,⁶¹ only a year after the English original and also included extensive sections on employment and labour movements. Palme Dutt advocated, like Roy but unlike Schrader and Furtwängler, the autonomy of a politicized, anticolonial labour movement from the Gandhi-led nationalist mainstream. A less radical, “labour imperialist” position was taken by the socialist Scottish MP Tom Johnston and Dundee trade unionist John Sime in their above-mentioned report of 1926. Highly critical of the living standards of Indian jute workers and supportive of unionization in India, they believed that improved living conditions and increased purchasing power of Indian labour would benefit workers across the Empire as this would also facilitate British industrial exports to India.⁶² Their export-focused argument, in a modified, non-imperial and free-marketeer form, could also be found in Furtwängler’s writings.⁶³

At the same time, the left and radical trade unionists, both in Britain and Germany, discovered China as a focus of anti-imperial struggle and as the home of a growing and over-exploited working class. Cecil Malone’s controversial “New China: Report of an Investigation”, published by the Independent Labour Party in 1926,⁶⁴ may well have provided the structural pattern for Schrader and Furtwängler’s book-length minority report on the textile workers’ delegation: “Working India”, too, was divided into two parts, the first providing a general introduction to the country’s society, history and politics, the second giving a survey of the working and living conditions of industrial labour. Indeed, Schrader and Furtwängler referred to Malone directly in their report⁶⁵ and in 1928, the same year when the German trade union’s publishing house brought out “Working India”, it also published a translation of part II of Malone’s “New China”, its first part being replaced by a new text authored by Furtwängler.⁶⁶ This was, perhaps, in direct competition with the China solidarity activities coordinated by the communist Willi

Münzenberg since 1925, which produced a stream of publications.⁶⁷ In 1927, a German translation of the report of a Soviet trade union delegation to China was published in Berlin on behalf of the Red Trade Union International along with excerpts from a speech the general secretary of the Chinese seamen's union, Chen Kuen, had held in Berlin on March 16 of that year.⁶⁸ In 1930, the German version of M.N. Roy's "Revolution und Konterrevolution in China" ("Revolution and Counterrevolution in China"), written after his break with the Comintern and translated by the oppositional communist Paul Frölich, appeared in a socialist publishing house.⁶⁹

When Schrader and Furtwängler prepared themselves for their voyage in 1926, India's economy and industrialism as well as its international position and the rise of anticolonial movements had thus been a matter of intensifying debate in Germany for at least a decade. German trade unions, closely connected to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), felt compelled to engage with labour outside Europe, veering uneasily between Euro-centric conceptions of social progress that justified colonial rule as a "temporary necessity", economic nationalism, labour movement internationalism and socialist anti-imperialism. There was a market for German translations of relevant work produced in Britain and elsewhere that included radically anti-imperial critiques of colonialism. There was also a presence of articulate Indian exiles who had found moderate support by the German authorities since the First World War as well as a growing interaction of Indian scholars with German academia. There were, moreover, German, often conservative scholars, who engaged with contemporary India as an economic space of growing importance or as a "factor" of their often anti-British geostrategic calculations. This growing German engagement with India occurred at the same time when a revanchist, nativist-organicist ("völkisch") nationalism assumed a new intensity in the wake of the "lost" World War and the Versailles Treaty. Even scholarly work that appears to have been less affected by this context of German nationalism, such

as Josef Horowitz's "Indien unter britischer Herrschaft" ("India under British Rule"), was published in a series, the objective of which was stated in a telling formulation: the "Handbook of Anglo-American Culture" aimed at university students and at "all who wish to draw inspiration from the understanding of an alien culture for themselves and for the deeper understanding of the peculiar German nature [deutscher Eigenart]."⁷⁰ The engagement with "alien cultures", even European ones, was thus based on a common sense of essential difference, which assumed specific nativist-organicist features in interwar Germany. This shaped the wider intellectual context in which "Das werktätige Indien" made its mark.

II. Homecoming: "Working India" in late-Weimar Germany

Schrader and Furtwängler's separate report on the delegation of British and German textile union representatives to India, and especially the second part with its detailed account of the findings on labour conditions, is a remarkable piece of social documentary on various counts. A comparison with Tom Shaw's rather formulaic and lifeless parallel report on behalf of the British delegates brings this out quite clearly. A review of "Das werktätige Indien" in a German socialist journal compared it with Friedrich Engels's classic "Condition of the Working Class in England."⁷¹ This comparison may have seemed fitting not only because of the combination of acute observation with passionate prose but also since the authors themselves frequently juxtaposed the living and working conditions of Indian labour to those of "early capitalist" Europe.⁷² The authors had been remarkably thorough in that they did not merely provide concise summaries of the still scanty official, company and trade union data, for instance on working-class household budgets, but complemented them with the results of their own field work, which

they conducted at various industrial centres.⁷³ Much of the data scarcity they deplored would soon be a matter of the past, which may be one reason for the very limited impact of “Das werktätige Indien” outside the German-speaking parts of Europe, for the Royal Commission on Labour in India not only published a substantial report in 1931⁷⁴ but supplemented it with extensive evidence volumes. It also facilitated an explosive growth of “British India’s” labour administration and of their reporting routines. Yet other aspects of “Das werktätige Indien” have remained unique in the wider field of contemporary writings. Hence the sections engaging with the labour process in Indian textile mills comparing their productivity with that in European factories were remarkable in that they avoided the racist taxonomies of labour “efficiency” that were promoted by the globally circulating “racial management” theories of the time⁷⁵ and emphasized instead factors of social reproduction. The shrewd analysis of the labour process in Indian textile mills, pointing out that the low wage level allowed management to optimize the utilization of the machinery in ways that were not feasible in European factories,⁷⁶ may well have been possible only because of the technical knowledge of the experienced textile worker Karl Schrader. Moreover, the detailed account of Indian trade unionism also stands out by its close attention to everyday organizational practices.⁷⁷

At the time, “Working India” appears to have been recognized as an authoritative report on the Indian labour situation by the various strands of the German left. It was even quoted for an endorsement of the second German edition of M.N. Roy’s “Indien”—a publication on behalf of the Communist International.⁷⁸ In the authors’ own social democratic circles the report’s detailed examination of “early capitalist” working and living conditions was approved and there was also some recognition of a need for action on the part of European trade unions and labour parties. The reasoning of the social

democratic “Vorwärts” in its book review was not altogether different from that of British “labour imperialists”: European workers had to be interested, the “Vorwärts” argued, in Indian labour struggles because

... Indian capitalism catches up quickly with his elder brother in Europe and competes bitterly even today with the products of our own industry. We cannot resist this development but we have an interest that this competition is not exacerbated by way of starvation wages and early capitalist drudgery [Menschenschinderei] in India.⁷⁹

If the authors of “Working India” had linked their analysis of labour conditions to an indictment of British colonial rule—and Furtwängler would continue to do so when he attacked coercive labour practices on Indian tea plantations at the International Labour Conference in 1929—leading German social democrats were reluctant to endorse this argument.⁸⁰ A heated exchange in 1930 in the social democratic press brought out a strong belief that progress in India depended on continued European tutelage of the kind promoted by the British Labour Party. For in concrete terms, influential German social democrats tended to support the limited constitutional reforms that the British government under Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald promoted at the time at the Round Table Conferences against the bitter opposition of the Indian National Congress.⁸¹

Yet “Working India” reached a much wider audience in late-Weimar Germany than that associated with working-class parties and trade unions. Reviews were published both in the mainstream press⁸² and in academic journals. The Indologist von Glasenapp felt that the book was a “useful addition” to the existing literature on India that had focused too narrowly on art and poetry, but scoffed professorially at its authors’ ‘marxist attitudes’ and the “diverse errors and imprecisions in the presentation of names and dates”.⁸³ The geographer Alfred Rühl, however, lauded the richness as well as the stimulating presentation of new material and highlighted the

particular importance of the book's second part with its focus on labour conditions.⁸⁴ Two further reviews that would turn out to be of particular consequence for Furtwängler's future political role came from unexpected quarters: from increasingly influential intellectual circles of the German right that were ideologically heterogeneous but united in their revanchist and organicist nativism.

Karl Haushofer, powerful professor and academic entrepreneur in Munich, warmly recommended "Working India" even to readers with no particular interest in labour issues. He praised the "geopolitical, dynamic introduction" provided by the first part of the book as a "masterstroke". Despite some critical remarks on gaps regarding "cultural geography" and on what he considered an overemphasis on urban India, Haushofer saw "enormous progress" in an approach that was not based on "maxims of paper, but on the soil", "on the essence of the living space [Lebensraum]". He also commended the authors' analysis of the colonial "booty economy" (Beutewirtschaft), their conclusion that "a free India is the greatest hope of humanity", their ability, in observing this nation, to grasp a process of becoming, and their "holy and ethical earnestness and supreme sense of racial responsibility". Haushofer also approved of the more sociological sections of the book's second part and particularly the collection of household budgets for they, too, were useable, in his view, for a novel "Länderkunde", a science of "Lebensraum" or of the organic compound of a land and its people.⁸⁵ The premises of an organicist-"völkisch" ideology here came to define a scientific discipline, which Haushofer regarded as the necessary and as yet largely missing foundation for his "geopolitical studies". If German social democratic reviewers were more ambivalent about the open advocacy of Indian nationalism in "Working India" and mainly referred to its second, labour-centred part, Haushofer saw the combination of a survey of geographical and socio-cultural structures and sociological field work with the recognition of a process of nation-making as conducive to his own

project. Politically, he saw a “fateful community” (Schicksalsgemeinschaft) that posited the potentially “revolutionary” but presently still “hypnotised” powers in Asia and Central Europe against the “evolutionary” Anglo-Saxon powers, which held them bound in an artificial spatial order. Against this, he believed, the forces of Pan-Asianism and Pan-Germanism were gathering strength for a restitution of organic “Lebensräume”. If Haushofer thus considered India’s nationalist upsurge against British rule a natural ally of and even a role-model for a post-war Germany fettered by the Treaty of Versailles, Furtwängler and Schrader’s indictment of colonial exploitation and their open sympathies for Gandhianism appeared to provide grist to his mill.⁸⁶

“Working India” provoked positive responses not only from a German academic mainstream brimming over, in the interwar period, with nationalist revanchism and organicism, but also from forces even further to the right. By 1928, Ernst Graf zu Reventlow looked back on a long and distinguished career of right-wing radicalism beginning with the Pan-German League (Alldeutscher Verband) before the World War, continuing with various antisemitic, revanchist and “völkisch” groups in the post-war decade and eventually joining Hitler’s NSDAP in 1927 as a member of the Reichstag and as an associate of Gregor Strasser’s faction in that party.⁸⁷ When in 1923 German communists attempted in the wake of Karl Radek’s “Schlageter speech”, to no avail and for a brief period, to poach right-wing radicals for their cause, Reventlow had joined the debate in a reverse attempt to win over communist workers to a “völkisch” socialism.⁸⁸ Schrader and Furtwängler’s book appears to have encouraged him to renew this attempt, now testing the openness of sections of the social democracy to “völkisch” and revanchist ideas. His detailed review of the book was published in his own monthly “Reichswart” in July 1928 and contained three basic strands of argument.⁸⁹ For one, he acknowledged the empirical richness of

“Working India” but criticized the inadequacy of the “Marxism” and “materialism” of the analysis: for “fateful is not the economy, but spiritual speciation [seelische Artung]”. Gandhi’s enormous influence among the masses, he argued, was only possible because he was a personification of a spiritual, non-materialist philosophy of life. Secondly, he argued that a real alternative to capitalism both in India and Germany could not lie in a continuation of industrial life, that “a truly liberated Indian people would not find happiness and its ideal in a further promotion and development of the industrial working class, but in a return to agriculture and to some extent artisan industry. In India in particular such reverse development would be possible and, we believe, likely.” In Germany, he added, things were more difficult, though not altogether different. Reventlow’s third and main point was, however, that he fully agreed with the authors that the struggles for social and national liberation were closely connected for the workers of this colonized country. But, he added, this analysis applied as much to post-Versailles Germany as to “British India”: social emancipation was premised on national freedom, while sustained national freedom was conversely only possible along with emancipation from “international” (read: Jewish) capital.

Reventlow’s review proved to be politically significant because it contributed to the introduction of Furtwängler into intellectual circles in Berlin that included far-right “national revolutionaries” and “national Bolsheviks”. This turned him into a liaison man in 1932 between the Strasser faction of the NSDAP and circles in the ADGB around its chairman Theodor Leipart who sought to loosen the traditional ties of the German trade unions to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), enter a dialogue with right-wing forces on the basis of a shared anti-Versailles nationalism and find a way of institutional survival under conditions of impending fascist rule.⁹⁰ Through the same elite circles contact was also established to members of the (often aristocratic) German service gentry, to men of various persuasions who would eventually turn against Hitler and associate

in the “Kreisauer Kreis”. Through these connections the social democrat Furtwängler was recruited in 1940 by the German Foreign Office as a specialist for India and was involved in their negotiations with Subhas Chandra Bose.⁹¹ These political consequences have been brought out in many nuances (and clearly with some heartburn) by Furtwängler’s biographer Willy Buschak.

But Reventlow’s review is also significant as a document of intellectual history that throws a glaring light on unlikely but politically potent “bridges” between conflicting, seemingly irreconcilable and unconnected political currents in the interwar period: “völkisch” ideology, i. e. organicist nativism, claimed kinship at times even with Gandhian rural romanticism and construed Indian nationalism as an ally in the struggle against British imperialism and “international capital”. Karl Haushofer struck notes not altogether dissimilar, though he was more impressed with the right-wing modernism of Indian nationalists like Benoy Kumar Sarkar as he believed that Gandhi was “by now drifting away from life”.⁹² Reventlow used Schrader and Furtwängler’s assertion that the appalling conditions of India’s working classes could be overcome only by way of national independence as a corroborative argument for merging politically the social and national questions in Germany, too, by way of a “völkisch socialism”. And such notions were not only nurtured on the lunatic intellectual fringe of the far right. For the labour movement, in Germany as elsewhere, was not entirely immune against the temptations of an étatist, revanchist and organicist nationalism: in 1926, when the Textilarbeiter-Verband decided to send out Schrader and Furtwängler to India, Ernst Niekisch was only about to leave behind his job as a national secretary of that trade union as well as his long-term membership of the Social Democratic Party to emerge as the chief ideologue of a “völkisch socialism” that inspired many of the far-right intellectuals Furtwängler would engage with a few years later.⁹³ The intellectual defencelessness and political defeatism of sections of the labour movement was displayed most pathetically by

Karl Schrader, the co-author of “Working India”, on May 1 1933, which had just been declared the “holiday of national labour”: by then chairman of the Textile Workers Association, he marched under swastika banners ahead of a deputation of his trade union in a desperate and foredoomed effort to come to terms with the new regime.⁹⁴

What needs to be asked, then, in this essay is whether these right-wing appropriations of “Working India” (and of Furtwängler’s subsequent writings on India) were unwarranted by the text itself or whether ideological “bridgeheads” can indeed be found that allowed these connections to be made. Or, in other words, does the text of “Working India” itself contain statements that would help to explain the later approachability of its main author, Furtwängler, as an “India expert” even by nationalist academicians and political radicals of the extreme right? Existing evaluations of “Working India” do not seem to consider this question. Buschak, despite his more cautious analysis of Furtwängler’s ideas elsewhere, celebrates “Working India” as a work of Saidian anti-Orientalism *avant le lettre*,⁹⁵ while Manjapra believes that Furtwängler “embraced Marxist Orientalism” as he conceived of Gandhi as the “model leader of labor struggle and spiritual renewal”.⁹⁶ A close examination of Furtwängler’s writings on India, I argue, does not support either of these sweeping, seamless characterizations and reveals, instead, a deeply disturbing inconsistency that exceeds standards of intellectual conflictedness in less polarised historical periods. This inconsistency had consequences: it was the very eclecticism of the text, the randomness and irreconcilability of the ideological registers the authors of “Working India” chose to combine, that opened up possibilities for divergent interpretations and also for communication across the bloody political trenches of the time.

This volume presents, for the first time, an English translation of a substantial part of “Das werktätige Indien”, which may be most relevant to those interested in Indian labour history and in the history

of trade union internationalism. But this partial translation may, once again, tend to generate an exaggerated impression of consistency, for it is particularly in the first, untranslated part, which Haushofer praised so emphatically, that conflicting lines of argument are most visible. Moreover, two subsequent publications, in which Furtwängler elaborated further on the experiences and findings of the delegation, provide a wider context to “Working India” and refer us to the complexities of interwar-period trade union internationalism. The first of these subsequent publications bears a curious and unlikely but, as we shall see, significant title for a personal account of a trade union study tour of India’s industrial districts: “Indien: Das Brahmanenland im Frühlicht” (“India: Brahmin country in the morning light”) was published by the trade union book club Büchergilde Gutenberg in 1931. Two years earlier, Furtwängler’s lecture on “Die weltwirtschaftliche Konkurrenz des indischen Industriearbeiters” (“The competition of the Indian industrial worker in the world market”) at the Handels-Hochschule Leipzig, at the time a leading German institute for the study of the world economy, had been published as a booklet. Together, these publications bring out more clearly the various notions and premises that informed this peculiar German trade union perspective on India. In these writings, Furtwängler (and his co-author) may have given in to a temptation that few intellectuals feel inclined to resist even in our own time: the urge to be recognized by a wide and respectable audience, the accompanying wish to please everyone may have toned down the effort to maintain a stringency of argument even in regard to politically explosive categories such as race, class, caste or nation. In the final analysis, we cannot penetrate the authors’ motivations, of course, but we can trace the ruptures in their writings.

“Das werktätige Indien” was remarkable, as I have argued before, in that it did not take up the tropes of the “racial management” discourse of the time and resisted a naturalization of productivity differentials between India and Western Europe. Hence

neither climate nor race were accepted as the key “factors” responsible for the fact that weaving looms were manned much more heavily in Indian textile mills than in their German or British counterparts. Schrader and Furtwängler instead highlighted social issues: poor health conditions, inadequate skilling facilities, low wages permitting other forms of labour deployment.⁹⁷ They quoted railway workshops, the Tata steel works in Jamshedpur and the Bengal engineering industry as evidence for the potential of raising labour “efficiency” in India through improved skill and living standards.⁹⁸ However, race was not entirely absent in the writings and “slipped in” in the form of standard orientalist clichés: “active struggle with nature and human environment” Furtwängler believed to be foreign to “the children of a contemplative Hindu culture” and acquirable only from “the European”.⁹⁹ Notions of essential cultural difference and of a more other-worldly, non-material disposition of “the Indian” were too strongly entrenched in German imaginations of India to be cast aside altogether if the authors were to display their erudition. Hence the essentialist’s standard boxes were ticked even though the trade unionist’s perceptiveness of everyday social conditions made it difficult to rely as much on metaphysical ideas of “spiritual speciation” as Reventlow would have liked.

In addition, notions of a multi-layered racial hierarchy with European races at the top, “primitive” races at the bottom and culturally more or less advanced races ranging somewhere in the middle were not absent in the European labour movement and were reflected, for instance, in the approach of the Socialist International on the 1928 Congress, where their resolution on the colonial question insisted that complete independence was as yet not suitable for less “cultured” peoples.¹⁰⁰ Though Schrader and Furtwängler unequivocally supported Indian independence and ridiculed the idea of tutelage that leading German social democrats defended as much as Ramsay MacDonald’s Labour Party,¹⁰¹ they

did subscribe to notions of racial hierarchy within India and South Asia itself. Hence “primitivity” was ascribed to Adivasi (“tribals”)¹⁰² and, to a less extent, to Dalit (“untouchable”) populations of the subcontinent.¹⁰³ Particularly Furtwängler’s “Brahmanenland im Frühlicht” betrays, here and there, a sense of racial superiority, even a social-Darwinistic, almost gleeful appreciation of the “modernizing” Tata Company’s assertion of the “natural right of the strongest” to grab the land of “the most primitive and culturally impoverished” Adivasis.¹⁰⁴ The “tropical, jungle-like” Dravidians with their “exuberantly proliferating and overheated fantasies”¹⁰⁵ were placed somewhat higher on the racial ladder: they are described in “Working India”—along with the “Aryans” and in distinction to the Adivasis—as “bearers of Indian culture”. However, “[w]here the Dravidians accepted the Brahmanical Hindu religion under the influence and by mixing with the Aryans, they have blunted and coarsened its intellectuality” while the “Aryans” were of “light skin colour and have developed the highest culture through their upper caste, the Brahmins”.¹⁰⁶

The conceptual triangle of class, nation and caste allowed for further ambiguities and contradictions. The concern of German and British trade unionists that had led to the joint delegation to India in 1926/27, i. e. the fear of Indian cheap textiles flooding European markets, was more or less brushed aside by Schrader and Furtwängler as a limited problem that had to be faced and was, on the whole, manageable¹⁰⁷—probably a realistic assessment since India’s cotton textile industry, protected by the customs policies of the 1920s from East Asian competition, mainly catered to an expanding domestic market and was much less oriented towards export.¹⁰⁸ While issues of industrial “locational advantage” were thus less important for their argument, economic “national interest” entered the narrative on a different route: British trade policies that continued to obstruct German imports into India and were possible

only under colonial conditions were identified as a factor that held back economic prosperity in both countries. Schrader and Furtwängler imagined that the bandwidth of industrial commodities produced even in an India unfettered by colonial policies would remain limited in the foreseeable future, but that improved living standards would then create a market for imported industrial goods other than textiles from Germany. Arguments in “Working India” like these rather than the examination of Indian trade unionism would have induced nationalist and fiercely anti-British academics like Ernst Schultze, the Director of the Handels-Hochschule Leipzig, to invite Furtwängler for lectures.¹⁰⁹

The category of the nation, and specifically of the *cultural* nation, had even greater centrality, however, in Schrader and Furtwängler’s depiction of India. They had travelled to the subcontinent as trade unionists, were unimpressed by the level of organization of most Indian trade unions but admired the commitment of the labour activists they met¹¹⁰; they were appalled by the sight of living conditions they associated not with the working class of the present but with an early capitalism of the past¹¹¹; a socialist internationalism reaching back to the pre-war period facilitated an openness to engage with social and political difference. Furtwängler had travelled Western Europe as a journeyman: he felt deep respect for socialist leaders of other countries like Jean Jaures and valued the ability to communicate with them in languages other than his own.¹¹² In preparing for the journey, his wish to communicate directly with Indian workers had induced him to study Hindustani though, as it turned out, not enough to do so without a translator. This openness also implied their resolution, insisted upon repeatedly in “Working India” and subsequent writings, not to apply European parameters to Indian phenomena that needed to be understood, they believed, on their own terms.¹¹³ This turned them into remarkably sharp observers and has given their accounts lasting value. But this

openness to difference was also expressed in the ideological frames that were circulated most widely at the time, and these were the frames of cultural essentialism, i. e. of *absolute* cultural difference, and “nation” served, along with “race”, as the key receptacle of essentialist identity. For Furtwängler, the World War had ultimately established the primacy of national identity: in Germany where the War and even more so the subsequent French occupation of the Ruhr had converted even the least nationalist¹¹⁴ as also among the “peoples of Asia, the fully as well as half-colonized, who henceforth accepted nationalism as the yardstick for their value as a people [völkische Wertgeltung]”.¹¹⁵

Hence the difference of India, and of India’s workers, was looked at consistently through nationalist shades: Gandhi, in particular, was perceived as having succeeded in appealing to the “soul”, to the deeper essence of the Indian nation.¹¹⁶ “Brahmanic Hinduism” was, moreover, credited to be the “carrier of culture”, that “great element, which protected the Indian people from decay through the centuries”.¹¹⁷ “Völkisch” was thus not only a regular part of the vocabulary of Furtwängler’s writings, it was also used in the sense of organicist nativism, of nation as an organic entity hinging on cultural purity, which was at the core of the emerging ideological hegemony of the far right in Germany. Gandhian forms of political mobilization were, in this narrative, naturalized whereas communism, for instance, was asserted to be politically largely irrelevant since it was alien to the Indian “soul”.¹¹⁸ The central category of India’s organic essence and soul was *caste*, however, according to “Working India” and even more so to Furtwängler’s subsequent book. It is in regard to caste that the writings are least coherent, that inconsistencies are most glaring.

On the one hand, we find a strong indictment of caste discrimination and especially of practices of untouchability.¹¹⁹ This is often accompanied, however, with the assertion that these are

remnants of the past that were about to disappear: modern life, particularly urban and industrial living conditions, are associated with this change but also reform initiatives from “above”, those of Gandhi and of Baroda’s Maharaja Sahajirao Gaekwad III being emphasized in particular.¹²⁰ In the same vein, Furtwängler and his co-author claim that caste discrimination has been overcome largely both in the trade union and the national movements,¹²¹ while conflicts between the Indian National Congress and Dalit leaders like Ambedkar, so conspicuous at the time, do not find any mention. On the other hand, there is also a strong endorsement of caste, which may well reflect that many of Furtwängler’s Indian interlocutors were Brahmins, those of Pune leaving perhaps the strongest impression on him.¹²² Caste is then also represented, in a classical orientalist manner, as the essence of Indian culture that had upheld, from times immemorial, the morality and coherence of communities in the (presumed) absence of regulatory statehood.¹²³ This notion is further developed into a peculiar trade-union culturalism: “Strike, boycott, passive resistance under the names of ‘hartal’ and ‘satyagraha’, made known to us by Gandhi, are not to Indians a product of the mind [Gesinnungsprodukt] from an imported ‘marxist’ world, but ancient expressions of their collective life that is organized through caste”.¹²⁴ In the course of strikes, wrote Furtwängler, “all the instincts of the ancient collective life of caste” were awakened.¹²⁵ Moreover, referring to more recent eugenic ideology, caste is also presented as a device to secure “racial hygiene”.¹²⁶ The author’s avowed socialism is here curiously replaced by an admiration of quasi-aristocratic qualities of Brahmanical lifestyles. Brahmins are represented as the bearers and preservers of essential Indian culture, while “untouchables” could only abandon, to some extent, their cultural lowliness by way of imitation.¹²⁷ Furtwängler was impressed, in particular, with the aristocratic demeanour of mill owner and shipping tycoon Narottam Morarji – “that lissome, prudent

Brahman of ancient quality” “whose facial features indicated the spiritual energy of a catholic prince of the church” and whose actions never ceased to be informed by an inbred “will to power”. His admiration for the nobility of this “Brahmin Croesus” culminated in his approving observation that, as a guest in the businessman’s house, he had been served his food by a Dalit while “a high one, an equal”, i. e. a Brahmin, took care of the host.¹²⁸ Furtwängler displayed the social democrat’s foundational distaste for the “Junker” gentry at home while simultaneously bowing deeply before an “oriental”, spiritually elevated nobility. This may well have resonated not only with the orientalist common sense of the period but also with the Nietzschean contempt for the masses and with the craving for a neo-aristocratic revival of hierarchy, which was so common among Germany’s educated classes at the time. This double resonance may well have facilitated Furtwängler’s access to circles of Berlin’s and Munich’s right-wing intelligentsia.

If Schrader and Furtwängler’s writings on Indian labour thus met with an extremely uneven reception at the time of their publication, they were to fail altogether in having a lasting impact on European views of India or Indian labour. The books would soon be forgotten and not merely because they were published by labour movement organizations that were banned by the Hitler government a few years later. The curious combination of open sympathy with Indian nationalism in its Gandhian form with a German cultural nationalism with strong undertones of revanchism may well have prevented the translation into English of “Das werktätige Indien” and even more so of Furtwängler’s subsequent writings on India. Not only British Labourites would have found this stance at odds with their “labour imperialism”, but even German Social Democrats were distinctly uneasy about Furtwängler’s prose, which one of them described as “a mixture of German nationalism, sympathy for Indian nationalism and communist world revolution phraseology concealed by stylistic brilliance”.¹²⁹ Cultural essentialism and anti-bolshevism might have

been identified as further ingredients to this heady mix, which were likely to further reduce the readership of these writings among the left, both in Germany and abroad.

There was certainly more to “Das werktätige Indien”, as has been pointed out before. While the Royal Commission on Labour in India would produce an impressive corpus of data only a couple of years later, some of Furtwängler and Schrader’s analyses, specifically that of Indian trade unionism, were clearly not superseded. But German writings from a trade union perspective would not have been available in Germany after Hitler’s accession to power, while Furtwängler’s well-known, controversial and close engagement with the extreme right in the early 1930s made him suspect among antifascist exiles. We have seen that his expertise on India opened employment perspectives with the German Foreign Office in 1940. The complexity of this context would merit closer scrutiny than the existing literature has offered: a circle of elite civil servants plotting against Hitler were, at the same time, trying to convince the Nazi regime, abortively as it turned out, to continue policies developed in imperial Germany during the previous World War—policies of supporting Indian nationalism with the strategic aim of weakening the British Empire.

The second half of the 1940s changed the international arena fundamentally: the defeat of Nazi Germany, the independence of India, the decline of the British Empire, the rise of the USA to the leadership of the “West” and the beginning of the Cold War implied a new political constellation. While Furtwängler resurfaced on the public stage as a social democratic parliamentarian and trade union intellectual in the early Federal Republic of Germany, he did not resume his position as an “India expert”.¹³⁰ The international policies of German trade unions do not appear to have reconnected to the exploratory approaches of the 1920s: Furtwängler’s time of widely publicized international trade union delegations was, perhaps, over.

The new forms of engagement that were developed in the shadow of the Cold War lie, however, beyond the scope of this article.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Karl Müller-Bahlke, Maria Pomohaci and Ashwin Subramanian for their thorough work as research assistants. All translations from originally German texts are mine.
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- 14 See e. g. Brij Narain, “The Indian Tariff”, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* 19 (1923): 168 – 175 or idem, “Indian Exchange and Currency during 1920”, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv* 17 (1921/22): 67 – 73.
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- 24** Theodor Ficker, *Exportieren oder Untergehen* (Leipzig: Gesellschaft für Exportorganisation, 1932).
- 25** See Aditya Sarkar, *Trouble at the Mill. Factory Law and the Emergence of Labour Question in Late Nineteenth-Century Bombay* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

- 26 Cf. Ravi Ahuja, “A Beveridge Plan for India? Social Insurance and the Making of the ‘Formal Sector’”, *International Review of Social History* 64/2 (2019), 215.
- 27 *Report on an Inquiry into the Wages and Hours of Labour in the Bombay Cotton Mill Industry* (Bombay: Labour Office, 1923); *Report on an Inquiry into Working-class Budgets in Bombay* (Bombay: Labour Office, 1923).
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- 29 A.R. Burnett-Hurst, *Labour and Housing in Bombay* (London: P.S. King, 1925).
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- 40** Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*, 13.
- 41** Franz Josef Furtwängler, “Die weltwirtschaftliche Konkurrenz des indischen Industriearbeiters,” in *Weltwirtschaftliche Vorträge und Abhandlungen*, Heft 4 (Leipzig: Deutsche Wissenschaftliche Buchhandlung, 1929). See also A. Nobel, “Technik und Verkehr in Indien” in *Indien in der modernen Weltwirtschaft und Weltpolitik*, ed. E. Wunderlich (Stuttgart: Fleischhauer & Spohn, 1931), 67 – 69.
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- 111 Furtwängler and Schrader, *Das werktätige Indien*, 189 f and *passim*; Furtwängler, “Die weltwirtschaftliche Konkurrenz”, 43; Furtwängler, *Brahmanenland im Frühlicht*, 49.
- 112 Cf. Buschak, *Franz Josef Furtwängler*, 18 – 20.
- 113 See for instance Furtwängler, *Brahmanenland im Frühlicht*, 184.
- 114 Buschak, *Franz Josef Furtwängler*, 236; see also *ibid.*, 98 f. The Ruhr Occupation (1923 – 25) had evoked a particularly violent nationalist mobilization against a purported “black shame” – the main complaint being that large parts of the French occupation forces were African soldiers. This racist campaign was supported by most political forces in Germany with the exception of the far left. Cf. Iris Wigger, *Die “Schwarze Schmach am Rhein”. Rassistische Diskriminierung zwischen Geschlecht, Klasse, Nation und Rasse* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2007). Furtwängler clearly referred to this campaign when he claimed, in an article published in 1930, that the Versailles

- Treaty had established a “hegemony of Negro-Gaul over the new Europe”. Cf. Buschak, *Franz Josef Furtwängler*, 119.
- 115** Furtwängler, *Brahmanenland im Frühlicht*, 204.
- 116** Ibid., 80.
- 117** Ibid., 106.
- 118** See, for instance, Furtwängler, *Brahmanenland im Frühlicht*, 72 – 74, 80 – 81.
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Appendix: Indian Workers’ Delegates at Sessions of the International Labour Conference, 1920 – 1929

Session	Delegate	Advisers
Second Session, Geneva, June 15 – July 10 1920	A.M. Mazarello (President Asiatic Seamen's Union, Bombay)	Bhika Ahmed, Lascar Serang Habiboola Elhamdeen, Fireman Serang
Third Session, Geneva, October 25 – November 19 1921	N.M. Joshi	B.P. Wadia
Fourth Session, Geneva, October 18 – November 3 1922	N.M. Joshi	–
Fifth Session, Geneva, October 22 – 29 1923	K.C. Roy Chowdury	–
Sixth Session, Geneva, June 16 – July 5 1924	Joseph Baptista	–
Seventh Session, Geneva, May 19 1925	N.M. Joshi	Diwan Chaman Lall
Eighth Session, Geneva, May 26 – June 5 1926	Lala Lajpat Rai	–
Ninth Session, Geneva, June 7 – June 24 1926	M.M. Daud	S. Moghal Jan
Tenth Session, Geneva, May 25 – June 16 1927	V.V. Giri	G. Sethi
Eleventh Session, Geneva, May 30 – June 16 1928	Diwan Chaman Lall	Mahbubul Huq P.C. Bose R.R. Bakhale (Secretary)
Twelfth Session, Geneva, May 30 – June 21 1929	N.M. Joshi	B. Shiva Rao V.R. Kalappa Abdul Matin Chowdhury G. Sethi

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