

Chapter III

Workers' Resistances in the Indian Railways: 1845 to 1973

In this chapter we will look at the nature of workers' resistances in Indian railways since the early phase of the establishment of the railways in colonial India till the strike of May 1974. An attempt has been made to analyse the causes of the grievances of the railway working class in the colonial period and even during the post independence period till early 1974. Workers' grievances were responsible for their resistances against the authority. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section has dealt with the workers' resistances during the colonial period till independence, i.e., from 1845 to 1946. In the second section we focus our attention to the nature and type of the trade union activities in the railway industry since independence till 1974.

I

Railway Workers' Resistances in the Colonial Era

In this section we have tried to find out the reasons behind the grievances of the workers' in the railway industry and analyse whether these resistances were a conscious effort or a spontaneous action against their employers. In India the process of industrialisation began with the establishment of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1853 the first engines of change had moved but the process of building the railways had started in 1845. Most of the studies in this area analyse the workers' movement through the lense of traditional model of trade unions. But one must talk about the various forms of collective actions of the workers for a better understanding of the background of trade union movement in the country. This would lead to a study of the history of trade union movement in the Indian Railways.

Interestingly the mid nineteenth century's workers' resistance was the product of their own time and circumstances. Throughout the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century's organised trade union movement was not noticed. During the period of early industrialisation, workers' resistance was mostly unorganised, unconscious, and sporadic and many a times they were silent efforts of the workers. The establishment of the railway industry in the colonial era gave birth to a new class of proletariat in the country – the railway working class. Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of people of the country into workers. The mass was therefore, obviously a class against the capital, but not yet for itself (Dasgupta, 1996; p.27). In the struggle they became united with some interests, which ultimately turned them into a class interest.

The construction and maintenance program of the railway industry provided larger facilities particularly employment facilities to the skilled and unskilled workers and produced an excellent alternative employment to the agriculturalists in the times of bad harvest (Mast, 1969; p.1). Peculiarly in India the landless labourers, tribals, peasants etc became the industrial workers. The unique feature of the early industrial labourers of India was semi proletariat who were semi agricultural and thus, a bit complex type. Excessive brutal exploitations and deprivation by the colonial rulers created impediments towards the formation and consolidation of industrial workers as a class. Sen had nicely explained the scenario in a manner that in such a vast country like India with enormous diversity of language, culture, religious belief and social custom, the mass migration from one province to another and permanent settlement in an altogether different environment gave rise to certain peculiar problems in the formation of the Indian working class and its movement (Sen, 1997; p.29). Labour historians said that in the Indian scenario the emergence and rise of proletariat class itself could be considered as the first type of workers' resistance. In the mid nineteenth century this new proletarian class had to depend on the sale of their own labour for survival. And they took up permanent, temporary or contract waged labour. The number of these wage labourers had increased tremendously within a few years of industrialisation. And the employee and the employer relationship in Indian industries were never harmonious. The process of labour sold and bought was at the same time obstructive and antagonistic. The tendency of the capitalist process was to maximise the works through tremendous exploitation of labour with minimum wages. Two private British companies

e.g., the East India Railway Company and Great Indian Peninsular Railway Company were formed in England and began the construction of railways in 1845. The Great Revolt or the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had increased the speed of railway construction works. In the railway front immense exploitation and oppression and deprivation led the workers to resist their counter consciously or unconsciously. From the very beginning of the construction of railways collective actions by the workers started taking place. But one cannot claim that these unrests were the conscious and vigorous attempts of protests by the workers towards the capitalist system or the authority but they were mostly unorganised and sporadic. Unwillingness or reluctance to work was also a kind of protest against the industrialisation process. Many a times it was noticed that a bulk of workers worked in one worksite and during the harvesting season they went to their villages and did not come back again. Sometimes workers refused to work in a particular work field repeatedly and exited the place and joined some other construction sites. Characteristically Indian workers were a nit complex type, because those who had joined and participated in the industries, such as landless agricultural labourers, had strong bondage to their villages and never became full time permanent workers. In the early period of railway building the earth works – digging or rock moving in the railways were mainly done by these types of workers. The village power holders were asked to supply the lower caste and tribal people to perform these works. They agreed to take district wise contract to engage these types of labourers in the construction industries. Resistances emerged in many forms some could almost be termed as complete ‘inaction’ to direct action, sometimes violent actions from crude or indistinct attempt to control a work process. Sometimes the workers showed the grievances vehemently in an immediate forceful response to the brutal supervisors (Kerr, 1997; p. 170). Most of the times it happened that half the amount of the promised wages was disbursed or all the wages became arrears in months. In 1859 at the construction worksite of Bhore Ghat incline, when similar types of situation arose, the angry workers attacked the European contractors and as a result the armed guards arrested the gang leader and repressed the workers heavily. Interestingly one of the European supervisors found dead while he was alone wandering away from the construction site and not escorted by the armed forces. More surprisingly, it was reported that none was found guilty because none of the coolies had admitted the crime and opened their mouth against anyone. Within 1860-79 more than four lakhs workers were employed every year for constructing the railways in colonial period. In early 1860s in Trichinopoly district and in the East Bengal

Railway workers did not work for several days for rising the rates of earth works. Thus it can be said that this section of the railway workforce was the most advanced and progressive form of organised industrial labour of nineteenth century India. The most fascinating feature of the railway workforce was its various types of works involving numerous works – skilled to unskilled. Thus varied forms of protests and resistance had cropped up and the workers were exposed to several types of adversities and stresses of the process of capitalist development and advance industrialisations. The most important causes of workers' resistance were:

- a) Problems relating to payment of wages, and;
- b) Demand for higher wages.

Railway construction workers had to work and stay in a very difficult and highly inconvenient atmosphere. The work sites, especially the construction of bridges, tunnels inclines etc. were very dangerous, risky, disease prone, violent and lawless and thus tough to live in those places. In this environment the workers had suffered from delay or irregular payments and most of the time got lesser wages than what had been promised. Kerr had noticed that the railway workers in the Bengal-Bihar region were more developed and aware of their deprivations. He referred to an incident e.g. the way maintenance gang men in the Calcutta and South Eastern Railways demonstrated and agitated against their employer and went on strike in 1877 because their wages were lower than similar workers than the Eastern Bengal Railways (Kerr, 1985; p. PE 37). In 1890s several incidents took place where the railway workers especially the coolies and earth workers were forced to work in hot days but starved due to non- payment of wages. The European contractors had the tendency of not paying the full amount of promised wages promptly. Another factor which existed in the railway front during the colonial rule was that employment was made purely on the basis of race and community. British Railway Companies never wanted any type of disorder among the construction workers hence they always tried to create a cleavage among them. Therefore, the worst type of division and distinction among the workers persisted in the railway front and this division continued even after independence. They did not emphasise on the performance or functions of the workers but basically employment was made under community consideration. The racial discrimination between the Europeans and Eurasian on

the one hand and the Indians on the other again aggrieved the situation. Kerr calculated that the permanent workforce those employed on continuing basis by the open (operating) lines numbered some 18,000 in 1860, 15,108 in 1880 and 338,041 in 1900 (Kerr, 1985; p. PE 36). The contrasting character of the railway working class generated various problems such as, wage differences, their grading system, different rules and regulation systems etc. Interestingly the British employers consistently encouraged the discrimination among the workers to carry on the construction process smoothly. In this way the railway authority kept on dividing the workers which ultimately affected the growth of collective resistance of the railway workers. It ultimately led to fragmentation and weakening the process of combined and conscious protest of the workers on the one hand and strengthening the hands of the capitalists on the other. Interestingly prior to 1900s most of the united protests came from the European and Eurasian mainly for wage increase. For united action Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was formed in 1874 in India which provided a platform for voicing the resentments of these railway workers. In the mid 1870s using this platform these European and Eurasian protested against the Great Indian Peninsular Railways for increase of their payments but these communities hardly encouraged the Indians to join with them for collection causes. In the late 1990 guards, signallers, station masters struck against the management but this action was suppressed with heavy hands e.g. the men were dismissed from service; forced to vacate their quarters on disciplinary ground and most of them were not taken back to service again. The reason behind the failure of this struggle was basically the factors relating to the sentiment of caste and communities. This was one of the weapons in the hands of the railway authority to meet any kind of workers' agitations.

Railway working class, from its inception appeared to be militant in character. Some Indian tribes were famous for their rebelliousness and confrontation who used to assault their European supervisors frequently even on petty issues. Moreover, mass departure from worksite, unwillingness to work or refusal or independent working were the various forms of protests provided during the earlier phase of railway building in India specially up to 1900s. Immense labour unrests were proliferating in different shapes and size in this period. In April-May 1862, twelve hundred labourers of Howrah Station took part in the strike on the demand of eight hour works a day. Not only the transport industry, Railways were the first industry in India that were introduced in 1853, thus this strike by a section of the Indian

working class within eight to nine years of the establishment of the industry, was worth-mentioning and had been really a courageous step. (Sen, 1887; p.71). Railway workers had really practical causes for protest, it was hard to bear the harsh working and living conditions; rules and regulations and disciplinary measures were repressive and brutal. Another significant feature was noticed in the nature of railway workers' resistance that the intermingling of swadeshis or nationalists with that the railway workers. In 1905 huge public agitation took place in Bengal Presidency as the Bengalis immensely opposed the decision of 'Partition of Bengal' for administrative reasons and divided it into two units. When the swadeshi movement began against the decision of partition of Bengal, the nationalists attacked the railways as the railways became the symbol of the colonial ruler, thus a few trains were bombed and also the railway network was disturbed, railroad workers were motivated and started ventilating their grievances with great enthusiasm and utilised nationalist sentiment in a series of strikes by railroad workers (Kerr, 2013; p.9). All these incidents of struggle and protest of the workers led to the formation of formal trade unions in the railway front. The nationalist struggle of 1905-08 had extensively provided the necessary impetus to the emergence of the formal railway trade unions. Workers perceived that if they did not get organised, their resentments will remained unheard and unresolved. Several reasons were responsible for the workers' to get organised, e.g. the extremely low wages paid to native workers, racial discrimination and immoderate duty hours and above all the mis-behaviour of the Anglo Indian or European supervisors were another reason which ignited the railway workers immensely, but the root cause of instigation in the movement came from the nationalists freedom fighters which swept the country from 1905-08 (Chakraborty, 1987; p.8).

A prominent railway workers struggle took place in East Indian Railways in 1906 which was reviewed as an action that had taken place due to the political agitation in the country, i.e. wave of the swadeshi movement. Interestingly all the native railway workers had joined the strike and from Howrah to Asansol and Burdwan all the segments of railway industry remained closed for a couple of days. Railway services in this area became standstill. The demands of this strike were (i) higher pay, (ii) improved working conditions, (iii) abolition of racialism and (iv) the workers demanded for replacing the word "native" by "Indians" which they considered as derogatory (Sen, 1997; p.86). This action was highly

organised and united. But the authority was successful in suppressing the strike struggle. This was the first strike that was directly connected with the nationalist movement. Although the strike had failed to secure its success but it led to the formation of the first Indian Trade Union – The East Indians Railway Employees’ Union. A large number of railway workers enrolled themselves as the members of this Union. The primary task of this union was to support the workers’ cause. In 1906 this union had organised a strike in Jamalpur workshop and it impacted the countrywide collective struggle in 1907 onwards. Decline in economic condition, heavy workload etc. compelled the railwaymen to resist their employer from exploiting them. Employees working in the big railway workshops had developed a tendency of hostility against the exploitative attitude of the authority. Sukomal Sen commented that three thousand railway workers engaged in the workshops at Bombay struck work on 1st May 1907, the strike lasted for over a week and the workers had joined their duty after winning some concession (Sen, 1997; p. 91). In Southern Railway several collective action were taken during this period. All were not so organised most of them were sporadic and purely localised. But in Perambur Workshop repeated action by the railway employees from 1911 to 1918 indicated a consistency in labour movement in this region. Though none of the demands got fulfilled but they took brave steps to form a union. In 1919 the Madras and Southern Marhatta Railway Union, Madras was founded (Sen, 1997; p. 139).

The Royal Commission of Labour which was set up in the year 1929, in India reported in 1931 that many railway trade unions were formed between, 1919-21 (Fernandes, 1984; p.19). Bombay-Baroda and Central Indian Railway, Ahmedabad and North Western Railway Union, Great India Peninsular Staff Union, Kanchrapara Workshop Union etc. came into existence during this time. The memberships of the trade unions were mandatory merely in this context we must mention about All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which was the first national level trade union of the Indian working class which emerged in 1920. The AITUC provided necessary strength to the workers in many segments of the Indian industries to organise themselves in a more stronger way. However, almost two hundred strikes took place within mid 1020s e.g., the Burma Railway Workers strike in February 1921, East Bengal Railway Workers strike in June 1921, five thousand railway workers in Lucknow struck in 1921 for almost three months, In Toondla, Bareilly

Workshop, Rohilkhand etc. struggles were also launched. In 1923-24 workers of Bengal and North Western Railways led a number of strikes. Expressing of discontent and unrest of the workers necessitated more organised, all India basis co-ordinate effort and actions. Therefore, measures were taken to unite all these unions into one platform. And All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) was founded in June, 1925 and its first General Council's meeting was held at Nagpur. All the small railway unions of the country now started getting affiliated to it. Sherlock had noticed that the affiliates to the AIRF were politically diverse including Congressmen (many became Congress Socialists later), followers of M.N. Roy and Communists (Sherlock, 2002, p. 41). It provided a greater feeling of solidarity among the workers. The six major strikes that were reported in 1925 on the Indian Railways resulted in a total loss of 8, 24,032 man days (Fernandes, 1984; p. 21). Therefore these organised struggles got involved and mingled with the nationalist movement of the country. As a result, the Trade Union Act 1926 came into force. In 1927 the most prominent of all the struggles was the strike of Bengal Nagpur Railway Workers in Kharagpur. The reason behind the action was the authorities decision of retrenchment of the workers. Government resorted to terror to crush the strike. Police and armed forces were used to suppress the workers' action, they faced immense torture. But all the wings of trade unions supported the strike action and all sections of people and nationalist also expressed their solidarity. In 1938 at Liluah, East India Railway Workers' struggle and South Indian Railway Workers' strike were also noteworthy. In January 1928 the employees of some departments of East India Railway (EIR) put forward certain demands which were:

1. that the pay of the unskilled workers should be doubled and that their minimum wage should be fixed at Rs. 30/- per month;
2. that the wages of the skilled workers be increased by 25 percent in order to equalise them with the labour and Lucknow State Railway Workshops;
3. that the two men of the 'M' shop dismissed on the 16th February reinstated (Karnik, 1967; p. 206).

And when the authority dismissed another four workers on the ground of the disorderly behaviour, all the workers refused to work and went on peaceful Satyagraha. This

movement immediately spread over the entire Howrah region. In 1930 G.I.P. Railway workers struck on the demands of:

1. wage of increase;
2. stopping of dismissal;
3. illegal transfer;
4. victimisation; and
5. Stopping retrenchment (Sen, 1997; p.226).

This strike got widespread response on the one hand and the authority took every step to crush it on the other. In 1932 in Perambur Workshop several workers were retrenched. In this case the AIRF tried to resolve the matter, but the authority decided to go for wage cut of the employees, instead of retrenchment. Workers did not agree with this proposal and went on strike in the month of October 1932 which ended in January 1933. This strike was not an unorganised one, AIRF issued strike notice and estimated that minimum six hundred stations would become the strike centres. They held regular meetings and planned to make the struggle successful. The administration remained stubborn and cautious besides remaining stubborn, the administration also resorted to pressure tactics (Krishna, 1980; p. 17). After the withdrawal of the strike a large number of workers were dismissed. According to Narshima Reddy the ruthless action of the management created a scar among the workers, they were afraid of joining the union and paying the subscription; it was a severe blow to the union movement and the membership of the M and SMREU dropped from 32,000 in 1932 to 800 in 1933 (Reddy, 1980; p. 1622). The history of the working class movement in the railway workshops in India in the early twentieth century was quite interesting because the moderate trade union leadership never utilised the workers' potentialities to bring any social or economic change in their life. They also failed to foster consciousness among the working class or headed any large scale mobilisation of the railway workforce. As an industrial enterprise the railway workshop employees never achieved prestige or obtained any privilege. Therefore, they stood together and emerged as a new type of industrial labour apprehending solidarity in colonial India.

Employment in the Railway Workshops of Lahore, 1870 – 1960

| Approximate date | Approximate numbers of employees |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1870 | 1,000 |
| 1880 | 2,000 |
| 1890 | 2,500 |
| 1906 | 4,500 |
| 1911 | 7,000 |
| 1916 | 10,000 |
| 1925 | 10,600 |
| 1929 | 12,200 |
| 1960 | 18,000 |

Source: Kerr, 2007; p. 250.

During 1930-31 the total number of workers in the railway stood at 781,859 which during the next financial year came down to 730,290, this meant a reduction of 51,569 workers (Sen, 1997; p. 289). This happened because of mass retrenchment of workers by the authority which claimed that economic depression led them to take this decision. Therefore industrial disputes also touched its peak during this time. Labour disputes were observed not only in the railway industry but in almost all the sectors like cotton and textile, jute mills, post and telegraphs etc. The following table has clarified the scenario.

Labour Disputes 1931-1936

| Year | No.of Disputes | No. of Workers | No. of Working days lost |
|------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1931 | 166 | 203,008 | 2,408,123 |
| 1932 | 118 | 128,099 | 1,922,437 |
| 1933 | 146 | 164,938 | 2,168,961 |
| 1934 | 159 | 220,808 | 4,775,559 |
| 1935 | 145 | 114,217 | 973,457 |
| 1936 | 157 | 169,029 | 2,358,662 |

Source: Sen, 1997; p. 291

Sukomal Sen reported that in 1936, a biggest strike of colonial era had taken place in B.N. Railways where twenty-six thousand and five hundred workers had participated in the strike and it started on 13th December and ended on 10th February, lasted for almost two months. As a result of which a huge number of man days were lost in the Indian Railways. Prolonged talks were convened between the railway management and the labour unions but they were unable to yield any fruit for the workers. It resulted into the huge dropout of union membership hence the unions met an unbelievable challenge. Again after 1938, the membership base had increased and an unexpected rise in number was noticed before the Second World War. Years preceding the Second World War saw a huge fall in real earnings, price rise, anti labour policy of the government, imprisonment of most of the nationalist leaders and other economic problems. In this situation World War II broke out in 1939 and the Indian workforce especially the railway workers faced tremendous hardship. The working class of the country became a silent observer. To please the workers, the government started seeking suggestions from the AIRF leadership relating to the matters of railwaymen. A series of strike struggles were launched by the leaders during the war years along with the line of nationalists i.e. Quite India Movement of 1942. These resulted into the consolidation of the railway workers at all levels. The membership of the railway unions which was 2, 44,771 at the beginning of the war in 1939 reached 3, 04,486 in 1945 at the end of the war (Fernandes, 1984; p.23). The number of general trade unions had gradually increased in the Indian scenario along with its membership base. The following table showed this trend:

| Year | Trade Unions | Membership |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1927-28 | 29 | 1,00,619 |
| 1935-36 | 420 | 3,90,312 |
| 1947-48 | 2,766 | 16,62,929 |

Source: Karnik, 1967; p. 25

The colonial rulers had formulated their labour policy according to the nature and composition of working class in the country. Railway management in colonial era always emphasised the communal consideration for employing the railway workforce in Indian

industries. This was a great weakness of the labour movement of an underdeveloped country like India and the trend was increasingly high at the closing decades of colonial rule. The following table showed the mobilisation of employment during 1936 to 1944.

| Year ending March-April | Europeans | Hindus | Muslims | Anglo-Indians And Domiciled Europeans | Sikhs | Indian Christians | Others |
|--------------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|--|--------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| 1936 | 3,219 | 5,04,977 | 1,55,439 | 13,423 | 8,740 | 16,824 | 9,742 |
| 1937 | 3,121 | 5,04,983 | 1,54,535 | 13,416 | 8,734 | 17,253 | 8,838 |
| 1938 | 2,692 | 4,94,272 | 1,53,794 | 12,843 | 8,114 | 17,311 | 1,597 |
| 1939 | 2,505 | 5,01,243 | 1,54,837 | 13,440 | 7,745 | 17,702 | 1,680 |
| 1940 | 2,333 | 5,06,220 | 1,57,857 | 13,099 | 8,106 | 18,045 | 3,362 |
| 1941 | 2,143 | 5,21,171 | 1,60,912 | 13,239 | 8,503 | 18,758 | 3,373 |
| 1942 | 1,918 | 5,38,840 | 1,72,685 | 12,260 | 8,705 | 20,039 | 3,259 |
| 1943 | 1,833 | 5,87,368 | 1,90,352 | 12,271 | 9,368 | 20,848 | 4,006 |
| 1944 | 1,761 | 6,29,730 | 2,08,190 | 12,262 | 9,397 | 22,212 | 4,504 |

Source: Labour Investigation Committee, Government of India, Delhi, 1946; p.6.

(See: Mast, 1969; p.5).

The leadership in the formal trade unions had attempted to voice the demands and resentment of the industrial workers. They also tried to combine all the associations of the workers and took steps for the attainment of solidarity, so that they could challenge and

confront their employers. But in India the history of trade unionism was the history of fragmentation and alienation throughout the early and mid twentieth century. Not only that the trade unions of this country were formed and shaped on communal basis. The trade unions in the Indian Railway industry were of hierarchical character which was supposed to be the most significant weakness of the trade unions' activities. However, in the dawn of the country's independence Jaya Prakash Narayan (J.P.) became the president of AIRF (1947-1953) who was a dominant leader in the labour movement of the country. In the railways the management and workers relationship was of immense importance because Indian railways employed a large number of workers and most importantly the Government itself here was the employer. Thus, the labour policy of the imperialist ruler must be reoriented in order to strike a balance in the industrial front during the post independent period.

The history of labour movement in Indian Railways can be divided into three phases. But one must mention about the preliminary phase of labour resistance in the country during the early decades of industrialisation process, the preliminary phase 1845 -1896. During this phase the railway workers were not so organised and united. All the struggles were spondaic, localised, scattered and short lived. The movements were noteworthy because the nature of the railway working class from the very beginning was militant and confrontational. A wide range of workers' resistances were seen during this decade and they were quite capable of bringing some concessions from the authority. The struggle of Howrah railway workers in 1860 was noteworthy. Terminologically organised trade union movement was not found at this time.

First Phase: 1896-1918: This period had witnessed a rapid development of railway industry throughout the country and at the same time noticed extensive increase in employment. Labour movements also started taking a united shape. Due to the decision of partition of Bengal in 1905 the railway labour resistances began to intermingle with nationalist struggle for independence and took a solid shape. The First World War (1914-1918) caused enormous hardships for the workers in India. The economic condition of the workers deteriorated further due to steady price rise and shortage of basic commodities. It resulted into enormous increase of labour unrests in every corner of the country.

The steep rise in prices during the First World War is evident from the following table

Movement of Prices during 1914-1918

| Year | Index (Base Year 1914=100) |
|------|----------------------------|
| 1914 | 100 |
| 1915 | 112 |
| 1916 | 128 |
| 1917 | 145 |
| 1918 | 176 |

Source: H.C. Arora and K.R.R. Iyenger,

Long term Growth of National Income in India, 1901-1956, papers on National Income and social topics, Vol. I, Bombay, 1960, p. 214.

(See: Mast, 1969; p. 22).

Large number of big and small strikes like G.I.P. Railways strike, Telegraph Worker' strike, the Bombay Postman's strike, the Nagar Traders' Strike, the strike of the Parel G.I.P. Railway Workshop Workers Strike, Strike of the workers of some Bombay Mills, East India Railway Strike had occurred during this period. Several measures had been taken to develop a general consciousness among the workers to achieve its particular goal. For e.g, the industrial workers in India were too religious which hampered the consolidation of the working class. Moreover, they were superstitious, had huge respects for the higher castes and had faith on certain feudal traditions. Nationalists attempted to generate popular working class consciousness among them, at least the sense that they were the source of economic and political strength of the country. The railway workers were militant but collective and believed in combined action. The major weakness behind developing the advanced working class movement in the country was the consciousness of the working class, ironically Indian railway workers had suffered from the lack of class consciousness. The railway working class launched numerous actions – strikes, go slow, mass sick leave etc. but these were localised, occasional and scattered. The absence of national level recognised trade unions had characterised the first phase of working class movement of Indian Railways.

Second Phase (1919-1929): This period had observed the emergence and growth of trade union movements in India including the railways. The Labour Commission reported that most of the railway unions came into existence during 1919-1921, e.g. the Madras and Southern Maratha Railway Employees' Union, the oldest one was founded in 1919, the North Western Railway Union in 1920, The Eastern Bengal Railway and G.I.P Railways Staff Union in 1921. On the economic perspective, the unstable financial conditions and the rising level of price in India during the World War I and aftermath brought considerable threat to the economic structure of the Indian industries and the conditions of the workers specially the railway workers became worse. In 1925 the AIRF was founded on the background of post-war difficulties. Interestingly in spite of several hindrances the growth and development in the trade unions in the railway front was rapid and was spread over the country. It tried to bring every worker belonging to the railways under one umbrella. Initiatives were taken to organise even the workers in the different workshops, i.e., each and every category of workers were included and the response was outstanding. AIRF was at that point of time the only recognised union, therefore it played quite a promising and effective role in this direction.

Third Phase (1930-1946): Till the end of 1920s the organisation of AIRF was not so strong and could not play any active or positive role in the labour movement in the country. In 1932, first time it tried to negotiate with the Railway Board on the time of retrenchment of the Southern Maratha Railway Employees and ultimately it launched a strike which lasted for almost three months in this region. This period had witnessed some internal disagreements, friction and mismanagement within the unions due to various reasons. The strength of a union could not only be measured by its size and recognition, but also by its organisational strength.

Economic conditions of the workers became more miserable due to the outbreak of World War II in 1939 especially the railways were the most affected industry in the country. The entire railway industry of India was utilised for the purpose of the British war. Railway workshops were turned into the production units of commodities required for war. Railway tracks, wagon, locomotives were also supplied to the Middle East and a bulk of railway employees were sent there. The production of railway industry almost came closure during this time. Shifting duties was introduced in the industries double shift or night-shift became

common. Therefore, the work pressure had enhanced immensely. Thus, the number of accidents grew. Before independence 80 percent of the total railway men were lowly paid or rather lower grades workers. Sukomal Sen had observed that during the worldwide depression the wages of the industrial workers were cut and in 1944 the minimum and maximum wages of the railway workers differed between Rs, 10/- and Rs. 12/- and Rs. 16/- and Rs. 34/- respectively; in 1939, the average yearly income of a railway worker remained at Rs. 541/- only and the amount by which were amplified till the year 1940 was much lower than that in the textile and even in metal industries (Sen, 1997, p. 225). To protect the existing standard of living, the workers had conducted several struggles throughout the country. As a result the industrial workers depended on the trade union in the closing decades of the colonial rule naturally the union membership had grown up. The following table revealed the growth of membership of the unions in different industries.

| Class of Industry | 1937-38 | 1944-45 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Railways and other communications excluding Tramways | 158,068 | 304,486 |
| Tramways | 2,425 | 10,390 |
| Textiles | 69,444 | 210,712 |
| Printing Presses | 6,566 | 13,560 |
| Municipal | 11,698 | 11,928 |
| Seamen | 46,057 | 79,501 |
| Dockyards and Port Trusts | 16,047 | 37,098 |
| Metal and Engineering | 3,505 | 35,513 |
| Miscellaneous | 76,302 | 186,200 |
| Total | 390,112 | 889,388 |

Source: Sen, 1997, p. 348.

At the end of the Second World War the economic and political conditions of the country became feeble hence it affected all sections of the people. Historians were of the opinion that, India's railway development was massive, but the colonial rulers had not assessed that whether this expenditure on the country's economy would have been required or beneficial and whether this proportion had really modernised India's life. The process of the establishment of the railways in India's history however had deeply affected the country's economic life (Thorner, 1955, p. 213). The working class of India played a significant role as an anti-imperialist force in the nationalist struggle of the country. They stood as an organised social strength in the centre of the movement for the transfer of power (Sen, 1997; p.363).

II

Union Movement in the Indian Railways: 1947-1973

In this section of the study we seek to discuss the nature and development of workers' resistances in Indian Railways after independence till 1974. It also looks at the reasons behind the proliferation of the craft based unions in the railway industry. The formation and existence of craft unions had indicated the enormous grievances and discontentment among the workers towards the authority and the recognised trade unions. It might have decided the course of workers' resistances in the railway industry which led to the agitations like the general strike by the Indian Railway men in May 1974. In the previous section we had noticed that the Indian working class had suffered enormously from the exploitations and deprivations since the very beginning of the industrialisation process in India during the colonial rule.

Independence steered immense hope among the working class of the country and they expected a magical end of all miseries and exploitations. But along with this hopefulness there were risks, precariousness, instability and insecurity arising out of partition and economic crisis due to high prices of food grain, scarcity of essential

commodities, large scale retrenchment and unemployment (Dhyani, 1986; p. 45). Independence mainly changed the political scene of the country, i.e., political power had transferred from the British bourgeoisie to Indian bourgeoisie. Indian capitalist land lord and elite classes held the political as well as economic powers of the country hence it was supposed to go against the interests of the working class. Therefore, national liberation was the main purpose and objective of the mass of the people of India in the pre-independence period. To achieve this goal the Indian working class had yet to develop the sense of socialist class consciousness. But Karnik said that the Indian working class was the helpless mass of downtrodden, uprooted from their rural traditions and surroundings and puzzled and bewildered by the new conditions under which they had to work (Karnik, 1967; p.1).

Independence was accompanied with splits in trade unions which resulted into the weakness of workers' collective actions and their consciousness. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was representative of all the working class in India in the eve of independence; it was mainly controlled by the leftists and communists. Few months before independence in May 1947, Congress founded the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). It was the first step towards controlling the workers' movement by the Congress. After independence state's interference in regulating employees and employer's relationship ultimately led to the weakening of growth and maturity of the trade union movement of the country. It also adversely affected the development and consolidation of working class consciousness.

The Planning Commission of India through its first Five Year Plan envisaged that the dignity of the labour and their partnership must be recognised especially in the public sectors. According to the First Five Year Plan, the employer-employee relationship had to be conceived of as partnership in a constructive endeavour to promote the satisfaction of the economic needs of the community in the best possible manner. It also argued in favour of collective bargaining which helped to reach a co-operative settlement on the part of the employers and organised strength of the workers. For rapid industrial growth through proper planning cooperation between trade unions and employers was essential. Not only that the Industrial True Resolution was passed in December 1947 which guaranteed that both the employers and workers tried their best to avoid the use of lockouts, slow-downs strikes etc. tactics to get their demands fulfilled or to resolve any matter, i.e., any party should not

hamper the pace of industrial growth in any ground. Trade unions should be associated with every step of implementing the provisions of the Plan. Both the unions and management had equal responsibilities and significant role to maintain the economic health of the country, improve the productivity of the working class, provide favourable working and living conditions to the industrial workers, ensure social justice etc.

The First Five Plan had reported that the need for maintaining peace in industry and for avoiding interruption of work during the period of implementation of the Plan was obvious and in the interest of national economy, unions and employees should exercise the utmost restraints in this respect (Report of First Five Year Plan, 1957; p. 10). From the above discussion it was clear that the Government tried to interfere in every step of independent decision making power of the working class. The Government had forced the trade unions to depend on authority to solve any problem and to accept the dominating presence of the Government especially in the case of public sectors. According to Sharit Bhowmik the autonomy of trade unions was diluted as they intended to depend on the state to resolve their problems with the employees (Bhowmik, 1996; p. L-39). State tried to manipulate the trade unions to control the workers' activities. The objective behind this attitude was to minimise the possibilities of opposition in the industrial front, although the main purpose of the trade union movement was to eliminate the political, economic and social exploitations. The splits in the trade unions caused further fragmentation of the workers' collective actions. Hind Mazdoor Sabha and United Trade Union Congress were formed in 1949. Then Bhartiya Mazdur Sangh was also formed in 1955 and this trend of splits continued till 1960s at the national and regional levels. However, independence brought along with it some severe malfeasance like huge inflationary crisis, immense rise in prices of daily commodities and fall in real wages. In this situation working class of the country resisted heavily against the state in order to protect its interests.

The workers resorted to several techniques to protest against the management e.g., go slow or gherao, work to rule or strike etc. At that point of time the economic condition compelled the workers to protect their interests in the background of modern industrial complexities. This present study tried to give an account of industrial disputes in private and public sectors which had a considerable effect on the industrial production and caused loss of man days due to work stoppages.

No. of Industrial Disputes resulting in work stoppages, workers involved, man days lost, separately for public and private sectors and average number of workers involved per disputes during 1962-1972.

| Year | No. of Disputes | | | Maximum no. of workers involved | | | Number of man days lost | | | Average no. of workers involved per disputes |
|------|-----------------|---------|-------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|------------|------------|--|
| | Public | Private | Total | Public | Private | Total | Public | Private | Total | |
| 1962 | 177 | 1314 | 1491 | 128,345 | 576,714 | 706,059 | 532,157 | 5,588,419 | 612,0576 | 473 |
| 1963 | 117 | 1354 | 1471 | 67,722 | 495,399 | 563,121 | 277,269 | 2,991,255 | 3,268,524 | 583 |
| 1964 | 254 | 1897 | 2151 | 154,184 | 848,771 | 1,002,955 | 747,393 | 6,977,301 | 7,724,694 | 466 |
| 1965 | 198 | 1637 | 1835 | 102,165 | 888,993 | 991,159 | 704,326 | 5,765,666 | 6,469,992 | 540 |
| 1966 | 345 | 2211 | 2556 | 239,722 | 1,170,334 | 1,410,056 | 1,276,659 | 12,569,670 | 13,846,329 | 552 |
| 1967 | 441 | 2374 | 2815 | 367,550 | 1,122,796 | 1,490,346 | 2,539,774 | 14,608,177 | 17,147,951 | 529 |
| 1968 | 386 | 2390 | 2776 | 433,722 | 1,235,572 | 1,669,294 | 1,971,890 | 15,271,789 | 17,243,679 | 601 |
| 1969 | 389 | 2238 | 2627 | 337,297 | 1,489,569 | 1,826,866 | 1,424,263 | 17,624,025 | 19,048,288 | 695 |
| 1970 | 446 | 2443 | 2889 | 438,562 | 1,389,190 | 1,827,752 | 2,062,214 | 18,501,167 | 20,563,381 | 633 |
| 1971 | 385 | 2367 | 2752 | 363,560 | 1,251,580 | 1,615,140 | 2,253,410 | 14,292,226 | 16,545,636 | 587 |
| 1972 | 538 | 2705 | 3243 | 415,843 | 1,320,894 | 1,736,737 | 3,345,618 | 17,198,298 | 20,543,916 | 536 |

Source: State Labour Departments and Regional Labour Commissioners (Central). Indian Labour Book, Labour Bureau: Ministry of Labour, 1972; p.70.

After independence from 1947 onwards the Central Government led by the Congress had an uninterrupted rule over the country till the late 1970s. During this period it never

allowed the trade Unions to have any separate identity or to have independent decision making power. Interestingly, the trade unions were too much entangled with the management or with the authority hence ignored the main purpose of their existence. They started pleasing the ruling government to remain in its position and became less interested to strengthen its workers' base. Thus, strained industrial relation resulted into un-utilisation of full capacity of industrial and workers' potentials. The following tables had shown the number of man days lost and the causes of disputes during the period 1961 to 1972.

Number of Disputes Resulting in Work-Stoppages, Workers involved and Man days Lost

| | | 1961-1962 | 1966-67 | 1969-70 | 1970-71 | 1972-73 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| A. Total | | | | | | |
| 1. | No. of Disputes | 1,357 | 2,556 | 2,627 | 2,889 | 2,137 |
| 2. | No. of Workers involved ('000) | 512 | 1,410 | 1,827 | 1,828 | 1,227 |
| 3. | Man days lost ('000) | 4,919 | 13846 | 19,048 | 20,563 | 12,750 |
| B. Central Sphere | | | | | | |
| 1. | No. of Disputes | 160 | 315 | 321 | 336 | 425 |
| 2. | No. of Workers involved ('000) | 82 | 204 | 544 | 341 | 351 |
| 3. | Man days lost ('000) | 364 | 928 | 1,783 | 1,689 | 2,936 |
| C.State Sphere | | | | | | |
| 1. | No. of Disputes | 1,197 | 2,241 | 2,455 | 2,291 | 2,464 |
| 2. | No. of Workers involved ('000) | 430 | 1,207 | 1,125 | 1,486 | 1,477 |
| 3. | Man days lost ('000) | 4,555 | 12,918 | 15,460 | 17,351 | 17,627 |

Source: Mehta and Maheswari, 1974; p. 60.

Percentage Distribution of Disputes by Causes

| | Cause | 1961-62 | 1966-67 | 1968-69 | 1969-70 | 1971-72 |
|----|----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1. | Wages and allowances | 30.4 | 35.8 | 38.4 | 36.0 | 37.1 |
| 2. | Bonus | 6.9 | 13.2 | 9.4 | 10.0 | 10.6 |
| 3. | Personnel and Retrenchment | 29.3 | 25.3 | 28.2 | 26.6 | 25.6 |
| 4. | Leave and hours of Work | 3.0 | 2.4 | 1.9 | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| 5. | Indiscipline and Violence | - | - | 3.2 | 3.8 | 3.8 |
| 6. | Others | 30.4 | 23.3 | 18.9 | 21.4 | 20.8 |

Note: The figures on industrial disputes relate to disputes resulting in work stoppages to involving 10 or more workers and are exclusive of political or sympathetic strikes.

Source: Mehta and Maheswari, 1974; p. 61.

In any society the existence and growth of harmonious industrial relations is a pre-requisite for higher productivity and higher growth rate of the economy, moreover, harmonious industrial relation should result in a better deal for labour and gainful employment in order to live with a reasonable level of comfort and dignity (Dutt, 2003; p. 11).

The growth of trade union activities in the national scenario enhanced the membership and during the period of 1947 to 1970 showed a considerable increase in this regard.

Union membership, 1947-1970

| Year | Number of registered unions | Number of members | Percentage change from the preceding year |
|-----------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1947-48 | 2766 | 1662929 | +19.90 |
| 1948-49 | 3150 | 1960107 | +15.16 |
| 1949-50 | 3522 | 1821132 | -7.63 |
| 1950-51 | 3766 | 1756971 | -3.65 |
| 1951-52 | 4623 | 1996311 | +11.99 |
| 1952-53 | 4934 | 2099003 | +4.89 |
| 1953-54 | 6029 | 2112695 | +0.65 |
| 1954-55 | 6658 | 2190450 | +2.71 |
| 1955-56 | 8095 | 2275000 | +4.96 |
| 1956-57 | 8554 | 2377000 | +4.29 |
| 1957-58 | 10045 | 3015000 | +21.16 |
| 1958-59 | 10228 | 3647000 | +17.33 |
| 1959-60 | 10811 | 3923000 | +7.04 |
| 1960-61 | 11312 | 4013000 | +2.24 |
| 1961-62 | 11476 | 3723000 | -7.64 |
| 1962-63 | 11620 | 3667000 | -1.66 |
| 1963-64 | 11740 | 3956000 | +7.31 |
| 1964-65 | 12744 | 4441000 | +10.92 |
| 1965 | 12948 | 3763000 | - |
| (Apr-Dec) | | | |
| 1966 | 14370 | 4369000 | - |
| 1967 | 15024 | 4503000 | +2.97 |
| 1968 | 16409 | 5094000 | +11.61 |
| 1969 | 18460 | 4866000 | -4.69 |
| 1970 | 20282 | 4850000 | +0.33 |

Source: Padmanabhan, 1980; p. 126.

This table shows enormous fluctuations in the membership base which was due to splits in trade unions and this division in the trade unions had adversely affected the workers' faiths and trust on their organisations. Interestingly in 1959 the Second Central Pay Commission (CPC) announced its recommendations which conceived the price index number 1949=100 for adjusting the price through Dearness Allowance. It also declared that if the consumer price index continued to rise the employees' grant to dearness allowance should be considered as the relevant circumstances of time. Sukomol Sen noted in this connection that the retrograde recommendations of the Second Pay Commission were universally deplored by the Central Government employees as well as by the entire trade union movement of the country (Sen, 1997; p. 389). As a result in 1960 the Central Government employees including the railway employees formed a Joint Council of Action which consisted of almost all the government employees including the railways, defence, Posts and telegraphs etc. The General Secretary Peter Alvares was elected as the Chairman and Secretary of the Council. Joint Council urged all the trade unions for their co-operation. Except INTUC, the unions of all political colours had supported this strike. This strike started on 11th July and continued for five days. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took all the measures to suppress the agitation. The government treated the strike as an anti-national activity (Fernandes, 1984; p. 26). Indiscriminate and excessive use of power crushed the strike action. Massive dismissal, suspension, imprisonment, victimisation took place which caused death of few employees in Western Railways too. Railwaymen completely rejected NFIR's stand for not joining this strike on the basis of "constructive trade unionism" (Sherlock, 2001; p.200). This strike ended without any immediate impact on the central government employees' demands but it had deep and long term effects on the future struggle of the working class. It provided a strong platform to the trade union movement of the country. In the later years the Government of India took reasonable initiatives to meet the workers' demands including bonus and dearness allowances. National Labour Commission was appointed to enquire into the matter relating to workers' resentments and disappointments in 1966-68, prior to which the Bonus Commission was engaged to look at the issue in 1962. This strike was followed by an one day token strike on 19th September 1968; again by the Central Government Employees. This action was also condemned as 'Black Acts' of the workers by the the Government. In 1967-69 the struggle of the Life Insurance Corporation workers gave a new

impetus to the Indian Trade Union activities. Negotiated settlements of the workers' grievances were never achieved in this country. Almost all the P.S.U.s, like Port and Dock, Railways, Post and Telegraph, Defence etc had joined the strike. M. N. Joshi was the Chairman of the J.C.A which had the following demands:

- a) Merger of D.A. in basic pay;
- b) need based minimum wage;
- c) full neutralisation of the rise in prices; and
- d) withdrawal of the proposal to retire employees, who are alleged to be ineffective or whose integrity is allegedly in doubt at fifty years of age (Sen, 1997; p. 393).

This strike was again dealt with heavy hands. Government resorted to police action; physical and mental torture of the employees and widespread repressions was observed over all the segments of the central government employees. However, the immediate effect of this struggle was the appointment of Third Central Pay Commission in the year 1970 in April, which published its recommendations in 1973 i.e., after three years of its appointment, the Commission was able to submit its report to the Central Government.

Another important development that took place in country's political context was the general Lok Sabha Elections of 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967 which had shown a steady growth of communists and their strong presence was also reflected in the mobilisation of working class in India. In this political background numerous trade unions had emerged in Indian industries and they had considerable number of membership base during these periods. The following table had shown the number of trade unions registered under the Trade Unions Act, 1926, membership of unions submitting returns, average membership per union and the percentage of women members to the total membership (Indian Labour Book, 1972; p. 60).

**Numbers of Registered Trade Unions (Workers and Employees) and
Membership of unions submitting Returns for the Years 1951-52, 1956-57 to
1970**

| Year | Number of Registered Trade Unions | Number of Trade Unions submitting | Membership of Unions submitted Returns | | | Average Membership per Union submitting Returns |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---------------|-------|---|
| | | | Men | Women | Total | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1951-52 | 4,623 | 2,556 (55.3) | 1,847 (93.2) | 136 (6.8) | 1,996 | 781 |
| 1956-57 | 8,554 | 4,339 (51.4) | 2,097 (88.2) | 280 (11.8) | 2,377 | 540 |
| 1961-62 | 11,614 | 7,087 (61.0) | 3,607 (90.7) | 370 (9.3) | 3,977 | 561 |
| 1962-63 | 11,827 | 7,251 (61.3) | 3,335 (90.6) | 347 (9.4) | 3,682 | 508 |
| 1963-64 | 11,984 | 7,250 (60.5) | 3,628 (91.2) | 349 (8.8) | 3,977 | 548 |
| 1964-65 | 13,023 | 7,543 (67.1) | 4,113 (92.1) | 353 (7.9) | 4,466 | 594 |
| 1965 Apr.-Dec. | 13,248 | 6,932 (52.3) | 3,565 (94.1) | 223 (5.9) | 3,788 | 546 |
| 1966 | 14,686 | 7,244 49.3) | 4,078 (92.9) | 314 (7.4) | 4,392 | 606 |
| 1967 | 15,314 | 7,523 (49.1) | 4,197 (92.7) | 329 (7.3) | 4,525 | 602 |
| 1968 | 16,716 | 8,851 (52.9) | 4,700 (91.8) | 421 (8.2) | 5,121 | 579 |
| 1969 | 18,837 | 8,423 (44.7) | 4,546 (92.8) | 355 (7.2) | 4,900 | 582 |
| 1970(P) | 20,314 (E) | 7,002 (34.5) | - | - | 4,241 | 606 |

Notes:

- (1) Figures relates to the entire Indian Union except Jammu and Kashmir. They also exclude Manipur for 1951-52 and 1961-62, Chandigarh for 1966 to 2968 and Andhra

Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Manipur for 1969.

- (2) Figures in the columns 4 and 5 do not always add up to those shown in column 6 since sex-wise classification of members in respect of certain unions is not available.
- (3) Figures in brackets in column 3 shows the percentage response from registered trade unions.
- (4) Figures in brackets in column 4 and 5 shows the percentage of 'men' and 'women' members respectively to total membership.
- (5) Due to rounding off, totals may not necessarily tally.

(P) – Provisional

(E) – Estimated by repeating the previous year figures in respect of those states for which information was not received.

Source: (Annual Returns under the Trade Unions Act, 1926. Indian Labour Book, Labour Bureau of India, Ministry of Labour; 1972; pp. 50-61.

The strength of lockouts or strikes could be measured by the average number of days in which the labour participated in any agitation. The economic and political potentialities of any labour unrest could be judged by the number of loss of man days and number of shifts of duties per disputes. The following table should reveal the average number of days a worker was involved in a strike and lockouts and maydays lost per dispute.

**Number of Workers Involved per Dispute in Strike/Lockout and Average
Number of Days a Worker was involved in Strike/Lockout**

| Year | No. of workers involved per Dispute in | | Average no. of days a worker was involved | | No. of Mandays lost per Dispute | | Intensity Index (7=6/5) |
|------|--|--------------------|---|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | Strikes (‘000) | Lockouts (‘000) | Strikes (‘000) | Lockouts (‘000) | Strikes (‘000) | Lockouts (‘000) | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | |
| 1961 | 348 | 684 | 6.9 | 24.4 | 2,390 | 16,667 | 7.0 |
| 1962 | 412 | 1,368 | 8.8 | 8.2 | 3,624 | 11,178 | 3.1 |
| 1963 | 360 | 673 | 4.5 | 14.4 | 1,634 | 9,719 | 5.9 |
| 1964 | 442 | 747 | 6.5 | 15.7 | 2,889 | 17,102 | 5.9 |
| 1965 | 524 | 739 | 5.1 | 18.2 | 2,721 | 3,427 | 4.9 |
| 1966 | 536 | 729 | 8.2 | 23.4 | 4,410 | 17,089 | 3.9 |
| 1967 | 551 | 395 | 7.9 | 43.6 | 4,342 | 7,232 | 4.0 |
| 1968 | 598 | 628 | 7.6 | 30.2 | 4,520 | 18,972 | 4.2 |
| 1969 | 720 | 495 | 9.2 | 25.5 | 6,602 | 12,618 | 1.9 |
| 1970 | 597 | 948 | 9.5 | 20.9 | 5,677 | 19,979 | 3.5 |
| 1971 | 596 | 507 | 8.0 | 34.1 | 4,746 | 17,310 | 3.6 |
| 1972 | 516 | 679 | 9.3 | 25.9 | 4,812 | 17,606 | 3.7 |
| 1973 | 797 | 453 | 5.9 | 36.2 | 4,686 | 16,417 | 3.5 |
| 1974 | 1,079 | 339 | 12.4 | 45.6 | 13,403 | 15,464 | 1.2 |
| 1975 | 628 | 371 | 16.2 | 46.8 | 10,162 | 17,374 | 1.7 |

Source: Dutt, 2003; p.16).

Interestingly from all sections, powers and force were utilised to refrain the workers to go on strikes but surprisingly despite all oppositions and discouraging consequences, workers had the tendency to go for agitations. Without the right to agitate and voice their grievances, workers were extremely under the grace of the employers. Therefore, a new type of awakening among the workers was found in the industrial front. Fragmentations and splits in the trade unions were the most significant weakness in the history of labour movements of India. Gour had assessed that the climate of industrial relations had improved in 1965 obviously because the trade unions of all groups set their differences aside and joined together to defend the country's freedom and integrity during the periods of war with the China in 1962 and by Pakistan in 1965 (Gour, 1986; p. 110).

During this entire period AITUC starting from 1947 till the early 1970s launched various direct actions and became more revolutionary which resulted into the formation of several unions. Immediately after independence huge industrial disputes were noticed. The following table would show the number of workers involved in the industrial conflicts in the year 1947 to 1949.

| Year | Number of Disputes | Number of Workers | Number of Mandays Lost |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1947 | 1811 | 1,840,784 | 16,562,666 |
| 1948 | 1259 | 1,059,120 | 7,837,173 |
| 1949 | 914 | 6,48,188 | 6,580,887 |

Source: Dhyani, 1970; p. 49

Most peculiarly these unions started competing with each other in the same industry for the same end. AITUC in its different sessions adopted some resolutions like, to protect the right of the workers as human beings etc. S.A. Dange became the General Secretary of the AITUC in 1954. In the later years especially in 1964, some members began accusing Dange on the ground that he was sacrificing the real causes of the workers and also criticised him for his bureaucratic attitude in administering internal matters of the unions. Therefore he was branded as class-collaborationist. In 1970, Centre for Trade Unions was

formed which tried to give a shape to the Indian labour movement and fighting for the cause of the workers. It also gave efforts to awaken the working class consciousness. It had its declared objectives to lead democratic and revolutionary and economic anti-imperialist struggle in every part of the country. B.T. Ranadive and P. Ramamurthy were elected as the President and General Secretary of CITU respectively. Since then a host of changes of grave importance to the lives of Indian people, have taken place in the political scene of India; working class actions too excelled all previous records (Sen, 1997; p. 400). In 1971, a series of hartals, bandhs were occurring – some places of West Bengal, Kerala, Calicut, Tamilnadu, Bombay in different industries such as coir, textile, iron and steel etc. on various issues. All these struggles and movements were conducted or supported by diverse wings of trade unions, therefore, it was easily assumed that all the political parties started taking interest or getting entangled with the industrial as well as labour fronts. The Central Government made many efforts to refrain the workers from agitation and tried to sustain peace but all its attempts went in vain. The all India general strikes of Central Government Employees in 1960 and 1968 had shown many horizons in this regard. In 1973 almost forty thousand government employees organised a strike action and in 1973 there were several other strikes and struggles by the government employees were observed, whose demands were mainly of economic, minimum need based wage, bonus, dearness allowance etc. From the Government's part there was no single step was taken for settlement, it only sought to use force to break the strength of the working class. Within a few years of independence and freedom from imperialist bondage, Indian working mass again faced the trouble and trapped in various types of black holes. But we must mention that the government's endeavour and eagerness to intervene in industrial disputes in early period of independence was not wholly to numb the workers' struggle, it rather tried to protect the weak and helpless workers by taking multiple steps even by enacting legislations to protect different aspects of employment, e.g., wage, bonus, recruitment etc. Ultimately the pro-labour policy of the government had changed with the passing of time specially when the workers posed serious challenges to the authority. The authority was scared of the oppositions of any kind. The entire industrial scene of the country was in a turmoil situation. The harmonious relationship did not persist in any of the industries.

Development of Trade Union Movement in the Railway Industry

In 1947 the partition of the country had immense effect on the railroad workers. The violence and disruptions of the partition left the railway industry in a very feeble condition. The railway industry had to manage and sort out the difficulties and issues of post war crisis. Thus transfer of power had largely transformed many things. The railroad authorities were repeatedly strained by political pressures and many times they had to approve such policies and practices which they regarded as unprofitable and unacceptable (Kerr, 2012; p. 153). Post-independence roused monumental aspirations among the railway workers like the other industrial workers. Thus, the unharmonious and un-cooperative attitude of the government threw them in a helpless and miserable situation. At the time the nature and activities of the railway trade unions were not optimistic and hopeful for the workers. But the modern system of communication had connected the remotest corners of the world and had broadened the scope of markets and enhanced the production systems. It was well known that without workers' contributions, no industry could run effectively and efficiently. Therefore, the trade unions and the management too must play a more positive role in favour of the working class. The improvements of transportation system had helped the emergence and development of other industries as well. In India railway industry as a mode of transportations had occupied a very crucial position in accelerating the industrial growth and economic progress of the country. Railways in India had been the life blood of modern trade and commerce. But economic progress of the country did not ensure the progress of the men behind this development.

Since long there was a demand for Indianisation of the entire workforce in the railway industry that was supposed to be completed within few years of independence. I. J Kerr reported that the railroads had 1,033,217 permanent employees in 1947 of whom 1,345 were European and 12,281 were Anglo Indians. Though additionally a substantial portion of workers were employed in the railroad industry purely on casual basis, there was no statistics found in this direction which could support the data. Kerr also mentioned that the number of railroad contractors under whose supervision these large number of labourers worked in the railway industry, also remained unknown (Kerr, 2012; p. 172). Throughout

the 1950s railway industry had employed enormously and expansion of the industry itself had taken place. In the Indian Railways (I.R.) employees were categorised into four groups – Class I and II were not allowed to form any union as they were called gazetted officers. Class III and IV were eligible to become a member of trade unions. Interestingly at that point of time the majority of railway workforce belonged to Class III and IV categories. There were more than 700 categories of work found in railways and the detail of which were not even available. However, railways in India as a public utility sector faced so many hurdles and hindrances towards the unionisation of the employees. Narshima Reddy explained that the railway employees were treated not only as industrial workers but also as the government employees and this doubleness had created difficulties for them because different standards of rules and regulations were applied to the railwaymen under various labour legislations (Reddy, 1979; p. 1652). Moreover, the varied categories of workers got a platform when AIRF was formed in the colonial period. After independence Congress had to constitute another trade union in the railway industry on a political basis. In 1948 Indian National Railway Workers' Federation thus came into being. The main purpose behind the formation was to seize the absolute powers of the Royist and communists over the railway workforce and also to influence them in pro-congress party vision in the post independent India. Interestingly for the Congress leaders it was much easier task to form a new union rather than to win AIRF under rightist ideology. Hariharnath Sashtri, G. Ramachandran etc. were the men behind its Constitution.

The history of AIRF was much intricate and complex. During the closing years of independence, AIRF tried to improve its relation with the management by supporting the war efforts. But having the leaders like V.V. Giri and Jayprakash Narayan immediately after independence it adopted or took to the strategy of confrontation. In the meantime when the Government disregarded the recommendations of the First Central Pay Commission relating to dearness allowance it created an atmosphere of workers' resentment and anger. Thus the leadership was forced to call a strike in March 1949. Government agreed to review the issues and appealed to withdraw the strike. The ordinary workers were not happy with the decision of calling off the strike. AIRF had curtailed its affiliations with those who went against its decision in order to show its allegiance to the government. Thus, by the end of 1950-51 the militant trade unions in the Railways were thoroughly suppressed and

disorganised (Chakraborty, 1987; p. 57). In 1948 the authority decided to regroup the twenty eight railways into six zones as a result the union leaderships had to reorganise the structural and functional basis of the unions.

In this connection we must discuss the policies of the railway authority to grant recognition to the trade unions in railway industry. Railway Board in 1949 announced certain principles for getting recognition. Among these principles some were already existed in the guidelines of railway administration since 1935. Followings were the pre-existing terms and conditions:

- 1) that the union must consist of a distinct class of government employees;
- 2) that government employees of the same class must be eligible for membership; and
- 3) that the union must be the one registered under Trade Unions Act, 1926.

The additional conditions were:

- 1) the membership of a union seeking recognition should not be less than ten percent of the total number of non-gazetted railway employees on the railway concerned;
- 2) sectional unions, i.e., unions composed of either category or a limited category of workers should not be recognised; and
- 3) recognition should not be granted to a union which in the opinion of the railway administration has been or is likely to engage in subversive activities (Reddy; 1979; p. 1653).

This policy was actually designed to prohibit the growth of not only the categorical unions but also to restrict the activities of the unions.

In 1948 the NFIR was born, during its inception NFIR was known as Indian National Railway Federation (INRWF). In 1953 after prolonged and detailed discussion the AIRF and INRWF merged and a new union came into existence, e.g. National Federation of Indian Railwaymen. Within a few years, AIRF found that NFIR was more keen to favour the members of erstwhile INRWF and protect the right reactionary forces within the union. Then AIRF decided to work along its own ideological path hence it left NFIR and began functioning independently from 1956. However, these two unions – AIRF and NFIR were

the only recognized unions in the Indian Railways till date. There were several other trade unions that existed in the railway front but the unions were affiliated to either of AIRF or NFIR.

The main source of income of these unions was their affiliation fees. The affiliation fees of AIRF were lower than the NFIR. Sometimes, it also happened that the affiliated unions protested and resisted the increase of affiliation fees and most of the times it was reported that due to these protests the recognised unions had to reduce their fees. The following table would reflect the situation.

| Year | Total Income (in Rs.) | Affiliation Fee* | |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | | Amount (Rs.) | Percent of the Total |
| 1953-54 | 8,081 | 7,830 | 97 |
| 1954-55 | 2,804 | 2,704 | 96 |
| 1955-56 | 6,288 | 6,188 | 98 |
| 1956-57 | 8,461 | 8,456 | 100 |
| 1957-58 | 17,464 | 14,911 | 86 |
| 1958-59 | 21,897 | 16,428 | 75 |
| 1959-60 | 2,532 | 382 | 15 |
| 1960-61 | 24,115 | 22,208 | 92 |
| 1961-62 | 15,739 | 14,062 | 89 |
| 1962-63 | 19,795 | 27,762 | 90 |
| Total | 1,27,176 | 1,10,931 | 87 |

*The amount of affiliation fee shown in this table is the amount actually received during the year and not that which become due during that year.

Source: Mast, 1969; p. 75.

Railway employees were mainly supposed to abide by the Factories Act of 1948 and Hours of Employment Regulations under the Indian Railway (Amendment) Act 1930. Railway workers since its inception had the primary complaint against the length of ‘working hour’. The hours of work in the railways have three aspects.

- a) Classification of workers;
- b) Maximum hours of work for each class; and
- c) Weekly rest period.

(Reddy, 1979; p.1651).

Apart from the workshop employees and clerical based jobs, the railway workers were regulated by Hours of Employment Regulations and they were divided into four categories:

1. Intensive’
2. Continuous’
3. Essential Intermittent and
4. Excluded.

The last two categories did not have any particular maximum hours of duty. The following table would indicate this categorisation of the workers.

| Category | Number of Employees (1970) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Intensive | 2,467 |
| Continuous | 9,09,931 |
| Essentially Intermittent | 1,46,592 |
| Excluded | 50,547 |

Source: (NFIR Memorandum to the Third Pay Commission, New Delhi; 1970, p. 27)

(Reddy, 1979; p.1653).

It was quite natural that the workers must have a long demand to reduce the work pressure by minimising the working hour. Loco running staffs of the railways were described as continuous and essentially intermittent staff. In 1955-56 several agitations took place in the different railway zones such as; in Eastern zone, South Eastern zone – Adra and Khurda stations, Bilaspur division etc. Workers went on strike and halted the work on various issues. In 1956 three remarkable struggles were witnessed at Kalka, Kharagpur and Kazipet on three different issues. e.g.:

- 1) The Chairman of the Railway Board denied to receive the memorandum submitted by the workers and not only that he ordered the police to disrupt the gathering of the workers;
- 2) In Kharagpur workshop, the workers struck when the authority refused to accept the demands of some staff to upgrade them into the pay scale of the skilled workers. Here also the authority resorted to force to control the workers' activities and most peculiarly AIRF did not agree to intervene the matter;
- 3) In Kazipet workers went on strike on the demand of reducing duty hours.

Another strong agitation was observed in 1956 in Calcutta when the head quarter of North Eastern Railways was shifted to Gorakhpur. As a result of this agitation North East Railways were divided into two parts (i) North East Frontier Railways and Eastern Railways. During this whole period upto 1958-59 AIRF did not play any significant role in leading the workers and launching any struggle. Though they indulge in militant trade union activities in various centres, there was a lack of a concerted effort to organise themselves into a powerful nation wide movement (Fernandes, 1984; p. 24). To settle the labour disputes and to achieve peace in the railway industry, the Government decided to constitute Permanent Negotiating Machinery in 1952 whose main function was to maintain day to day liaison with the workers and the management. It was established at all the three levels:

- 1) Zonal level;
- 2) Divisional level;
- 3) Railway Board level.

In this situation the recommendations of the Second Pay Commission compelled the central government employees including the railways to go on a strike in 1960 on the 11th July. While the railwaymen were in the forefront of this struggle under the leadership of the All India Railwaymen's Federation, the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen indulged in its professional strike breaking activity (Fernandes, 1984; p.27). This All India General Strike was suppressed by the government and the railwaymen's struggle was awarded with failure. In this situation the Congress led trade unions began to take advantages from the authority by showing its loyalty towards the government and by disrupting the strength and confidence of the workers. The most adverse result of this strike was that the feeling of disintegration among the workers was generated.

In the Southern Railways numerous employees' associations were formed, Employees' Associations were affiliated to NFIR and Southern Railway Employees' Unions were affiliated to AIRF. These two merged and ultimately formed Dakshin Railway Employee's Union affiliated to AIRF. The following table provided the picture of railway unions functioning in the Southern Railways. In Southern Railways, The unions were divided into broad categories and these were: Industrial Federal (IF); Industrial Regional (IR) and Industrial Categorical (IC).

Some Features of IF and IR Unions in Southern Railway, 1975

| Name of the Union | Year of Establishment | Union Type | Membership (Year) | Union Affiliation | Political ¹ Affiliation |
|--|-----------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Southern Railway Employees Sangh | 1957 | IF | 42,370 (1971) | NIRF and INTUC | Congress (O) |
| Southern Railway Mazdoor Union | 1960 | IF | 36,100 (1972) | AIRF | Socialist |
| Dakshin Railway Karmik Sangh | 1970 | IF | NA | BRMS | Jana Sangh |
| Dakshin Railway Employees' Union | 1961 | IR | 18,193 (1962) | - | Communist CPI (M) |
| Southern Railway Labour Union ² | - | IR | - | - | Communist CPI |
| Southern Railway Employees Progressive Union | 1970 | IR | 9 (1970) | - | DMK |
| South Rail Industrial Workers' Union | 1970 | IR | 23,000 (1971) | - | Congress (R) |
| Southern Railwaymen's Union | 1973 | iR | NA | - | NA |
| Dravida Railwaymen's Union | 1973 | IR | NA | - | NA |

- i) The political party affiliations as obtained in 1973, many changes had since the taken place regarding the case of political parties and their union affiliations.
- ii) It was merged with DREU in 1964, but was revised again. The exact date is not available.

(Source: (1) Office of the Registered Trade Unions, Madras.

(2) Southern Railway Headquarters Office, Madras.

(3) Railway Board, New Delhi.

(Reddy, 1980; p. 1623).

In this respect, we can say that the position of AIRF had become weak and rudderless. AIRF was confused whether to ventilate the workers' demands or to go with the management's industrial relation. Among the railwaymen a general feeling of hopelessness and frustration gradually began to appear. The AIRF became unpopular amongst the railwaymen. Meanwhile, a deadlock situation was created when the railway workers demanded to reconsider the matters relating to need based minimum wage and revision of dearness allowance. Government agreed to revise the same but in practice it did not take any constructive decision. The leadership in the AIRF were anxious about the sentiments of the railwaymen towards the union's stand, hence they had prepared twenty seven charter of demands. The workers were determined to go on a bigger movement. On the other hand, All India Central Government employees assembled to voice their resentments through a country wide struggle which resulted in the decision of a "one day token strike". It was held in July, 1968. The central trade unions had made several attempts to negotiate with the Government but Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India expressed no willingness to listen to them. Thus, in 1968 in the month of September a one day token strike was taken place by the central government employees including the railwaymen. It was reported that the government resorted to all sorts of repressive measures. 5,825 railwaymen were arrested, 8 railwaymen were killed in police firing at Mariani and Bongaigaon of N.F. railways and Bikaner and Pathankot. On Northern Railways in Delhi at Indraprastha Bhawan one employee was beaten to death by the police (AIRF Publication, 1924-99).

The strike action did not get any immediate success but the massive victimisation was withdrawn in the later years. And the Third Central Pay Commission was appointed by the Government immediately after the strike. Surprisingly the response of the recognised unions of all sections was very depressive and their participation in this struggle was very poor. Only handful of them had joined the strike. AIRF leadership could not command any resoluteness in this direction and remained very much passive. Nrishingha Chakroborty as a member of AIRF admitted that the reason behind the condition of AIRF might have appeared due to the death of the General Secretary Mr. Guruswami in 1963, who was mainly the guiding force of the union. He told that Maniben Kara shouldered the president ship of the union upto August, 1968. Maniben Kara was very popular among the workers and also

in the management; she used to represent workers' issues not only forcibly and convincingly but always counselled them and argued reasonably with the authority. But by this time, i.e., during the central government employees' strike AIRF could not prove itself. Chakraborty argued that the failure of AIRF leadership to fight for the just cause of the railwaymen, their serviceability to the railway administration and their democratic functioning within their organisations (i.e., suppression effected branches and unions) had led to rise of category sentiment (Chakraborty, 1987; p. 69).

In this connection we should refer to the category wise employment of the Indian Railways. Indian Railways consisted of varied types of works skilled to unskilled, educated to uneducated workers. The following table would highlight the department-wise employment in the railways.

Department-wise Employment in Indian Railways: As on March 31, 1973

| Departments | All the Nine Zonal Railways | Production Unit | | | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----|--------------------|
| | | CLW | DLW | ICF | |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Administration | 36.28 (2.6) | 454 | 379 | 429 | 37,546 (2.7) |
| Accounts | 29,563 (2.2) | 499 | 261 | 321 | 30,644 (2.2) |
| Civil Engineering | 2,93,342 (21.4) | 898 | 639 | 414 | 2,95,313 (20.9) |
| Signal and Tele Commu- nications | 49,837 (3.6) | 44 | - | - | 49,881 (3.51) |
| Transport | 1,90,088 (13.5) | - | - | - | 1,90,088 (13.5) |
| Commercial | 1,10,320 (8.0) | - | - | - | 1,10,320 (7.8) |

| Departments | All the Nine Zonal Railways | Production Unit | | | Total |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| | | CLW | DLW | ICF | |
| Mechanical Engineering | 4,29,243 (31.3) | 9,074 | 3,314 | 9,453 | 4,51,084 (31.9) |
| Stores | 36,581 (2.7) | 806 | 715 | 516 | 38,618 (2.7) |
| Electrical | 92,969 (6.8) | 923 | 622 | 1,143 | 95,657 (6.8) |
| Medical | 49,111 (3.6) | 604 | 84 | - | 49,799 (3.5) |
| Railway Protection Force | 54,826 (4.0) | 507 | 236 | 469 | 56,038 (4.0) |
| Railway Board and other Railway Offices | - | - | - | - | 8,029 |
| Total | 13,72,164 (100) | 13,809 | 6,270 | 12,745 | 14,13,017 (100) |

Notes: CLW : Chittaranjan Locomotive Works
DLW : Diesel Locomotive Works, Varanasi
ICF : Integral Coach Factory, Madras

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

Data on Department-wise distribution of employment in the Railway Board and other offices are not available.

Source: Ministry of Railways, Supplement to the Indian Railways, Report and Accounts 1972-73, Statistical Statement, Delhi, 1974.

Reddy, 1979; p. 1652.

Indian Railways consisted of wide range of departments hence, employed several types of workers. These department wise staff had their own problems and difficulties relating to their employment. The grievances and resentments must also be varied and diverse. Surprisingly, no recognised unions strived to protect the interests of the workers and voiced their demands. Therefore, the reactions of the different segments of railway workers were the manifestation of dissatisfaction and disappointments not only towards the attitude of the management but also to the performance of the recognised unions. The railway workers began looking for an alternative to these recognised unions which could provide a platform of strength and solidarity of the working class. As a result a number of category wise unions were formed by the different sections of the railway workers. Sporadic actions like go slow, work to rule etc. started occurring throughout the country.

The earliest of all category-wise unions in the railways was the Station Masters' Associations of 1953 but it never seemed to be very prominent and competent too because their members were scattered and not united. Another craft union which came into being in the Indian Railway was Indian Railways signalling and Telecommunication Staff Association in 1966. These workers too conceived the role of the recognised union as displeasing and unable to fetch any change in its position. The following table indicated the above statement, i.e., a large number of Staff Councils existed in the railway industry.

| Year | No. of Staff Councils |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| 1956-57 | 160 |
| 1957-58 | 157 |
| 1958-59 | 214 |
| 1959-60 | 261 |
| 1960-61 | 300 |
| 1961-62* | 400 |

Source: Indian Railway, Ministry of Railways for 1956-57, 1957-58, 1958-59, 1959-60, 1960-61; pp.65, 69, 76, 89 and 109 respectively.

*Report, NFIR, VII Annual Convention, New Delhi, 1963, p. 18, (Mast, 1969; p. 92).

A railwaymen's Federation remarked that "Parallel organisations are being created deliberately and some like the Staff Councils not only have been endowed with the power and functions of trade unions but are also allowed to enjoy more benefits privileges than those allowed to trade unions...These councils are formed by nomination yes-man of the administration as representatives of employees and their functions is to divert the attention of the employees at large from their trade unions" (Mast, 1969; p. 93).

The most significant amongst them was the emergence of Firemen's Council which provided a serious blow to the labour movement of the Indian Railways. In October 1966 a group of firemen formed an independent Firemen's Council at Madurai loco shed in Tamilnadu free from any superior upper level control. As they thought that they were nothing but the bonded labours of the railways, they began to spread their influences over the grass root level workers in the entire southern region. They initiated several meetings, deputations and demonstrations to ventilate their grievances. Their organisation was "Southern Railway Fireman's Council". In July 1967, out of six hundred firemen five hundred and thirteen workers were reported 'sick' which resulted into serious halt to running of trains – goods and passenger both. Management condemned the mass sick leave and more surprisingly the recognised unions declared that they did not have any link with this action. Southern Railway and South Central Railway managements resorted to police force to break the strike and several other methods but the firemen did not go back to work. Not only the firemen, but later they were joined by the Shunters and the Drivers too. Ultimately the authority accepted all the demands and assured that no victimisation would take place. The authority had no other options and negotiations were made between the management and the recognised unions because the Firemen's Council was not affiliated to any recognised unions. The Firemen's Council had established itself as a new militant pole of attraction in the railway workers' movement (Sherlock, 2002; p. 60). On the 8th of July 1968, again the Firemen's Council went on mass sick in protest of the victimisation of leaders who were terminated from railway service on the ground of the activities during the previous agitation. In 1968, out of three thousand firemen two thousand and five hundred had joined in the struggle in Southern Railway and thirteen hundred out of seventeen hundred in South Central Railways. Management threatened that 'severe disciplinary action' would be taken

against the workers. The railwaymen resumed their work on 16th July when the Railway Minister of State Parimal Ghosh assured that the workers' prolonged demand of reduction in working hours would be taken care of and the victimisation against the workers would also be withdrawn. These two struggles of the firemen rendered an immense strength and solidarity to all the sections of railway workers. Firemen's agitations paved the way to the formation of the broad based organisation of the loco men. The split between the ministers or politicians and the bureaucrats or the management was another outcome of this agitation. There had been long and several issues to be dealt with e.g., issues like long working hours, dieselisation from late 1950s abolished the hope of the senior firemen to get promoted to the scales of drivers when the authority started recruiting the young educated men to the post of the drivers. Before independence the firemen were treated as socially lower beings than the drivers and after 1947 the same mentality and attitude persisted. They demanded for fair treatment for their positions. However, in 1970 May, again they went on six days strike, this time the cleaners, drivers and shunters had participated with the firemen. Eventually the strike was called off on the promise of the Railway Minister to consider the issues and no victimisation would be taken place. In the background of agitations, category wise associations at the all India level formed Indian Railway Employees Confederation in 1969 whose main purpose was to settle the local demands. They launched several sporadic movements in the shape of stoppage of work or go slow etc. The intensity of these struggles forced the recognised unions either to join or to declare disassociation with them. But a new kind of unity and solidarity had developed among the railwaymen. The strike at Adra Station in South Eastern Railways had shown tremendous strength and solidarity in June 1970 and it spread upto Bilaspur Division where the workers struck in support of the demands of the workers at Adra Station. And surprisingly the authority was again compelled to assure workers to review their wage structure and to grant special leave for the strike days and authority had taken measures in favour of these promises.

These struggles of firemen in 1967, 1968 and 1970 showed the strength of the loco staff and paved the way to the formation of All India Loco Running Staff Association in 1970 in the month of August in Vijawada in Andhra Pradesh. It brought four thousand delegates from different parts of India indicating the solidarity of the workers. Railwaymen were basically inspired by a feeling of self confidence and unity to mount their own

agitations without the support of the recognised unions which were incapable to fight for the basic demands of the workers. In the end of 1970, another significant struggle occurred in N.F Railways where the management had to acknowledge the demands of the workers. In the N.F. Railways Loco Running Association got involved in the struggles of Barauni and Garhara in Bihar. In Siliguri in northern part of West Bengal four loco men were arrested and in protest against their arrest seven hundred workers had ceased to work on 23rd July, 1970. Sherlock nicely described the incident of Siliguri that, their attitude could not have changed when on 25th July five hundred soldiers detained by the stoppage at New Mal Station near Siliguri ran riot, attacking railway workers and looting grocery shops and the railway canteen...by the sixth day the strike had spread to New Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Bongaigaon (Sherlock, 2002; pp.100-101). Government took hard steps and deployed police and B.S.F. in the entire region as the area was strategically and geographically important as it connected the north east India with the rest of the country. In spite of the repression the strike ended on the assurance of the Railway Minister that no victimisation would take place, arrested leaders would be released and the workers who had lost their jobs would be getting back.

A convention was held in 1971 through which all the category wise and unrecognised unions joined hands and established the United Committee of Railwaymen in N.F. Railway Zone (Chakraborty, 1987; pp.75-76). In South Eastern, Eastern and N.F. Railway, innumerable struggles occurred during the early 1970s. The general trade union movement in India always faced splits and rivalry, therefore these two features specially the fragmentation was accompanied with weakness and essentially the “trade union democracy was sacrificed in the process” (Chakraborty, 1987; p.77).

Agitations and struggles kept on continuing in different parts of the country, such as in Dhanbad Division twenty thousand railway workers had paralysed the movement of trains between Gomoh and Gaya stations which had also affected the movements of rails in the neighbouring zones. The reason behind the disturbance was due to the frequent assault of the workers by the RPF men. In August 1972 the workers in South Central Railway in Hubli Division went on mass sick leave when the Divisional Manager rejected to receive the memorandum of demands from the Loco Running Staff Association for increasing the pay for all section of workers. The loco men got frustrated regarding the economic conditions of

their life. First and the Second Central Pay Commissions made all the central government employees extremely hopeless including the railway workforce. And when the report of Third Pay Commission was delayed, they became furious. Each and every division of Southern Railways had participated in this action. The campaign was so successful that even railway authority had to admit that five thousand and three hundred workers out of six thousand seven hundred loco men in the Southern Railway had participated in the strike and that only hundred of the normal five hundred fifteen goods trains were moving and two hundred and thirty six of the normal six hundred forty passenger trains (Sherlock, 2002; p. 103). Workers confronted with tremendous torture and repression including DIR. Huge Territorial Army was utilized to crush the strike but the railwaymen remained unmoved despite of arrest and lots of sufferings.

In this period the unrecognised category wise unions always tried to approach the recognised unions for joint action and united struggle. But the situation was never favourable for the craft unions. The unremitting hostility of the recognised unions was a constant background against which the Loco Running Staff Association had to operate (Sherlock, 2002; p. 113). Interestingly, clear distinctiveness was observed in the struggle of the loco men in the eastern and southern regions of the railways. Types of campaigns and solidarity were different, e.g., in the east the craft unions had tried to build a solidarity among themselves or rather they always tried to launch their movements in cooperation with the others, i.e., an atmosphere of craft consciousness always prevailed. In the south campaign for struggle or the strategy for uniting the workers to lead any agitation were unique. It had been argued that craft consciousness was an underdeveloped form of class consciousness and suggested that Loco Running Staff Association needed to foster a greater degree of class consciousness to succeed as an alternative to the recognised unions (Sherlock, 2002; p. 135). The Loco Running Staff Association started building a federal structure uniting the loco staff of various zones - eastern to southern. The united strength which the different strike actions in different zones had shown provided momentum to lead an all India united struggle. Interestingly in West Bengal the periods of late 1960s and early 1970s were the period of general mass upheaval. The Communists and Leftist traits in politics were trying to uproot the Congress led Government and channelized the working class strength to this end. As a result of this the militancy in the railway trade union activity

had flourished. The Naxalite movement in West Bengal led to the imposition of President's Rule. In this situation (1969-72) Railway Labour Tribunal (Miabhoy Tribunal) on working hours of the workers published its recommendations which had taken the unrecognised unions into its consideration. But it failed when NFIR refused its proposal of inclusion of unrecognised craft unions in the deliberations. Sukomal Sen analysed that in the background of overall economic crisis and growing upsurge of struggles all over the country, the Loco Running Staff Association decided to go into action, beginning with mass deputation to local authorities and then with work to rule, they prepared for bigger action (Sen, 1977; p. 413).

The category wise unions by the time had gained immense power and had led several militant movements in the railways. In January, 1973 at Burdwan, West Bengal, in its Annual Convention the Loco Staff Association declared that if the Rail Bhawan did not consider the demands, they would go for a country wide strike. In the month of May they started their agitations in the form of 'mass sick leave' when they repeatedly appealed to the Railway Minister L.N. Mishra and the management too for redressing their grievances, but all these went in vain. Workers were back to work when the authority gave assurance to review their demands and also submitted an undertaking that they would not go into any movement for next six months if their demand would have met. But unfortunately on 2nd August 1973 the AILRSA called an all India strike which continued till the morning of 13th August. This strike totally halted the train movement and paralysed the entire functioning of railways. In N.F. Railways a complete deadlock situation persisted. The Government's responses towards the agitations were very much negative. It arrested four hundred loco running staff and announced the strike illegal. Loco Running Staff were requested to join the work by both the recognised unions – NFIR and AIRF. The Hindu reported that Mishra decided to begin negotiations on 8th August with the leaders of the Loco Running Staff Association. The leaders agreed to meet him hence the negotiations started on 10th of August and an agreement was announced on 13th August (The Hindu, 10.8.73; P. 1). Mishra tried to include the leaders of the recognised unions in the settlement process but they didn't agree with the Railway Minister. The AILRSA did not agree with the Railway Minister on this point and forced the authority to remove the recognised unions. The strike was called off, no worker was victimised and arrested workers were immediately released and above all

the working hour had been reduced to ten hour maximum in a day. This agreement was an outstanding achievement of the railway workers. The success of this strike provided a greater impetus and a new height to the labour movement of the country because the majority of the Indian working class was composed of railway workers, thus, it offered a revitalisation of trade union movement of the railways as well as the entire country. An environment of strike struggles in the railways continued till early 1974 by the different craft unions such as Station Masters' Association, Train Examiners' Association, Technical Supervisors' Association etc. went on work to rule in the month of February 1974. Times of India reported that in the eastern India especially the coal and steel belt was badly hit by the different unrests by the craft unions and a chaotic situation was prevailed here for couple of months (Times of India, 7.2.74; p.4). Sherlock analysed the entire situation and said that loss of credibility amongst the workers was in itself a threat to the recognised unions, but the real matter of worry was that many workers revolted against the lack of effective representations and committed to building new organisations (Sherlock, 2002; p. 195). However, these movements revealed the fact that the workers had lost every faith from the recognised unions and these unions specially AIRF on the other hand lost effective leadership therefore, it tried to regain its power to retain in its position.