

Chapter VIII

Summary and Conclusion

In this study as stated earlier we have attempted to answer some specific questions relating to the railwaymen's strike of 1974 like, what were the reasons behind the railway strike of 1974? How did the railway trade unions prepare themselves for an all India general strike? Did the category wise unions participate in this strike? What was the situation in the Eastern and Northeast Frontier Railway-zones during the strike days? How did the Government of India respond towards the striking workers of Eastern and N.F Railways in 1974? What was the final consequence of the strike of 1974 in Eastern and N.F Railways? What was the political and economic impact of the strike? We have answered the questions in different chapters. Now it is time for a conclusion but before we conclude the study let us summarise the contents of the chapters. In chapter one, we describe the process of industrialisation and the emergence of the industrial working class in India during the colonial era with the advent of the Railway industry till 1974. This study explained the reasons behind the establishment of the railway industry by the colonial rulers in India. It had elucidated the course of the emergence of the industrial working class in the Indian railways in the colonial period from the mid 19th century till independence. The British capitalists primarily were not interested in investing in the railway establishment in this sub-continent. But two companies i.e., GIPR and EIR agreed to build railway tracks with a five percent guaranteed return on their investment. Ironically, even though British capital invested in the development of the Indian industry but the risk was taken entirely by the Indians whose taxes were used to pay the guaranteed returns and the profit was also earned by the companies throughout this period.

Railways had a long term impact on the socio-cultural life of 19th century India. Industrialisation and urbanisation were intermingled with each other, hence a new class had emerged, i.e., the industrial working class. Improved transport system began to revolutionise the economic and social life of the countrymen. Barriers of caste, creed, race, religion and language had been surpassed and the people entered into the new threshold of modernity.

The industrial workers in India had a unique character, initially they belonged to the traditional village societies but their search for good living had compelled them to join the British industries. During the harvesting season they all returned back to their homelands, resultantly these agricultural labourers could never become complete industrial workers during this early period of industrialisation. Thus, it took more than three decades for the Indian workers to emerge and consolidate themselves as a separate class and establish their own distinct position and identity in the social and economic system.

The year 1947 was marked as the year of transition, transition from two hundred years of colonial bondage; transfer of power from British Parliament to independent and sovereign authority, transition from agrarian economy to industrial economy; transition from rural agrarian society to urban industrial society, i.e., political, economic and social transition. India in the year 1950 had launched Five Years Plans for the overall development of the economy and it aimed at distributing the benefits to reach to every section of the society. Indian planners including Nehru were of the opinion that the state had a major role to play for rapid and all round transformation of the country's economy. This was because the entire country had suffered extreme colonial exploitation and drainage of economy. During this period since 1950 to 1974, four Five Years Plans had been implemented and in the year 1974 April the Fifth Five Years Plan had started. Indian Planners had insisted on growth and expansion of heavy industries in this phase of planning.

After independence the Indian Railways (I.R) became the largest and oldest Public Sector industry and biggest employer of industrial workers in India. It had faced troubles due to violence and upheavals before and after partition and transition from colonial domination to independence. The Government of India had emphasised on reformation of labour policy for strengthening the political and economic base, hence they entered into the era of planning and progress. The workers were the principle instrument towards the achievement of the goals set by the Planning Commission. Central Government employees including the railwaymen were already unhappy with the recommendations of the First Central Pay Commission and the decisions of Second Pay Commission made them furious and violent as it entirely neglected the principle of minimum need based wage. The cost of living index had determined the actual economic status and financial condition of the

workers and dearness allowances (D.A.) was the instrument to cope up with the increased cost of living and decline in real wage earning of the employees.

As a result we note that a section of railway workers known as loco running staff became highly annoyed with the pay structure of the I.R. As they were 'continuous' staff of the industry, they had to work for long hours-fifteen to sixteen hours per day. Working conditions sometimes posed formidable challenges to the railway workers especially to the continuous loco running staff. The living conditions of the railwaymen were very much unsatisfactory and accommodation was inadequate. The Class IV staff lived in the dirty slums called as 'coolie line' which were full of noise, heat and bad smell. They did not have proper system of sanitation and clearance. Rooms were small with insufficient ventilation. Another issue that was proliferating in the railway front was the position of the casual workers. Indian Railway engaged almost two lakhs casual workers in the year 1974 but they were lowly paid and were frequently terminated from their jobs. A casual worker, serving continuously at least for 120 days, was granted temporary status with minimum advantages of wages, leave, health facilities etc., thus, they were terminated on the 119th day of the appointment. Casual workers were mostly employed for construction works which were really hazardous and dangerous at the same time. They were not allowed to take leave, even if there was a genuine reason of sickness or other. The worst sufferers were the women workers, they did not get leave more than twenty days even on the maternity ground and most of the times they faced break in service.

In chapter two we looked at the growth and development of workers' resistance in Indian Railways from the colonial era till 1974. In this chapter we had traced the genesis of workers' resistance during the colonial period and its nature in the post independent period up to 1974. In India the process of industrialisation had began with the establishment of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1853 the first engine of change had moved but the building of railways had started from nearly 1930s. Interestingly therefore the mid nineteenth century's workers' resistance was the result of their own time and circumstances. In the mid nineteenth century this new class had to depend on the sale of their own labour for survival. Characteristically the Indian working class in this early phase was of complex type, because most of the industrial workers were landless agricultural labourers who had a strong bondage with their villages and never became full time industrial workers. The most

fascinating feature of the railway workforce was its various types of works involving numerous workers – skilled to unskilled. Thus the workers were exposed to several types of adversities and stresses of advance industrialisation. Resultantly varied forms of protests and resistance had cropped up among the workers.

Prior to 1900s most of the united protests came from the European and Eurasian and 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 late 1990s the guards, signallers and station masters struck against management but this action was suppressed firmly. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) which was the first national level trade union of the Indian working class, emerged in 1920. AITUC provided necessary strength to the workers in the Indian industries to organise themselves in a more consolidated manner. All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) was founded in June, 1925. All the small railway unions of the country started getting affiliated to it. However, in 1936, the biggest strike of the colonial era occurred in B.N. Railways where twenty-six thousand and five hundred workers had participated and it continued for more than two months. Years preceded the Second World War saw a huge fall in real earnings, price rise, imprisonment of most of the nationalist leaders etc. that had aggravated the labourers. In this situation World War II broke out in 1939 and the Indian workforce especially the railway workers faced tremendous hardship because the entire railway industry of India was utilised for the purpose of British war.

Independence was accompanied with splits in trade unions which resulted in the weakness of workers' collective actions and the process of developing the consciousness. After independence state's interference in regulating employees and employers relationship ultimately led to the weakening of the progress towards maturity of the working class movement. It adversely affected the development and consolidation of working class consciousness. I.R as a transportation industry had played a vital role in accelerating the industrial growth and economic progress of the country. Railways in India had been considered as the life blood of modern trade and commerce. In 1948, the NFIR was born and in 1953 was merged with AIRF. But when AIRF found that it was more keen on favouring the ruling party, AIRF left the union and began functioning independently and separately from 1956. However, these two unions – AIRF and NFIR were the only recognised unions

in the Indian Railways till date. The recommendations of the Second Pay Commission compelled the central government employees including the railways to go on strike in 1960 on the 11th July. This general Strike was suppressed by the government and the railwaymen's struggle was awarded with failure. Again all India Central Government employees including the railwaymen were preparing for struggle which resulted into the decision of holding of "one day token strike" in September, 1968. Several attempts were made to negotiate with the Government but Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India refused to listen anything. The strike action did not get any immediate success but the Third Central Pay Commission was appointed by the Government immediately after the strike. However, this period was characterised by a steady growth of communist movement and their strong presence in the mobilisation of working class in India. In 1970, the Centre for Trade Unions was constituted which tried to give a shape to the Indian trade union movement.

The attitude of the management and the performance of the recognised unions compelled the railway workers to search for an alternative which could provide strength and solidarity to the working class. As a result a number of category wise unions were formed by the different sections of the railway workers. These struggles of firemen in 1967, 1968 and 1970 showed the strength of the loco staff and paved the way for the formation of the All India Loco Running Staff Association. It was formed in 1970 in the month of August in Vijawada in Andhra Pradesh. Railwaymen were basically inspired by a feeling of self confidence and unity to mount their own agitations without the support of the recognised unions. On 2nd August 1973 the AILRSA called an all India strike which continued till the morning of 13th August. This strike halted the train movement completely and paralysed the entire functioning of the railways. The strike was called off on the assurance of the Railway Minister that no worker would be 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 great impetus and a new height to the labour movement of the country. Thus, it offered a revitalisation of trade union movement of the railways as well as the entire country. The result was the strike of 1974 by the Indian railwaymen.

The grievances of the workers had reached its peak during the late 1960s and early 1970s which ultimately resulted in the strike. In this background, in chapter III we had analysed the grievances of the workers which forced the workers and their unions to take the decision of launching an indefinite, general strike in May 1974. Here we have discussed the preparations for the workers to launch an all India general strike. It had unfolded the situation of the strike in different railway zones throughout the country during the days of the struggle.

In the 1970 there was a wave of crisis. Numerous strikes, bandhs, go slow, mass sick, lock outs had occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s which indicated the unharmonious relationship in the industrial front. The working class of the country had suffered from low wages, unsatisfactory working and living conditions, rising prices, absence of wage link with D.A, non-payment of adequate bonus, absence of leave with pay, problems relating to casual workers etc. During the years 1970-73 India had undergone its worst inflationary crisis since independence. In this moment the government had decided to disburse the D.A. in instalments. This decision made the workers furious when they found an absolute decline in their real earnings. But the leadership of the recognised unions in railway industry – both the AIRF and NFIR were reluctant to go against the authority as they developed an alliance with the bureaucrats. Therefore by the end of the 1960s a new trend had emerged in the railway front i.e. the formation of category wise unions hence AILRSA was founded in August 1970 which had agitated against the authority against long hours of work; harsh working condition, poor living condition, poor quality of uniform etc.

The success of AILRSA movement had revitalised the other recognised unions. NFIR though always remained loyal to the ruling government, declared not to go on direct actions. AIRF on the other hand, had a tradition of militant activities and ability to mobilise the workers. But during the whole of 1960s it had suffered from indecision and self contradiction. But to retain its position, it had to do something to influence the workers hence, it initiated to change its leadership. George Fernandes, a stormy trade unionist and Chairman of the Socialist Party was brought into AIRF to revamp the Federation. In December 1973 thousands of category unions from all over India met and discussed the demands and problems of the railwaymen and submitted a Charter of Demands to the Chairman of the Railway Board. But neither the category-wise unions nor the AIRF were

capable to mount any movement on its own. Therefore on 27th February 1974 in New Delhi a National Convention was held. Almost two thousand delegates were present in the meeting. A coordinating committee of all unions was established to launch a country wide indefinite strike with Fernandes, as Convenor and the committee was known as the National Co-ordinating Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle (NCCRS). On 28th February 1974, in its first meeting NCCRS constituted a thirteen member Action Committee. The union government had decided to take a tough line to deal with any possible struggle in the railway industry. On 2nd May in the midst of negotiation suddenly George Fernandes, P.K. Barua and others were arrested which indicated the unwillingness of the authority to settle the issue. NCCRS announced that all works on the Indian railways would stop, no wheels would move and the trains would terminate at the next main stations at 6 a.m. on 8th May 1974.

A united struggle of more than two million workers of the most significant public sector industry was such an outstanding event that no one could ignore it. The determination and solidarity that was achieved by the railway workers was not seen before in the history of labour movement in India. In almost all the railway zones the strike was intense and complete. Few places showed some exceptions. In the main railway centres of the country, e.g., Delhi Main and New Delhi, Bombay Central, Madras, in Calcutta both the Howrah and Sealdah, Gorakhpur, Guwahati, Mughalsarai etc. not a single train had moved and services were completely paralysed during the first few days of the strike. In the entire Southern region the strike was exceptionally strong. In the railway workshops like Kharagpur, Kanchrapara, Jamalpur, Perumbur, Golden Rock near Tiruchirapally, Chittaranjan Locomotives etc. remained deserted. Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi regretted for the entire attitude of the leaders of the railwaymen's unions.

For the government it was not possible to meet all the demands of the railway workers in the perspective of national economic conditions. At the end of the second week, the railway authority agreed that there were serious inconveniences that still existed in running the trains – both passenger and goods. In North East it had been difficult to maintain uninterrupted goods traffic which actually obstructed the tea trading in this region especially in Assam. In Calcutta and Bombay the suburban electrical multiple rakes were kept abandoned and inoperative due to the absence of the maintenance staff. From the mid of the second week i.e. from 19th May in different railway zones like Western, Central, Northern,

Southern, some divisions of Eastern and North-East Frontier Railways almost a pre-strike environment appeared to exist. It is under this condition that the rail strike had been called off from 28th May at 6.00 a.m. The twenty day long strike was withdrawn by the Action Committee of NCCRS unconditionally. So far the circumstances were concerned, the Action Committee had to consider all these perspectives and thus, withdrew the strike. According to the Action Committee the strike was called off due to current economic status of the workers and the country as well. In the course of assessing the intensity of the strike and the participation of the workers, Fernandes mentioned that out of fourteen lac permanent employees almost twelve lac faced break-in-service and fifty thousands were dismissed from jobs. Therefore, this figure itself symbolised the strength of the movement.

In chapter four we have studied the grievances of the workers and their story of deprivation in the Eastern Railway Zone during the period of late 1960s and early 1970s. It also focused its attention on the preparation of the strike by the railwaymen in this Zone. Here we have observed the situations that prevailed in the Eastern Railways during the strike days in May 1974. This chapter was also an attempt to assess the impact of the strike in this Zone. The main reason behind the workers' grievances was the wage structure. The salary which they were paid was so less that they could not avail minimum livelihood. It was really very tough for them to run a family of six to seven members with this amount of money. The heavy price rise of daily commodities especially the prices of food grains and edible oil had become immensely high which ultimately immersed the railwaymen into darkness. Workers also had disappointment on the bonus issue. In this background the employees of the Eastern Railway got frustrated by the role of the management and the railway trade unions too were frustrated.

In this situation, the trade unions in the railways had found it extremely difficult to appease the authority on the one hand and to subvert the labour movement on the other. In the Eastern Railway and in case of Northeast Frontier Railways, the role of the trade union leaders in harmonising and uniting the railway workers was remarkable. They started consolidating the working class and attempted to reach solidarity. In the meantime, NCCRS was formed and Zonal NCCRS was proposed for pursuing the decisions of Action Committee. As a result in E. R an Action Committee was formed. Bimal Dey, the general secretary of Eastern Railwaymen's Union was elected as the Convenor of this Action

Committee. Railway authority, on the other hand began its arrangements to manage the strike situation. Calcutta Corporation suspected that it would not be able to continue the water supply if the proposed rail strike materialised because the coal stock for the two pumping stations – Tallah and Palta were highly inadequate. FCI had prepared its own mechanism to increase its stock in order to meet the exigencies of the situation during the strike days. Eastern Railway had ordered to reduce the number of suburban trains in each and every division especially in Howrah and Sealdah.

The developments that took place in the strike days had impacted heavily the life of the mass in general and railway workers in particular. Two days before the strike a huge number of employees of the Eastern Railways and South Eastern Railways were taken into the custody. The E.R authority had declared that they had cancelled a few trains but the movement of the goods trains would be maintained so that essential commodities like food grains, coal and oil could be mobilised. From 8th May at 6'0 clock in the morning, most of the station areas were deserted because majority of the employees went on sick leave or remained absent from their duties. All the four sections in Howrah division demanded that they were in dire need of railway staff to run the trains and to maintain minimum services. E.R demanded that few goods trains carrying food grains, coal and raw materials to steel plants had begun resuming after one week, i.e., from 16th May 1974. Till the end of the fifteenth day of the strike large-scale absence of the Cabin staff was seen and the pictures of the crucial railway centres were more or less similar as the earlier. Eastern the Railways had demanded that goods trains too started moving and railways now were ready to provide services to the industries by transporting raw materials based on the Calcutta and its surrounding areas. It was on 27th May evening at 6 p.m. that the railway workers in E.R got the news of the unilateral decision of withdrawal of the railwaymen's strike from 28th May. The local leaders were of the opinion that the unilateral decision of strike withdrawal would certainly influence adversely the activities of the grass root trade union leaders and members too.

The impact of the strike of 1974 by the railwaymen was deep and manifold. The unity and solidarity achieved during this strike was historic. Eastern Railways had almost two lac of employees. In almost all the divisions, the workers had participated spontaneously in the strike till May 28th. The workers of the workshops in Liluah, Kanchrapara and

Jamalpur workshops had continued the strike remarkably. The Jamalpur Workshop was deserted till the end of the strike, the workers were keen to continue the strike to pressurise the Government to achieve their demands and sought an honourable settlement. At the Head Quarter in Calcutta almost ninety five percent of the workers remained absent from work. In Asansol division the strike was not at all intense, only hand full of railwaymen had joined the strike but the struggle was complete in Andal, Sitarampur and few more places under this Division.

The coal movement in this region was greatly hampered. In Calcutta and its surrounding areas the fish market was in critical condition, vegetables like potatoes, onions etc. became scarce and the prices started rising. The manufacturers of the products like soap, detergent etc. stated that the raw materials had become so scanty due to the railway strike. Supply of cooking gas was very irregular, petrol and diesel became similarly meagre in meeting the demands of the Eastern region.

The Divisional Head Quarters in Howrah and Sealdah and the station areas were under the control of military and para military forces, it seemed that the station became the base camps of army and their troops operation. At the end of the second week the strike fizzled out and ended with huge repression, victimisation, arrests, betrayal, loss of national income, stagnation in industrial progress. Huge amount of employees of the Eastern and South Eastern Railways had faced break-in-services, removal from services and suspension for participating in the strike. The West Bengal Government treated the strike as a political challenge thrown to the Congress ruling party by the leftist leaders. Siddhartha Sankar Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal had resorted to brute force to suppress the every little action of the railwaymen. Police did not spare the women and little children of the striking workers. In all the railway colonies a vast number of CRPF, BSF, and Paramilitary forces were deployed to handle the situation. Even at midnight police used to come at the colonies, scattered everything in the quarters in search of the striking workers. After the strike was called off, CITU organised a meeting consisting of all left parties, where a Legal Aid Committee was formed to look after the cases of victimisation like break-in-service, removal etc. and fight and defend them in the Courts.

In the Fifth chapter we have focused our attention on the grievances of railwaymen in North Eastern Frontier Railways. It has tried to describe the preparation of the railway workers of this zone before the strike began and during the days of the struggle. This study has intended to discuss the strike situation throughout the N.F. Railways in this period. This chapter has been concluded by analysing the consequences and effects of this workers' movement in the entire N. F. Railways. After independence in Assam and in the entire north east region a well developed railway connectivity did not exist, hence the link between Assam and the rest of the country was poor. Thus the Government of India had initiated towards eradicating the problem and formed a separate railway zone here and Northeast Frontier Railways came into existence on 15th January, 1958. It had four divisions in 1974- Katihar, Alipurduar, Tinsukia and Lumding with the Zonal Headquarter in Maligaon, Guwahati.

Railway workers of N. F. Railways had similar types of grievances as the workers of the rest of the country. But since they were the workers of the frontier states their problems were much more grave and hardships were more profound. Following were the causes of workers' discontentment in this zone:

- 1) the erosion in real earnings because of huge price rise aggravated the railwaymen and the D.A. formula that was used to bridge the gap, had failed to serve the purpose,
- 2) the bonus as deferred wages was also not permitted to the railwaymen,
- 3) in the hilly region of entire North Eastern States it was more difficult to manage the livelihood as there had always been a scarcity of essential commodities which ultimately led to price hike,
- 4) most of the railway workers in the north east states were provided with 'gang huts', the one room quarter which were so unhealthy, suffocating and filthy that living for years in those quarters was miserable,
- 5) the workers, engaged in the heavy works like those involved in fire works as a first or second foremen in the rail engines or the drivers of steam power, had to work in dirt and grease they needed some uniforms while they were performing their duties.

But the quality of the uniforms were so substandard that the workers were not able to wear them even for a single day.

- 6) railway workers in Assam were also disappointed on the issue of frequent disciplinary actions taken by the authority against them on little and insignificant matters even on personal grudges,
- 7) another problem that was very significant was the number of casual workers and their mode of payment, they were paid only rupees 3.5 per day on 'no work no pay' basis and employed for 119 days.
- 8) above all, the railway trade unions never fought for the interest of the railway workers rather remained busy to satisfy the management,

These problems existed in this zone and the resentments of the workers were increasing day by day. The recognised unions here never took any initiative to redress their discontent. Thus, the inactiveness of the recognised trade unions and their policy of appeasement of authority had forced the local leaders to form United Committee for Railwaymen (UCR) in the year 1970 and started organising themselves to convince the authority for fulfilling their demands separately. The entire union activity of N.F. Railways was dominated by the UCR. A greater unity was observed here by coordinating the unrecognised categorical associations and UCR played a pivotal role in this regard. But all these craft unions came under the leadership of NCCRS in 1974. The Convenor of Zonal Action Committee and Working President of Mazdoor Union, Indibar Kongar played a strong role in the entire process of uniting the workers at all levels. The Action Committees were actually assigned with a great responsibility to organise and prepare the workers to launch and continue the nationwide struggle. On 23rd April, 1974 a massive rally of railwaymen went to Maligaon Headquarters in the evening and had served the strike notice and threatened total withdrawal of workforce from 6:00 a.m. of May 8th for an indefinite period. The news of the arrests of national level leaders such as George Fernandes, H.S. Chowdhury etc. compelled the railwaymen to protest against this treacherous action of the government. On 3rd May, every division under N.F. Railway observed 'Protest Day' against the decisive attitude of the government.

In many places of North Bengal, the strike started on 7th May and continued till 29th May, 1974. The areas of Darjeeling Hills were completely detached from the rest of the state. Train services became extremely irregular in North Bengal including in the hills and the plains. In Katihar Division the mobility of trains had been disrupted since 7th May 1974 but the authority was incapable to move the trains towards their destinations because of the scarcity of the loco running staff. N.F. Railway authority ran only food grains special goods trains. But the staff attendance in various stations in Assam was so limited that after five days of the strike, supply of essential goods in Assam could not be maintained properly and the mobility of passenger services in the hill regions of north east were stopped totally. The Railway Board declared that maintaining discipline on the part of the employees was an important factor for the development of the railway industry. Thus, the railway authority considered this strike action in 1974 by the railwaymen as a breach of service rules hence, penal measures were taken against the striking workers.

The strike struggle in almost all the Divisions of N.F. Railways ended on 29th May morning instead of 28th May 1974. The aftermath of the agitation was not at all favourable for the striking railwaymen. The magnitude of the railway workers' struggle and their determination to challenge the authority were accompanied with the heavy cost of their own services because innumerable break in services, removal, suspension, arrest under DIR and MISA took place. At the beginning of the movement, the struggle was complete and the workers participated in it enormously. As a result of government's use of brute force and hostility towards the workers' cause, the railwaymen had resumed their duties before the withdrawal of the strike.

The Mining industry especially the iron ore and coal belt of the east had suffered a huge loss. Due to the immobility of the trains the production in most of the coal mines in Assam came to a halt. For the frontier states railways were treated as the second link to defence and the strike of twenty days was really a matter of great challenge for the authority. The most important impact of this railway strike in N.F. Railways was the food scarcity which had become an emerging matter of concern in Assam and its neighbouring states. The strike had affected the supply of food grains such as wheat and rice in the areas of the Darjeeling hills, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura etc. The Tea industry in Assam was the worst sufferer. From day one of the strike not a single

chest of tea was released from the state by rail to any part of the country. The agitation had encompassed several chains of disruptions which adversely influenced various other industries such as coal, steel, iron ore etc. and indirectly led to general increase of price level and thus the cost of living. Immobility of trains resulted in great inconveniences to the tourists in the Darjeeling hills, Dooars and in Sikkim. A large number of tourists including people from foreign countries had been stranded in Siliguri.

Unpreparedness of the railwaymen and their trade unions in N. F. Railways was the reason of the failure in the struggle. This strike was associated with inevitable strife and bitterness within the workers' organisations and the authority and trade unions also. In spite of all weaknesses, this struggle had achieved a solidarity that never before and never again, was seen in the history of Indian labour movement in general and Indian rail workers movement in particular.

In chapter six we have looked at the attitude and the reactions of the state to the railway workers' strike in May 1974. In this chapter we have made an assessment of the role of the state towards the working class movement in the country. It also tries to analyse the attitude of the State while negotiating with the trade unions before the strike started and the steps taken by the Government to deal with the strikers. It has focused its attention to find out the reasons behind the heavy repression that let loose over the railway employees by the Government to crush their movement. The attitude and response of the government had repeatedly been moving towards imposition of authoritarian rule in the country. And the Government became intolerant towards any opposing force within the country. The two struggles of 1960 and 1968 by the Central Government Employees had indicated that the government did not have any willingness to negotiate or settle any issue or dispute with the working class or their unions.

If the government was determined to confront the workers with its full state power and strength, no segment of working class belonging to ever biggest industry of the country could hardly manage to win. Indira Gandhi's government had utilised all its state apparatus to compel the railwaymen first to go on strike and then to surrender unconditionally and withdraw the movement unilaterally. The government conceived its success over the railway workers as a lesson to all the industrial working class especially the workers engaged in

Public Sector Undertakings and industries. On 23rd April Mrs. Gandhi briefed in the Parliament that a strike in the important public utility sector would be a national disaster and the leaders of the unions who had given strike notice should have realised the grave consequences of their proposed step. The railway administration declared that the strike notice itself was illegal under the Defence India Rules (DIR), the government would be justified in taking penal actions against strikers according to law.

Arrests in the crucial phase of negotiations had revealed the attitude of the government. But the authority argued that it had no intention of arresting and detaining the railwaymen. The Railway Board accused Mr. Fernandez for creating an atmosphere of distrust and confusion which ultimately led to this nationwide strike. Interestingly, the detention of Mr. Fernandez made him a national hero and he most skillfully utilised this image and tried to re-establish his party's importance in the national political scene. However, to some critics the Government had attempted to divert the attention of the countrymen from its failure to control the economic crisis which confronted the nation and shifted the agitation launched by the working class. Mrs. Gandhi's government showed power in handling labour unrests like lookouts in LICs and brought more tough labour policy to deal with the new trade union regime in the country and growing discontent among the industrial workers.

In the railway industry, the most important component was its loco running staff. They were required to keep the mobility of the trains hence they were more brutally forced and insisted to join their duties. They were beaten mercilessly and even were taken at the point of guns. When the strike began, the government declared the activities of all the striking trade unions as illegal and issued arrest warrant against thousands of leaders and the active members who were still outside the jail. In West Bengal the torture on the railway working class was tremendous. While repressing the railwaymen's agitation, the Government of West Bengal led by Siddhartha Sankar Ray showed a fascist attitude and it was so organised and skilful that it could be compared with a murderous attempt. The government took the help of a well equipped armed and police forces so that not a single railway worker could escape from this monstrous encounter.

Railway Board announced the termination of the casual workers before the strike began in May. Because they also had incorporated their demand of decasualisation in the Six Point Charter of Demands and participated in the struggle. As a result the railway authority had resorted to the weapon of dismissal of the entire casual workers of the industry. All the major stations, junctions, divisions, railway depots, loco sheds, yards etc went under the control of the armed forces. In most parts of the Northern, Central and Southern Railways, the authorities utilised the instruments of torture and harassment against the railwaymen in a same intensity in all the cases of opposition. Physical, financial, mental pressurisations were simultaneously employed against the railway men. According to B. T. Ranadive the brutalities of armed forces had crossed all the limits of terrorising the people. The police had raided the houses of the railway workers. They went on insulting and assaulting the women and children not only mentally but physically too, above all there were several ‘cases of rapes on workers’ wives, daughters’ also (Ranadive, 1999; p.5). The railway authorities in various zones had been repeatedly reminding the striking workers that any disruption of railway services would lead to termination from services.

M. N. Berry expressed his deep gratitude to the Ministry of Defence and Defence Minister Govind Narain for their prompt and effective assistance and support in the time of railway strike of May 1974. Railway Board had made every possible effort to keep the wheels of the transport industry moving. M.N. Berry appreciated all the secretaries, officers, supervisors, men of every department for their dedicated services during the railway strike in May 1974.

Apart from all these attacks and counter attacks by the trade unions and the authorities, the strike of May 1974 had symbolised the unity and solidarity of the working class of the country. It also represented the ability of the government to manage an internal crisis through dedicated involvement of the officers and their zeal to combat the hurdles and restored the services. This struggle was an isolated event in Indian labour history because both the workers’ activities and government’s reactions during the strike period had never occurred in contemporary India –sweeping involvement of the workers, their aggressive attitude, intensity of the movement did not know any boundary and touched the hearts of the millions and traversed the geographical boundary. Reconstructing the awareness and authoritarian attitude in the post colonial era were the two most significant components of

this movement which resulted in the consolidation of the working class and imposition of National Emergency in June, 1975.

Conclusion

Now let us arrive at a conclusion. The concluding years of 1960s and early 1970s we found were marked by several crises and the crisis took the form of industrial disputes, labour unrests, inflationary crisis, huge price rise etc in the economic perspective at the same time the political scenario of the country had represented discontent, contradiction, antagonism, corruption etc. These factors made the people of the country disillusioned and hopeless. The policies and the efficacy of the government was being questioned. And the year 1974 had crossed all the limits. The twenty days long general strike of the railwaymen which ended on 28th May 1974, became a matter of discussion and debate of every individual, every household, office, shop, market place so on and so forth throughout the country. The critics said that in India the economic breakdown was caused mainly due to the unsatisfactory performance of agriculture. Since the 1970s agricultural production especially the production of food grains were far below than the estimated rate i.e., it could not reach the calculated level of production. The years preceding 1974 were the bad years of harvesting and the result was the shortfall in production. Another reason was the failure of the management in distributing agricultural goods. Moreover, it did not reach the expected level due to several reasons, e.g., the emergence of Bangladesh during 1971-72 which had put pressure on the economy of the country. The Government had spent crores of rupees on the reliefs operation. War with Pakistan was another factor which strained the country's economy. Not only external assistances but internal causes were also responsible for the huge expenditure on national purse. Peculiarly, all these expenditure were charged from the pocket of the common man of the country. Enormous increase in population was in the period 1970-73, had a great impact on the agricultural production. The country was unable to cope up with the emerging situation. The years (1972-73) also required drought relief operation which incurred huge amount of money. In this background of overall national and

international crises, political condition of the country was extremely unfavourable for the smooth functioning of the administration. Economists were of the opinion that the monetary data had revealed that the Central Government's total indebtedness to the RBI which climbed by Rs 882 crores in 1971-72 and by Rs 800 crores in 1972-73, between January 26th 1973 and January 25th 1974, it mounted up by Rs 1,120 crores (Dandekar, 31.3.74, p.33).

In this economic context in a diverse country like India one must have a colossal of distress and annoyance and discontentment. Hence incidents of mass agitations occurred during this period. It appeared that the political process of the country was assumed to be operated only for dealing the instruments of coercion. It appeared from the attitude of the Government that it had the desire to reserve these problems to retain in power. The refusal of meeting the unwanted strain in the employer-employee relationship, refusal to abolish the growing unrests among the downtrodden and industrial-agricultural labourers had generated a kind of antipathy towards the attitude of the authority. The entire atmosphere of the country was affected by the increasing demands of the working class on the one hand and by the excessive use of arbitrary power and authority on the other. The basic dilemma of this type of political system was the centralising tendency of the authority and its hesitation of undertaking the systematic usages of economic and technological resources and socio-cultural power. In this political juncture and in the midst of economic crisis the Railwaymen's strike of May 1974 took place. It had occurred in the context of political instability and in the peak of a volatile situation.

In this connection it can be said that the trend of over centralisation in every aspect of political and administrative system had gradually deteriorated the relationship inside the political parties, their leaderships, in the industrial front or within the whole social groups. The tendency of autocratic rule and authoritarianism actually revealed the inner weakness of the political system, lack of accountability on the part of the administration and its inability to deal with a critical situation. The administration that was entangled with full of insecurities and anxiousness, lack of farsightedness was not in a position to attend any constructive or conclusive decision. It was observed that some narrow interpretations of current events and incidents left permanent and long term scar and blemishes on the country and on its mass of the people. During the early 1970s the policies of the government were

determined by the interests of the big business houses, traders-merchants, industrialists and by the rich farmers. The government had insured substantial support to the big industrialists for their sustenance and on the other hand this section of economy had provided the desired security to the ruling party for remaining in power.

To Pranab Bardhan the policies of the government, they were designed to control the public resources and finances of the country in favour of the industrialists. According to him “the policies of the import substituting industrialisations of quantitative trade restrictions, providing automatically protected domestic markets, of running a large public sector Essentially to provide underpriced capital goods, intermediate products and infrastructural facilities for private industry, of mobilising public lending institutions for private industrial finances, of providing for various forms of investment allowances, of permitting a very lenient tax treatment of capital gains and all kinds of real and fictitious business expenditure-all these had been to the considerable benefit of the industrialist partners in the ruling coalition” (Bardhan, 1978; p.529). Through all these measures the industrialists got better access to the national economy and participation in the social and political affairs of the country. At this juncture the relatively weaker section of the society was at the bottom of the bargaining process and did not participate in any mainstream political processes of the country. They also did not have any share in the surplus of the economy. The then Congress ruling party and the Government conceived labour power as the element of production system and saleable item in the market. Thus the growing discontents inevitably resulted into agitations all over the country. Consequently the quality and efficiency of the administration narrowed down and the working people were under pressure. But the powerful autonomous tendency of the working class tried to capture their early position, hence confronted with their authority. The Indian ruling elites with their several internal divisions could not provide any solid solution to the proliferating demands of the working class hence the consequences was the breakdown of the economy and the Proclamation of National Emergency.

However, the 1974 Railwaymen’s Strike had its own relevance and significance. It could be said that the trade union movement in India with the railway workers struggle of 1974 reached to a new height and ferment. The industrial working class of India had demonstrated that it had the ability to get united with its full strength to challenge the very

existence of the authority. The question of income and wages of the railwaymen placed a legitimate demand which was predominantly economic in character. The principle of collective bargaining also gained some meaning and validity in the political process. Nevertheless it was launched when the industrial disputes in the country were at its height and workers' militancy touched the sky. Several political forces started playing their wild cards in the country, e.g., in West Bengal the Naxalite movement was in its full swing. The split in the Congress-I had extended the power of Indira Government. Its inclination towards centralisation, establishment of autocratic rule and authoritarianism had resultantly escalated tremendously.

This strike was unique in terms of unity and solidarity achieved by the working class of the country. The rank and file of the railway workers had participated in this struggle, not only the railwaymen but the other central government employees and other industrial workers showed their solidarity towards this movement. It brought all the trade unions across the spectrum under one umbrella for their very existence. This strike marked a milestone as it transcended all the barriers of political shades. It boosted up the railwaymen with unprecedented awareness regarding the consolidation of the working class and also enhanced its self confidence. This movement for the first time in the country attained some maturity in the attitude of the trade unions. It also showed a distinct change in the working class consciousness. However, the Mainstream argued that this strike had clearly uncovered the gap between the middle class leadership of the trade unions and the worker leaders, who symbolised the aspirations of the mass of the workers (Mainstream, 8.6.1974; p.40).

It transformed trade union activity into a political struggle and the opposition, to some extent utilised the workers' agitation to succeed in its goal to gain power in the next general election. This strike demonstrated industrial strength and organised trade unionism in the country. The upheaval in the organised sector had developed new type of offensive against the working class. Surprisingly, the purpose and principle of the unity drive among the workers were to attain more maturity in consciousness. But the authority skillfully handled it and advocated in favour of them as a new kind of strains and stresses had strived on them. The workers remained unaware about the basic issues of contradiction between the management and the trade union leadership. Therefore, immense hardship and sufferings were ultimately faced by the innocent railway workers. A conflicting trend was observed in

this struggle from its inception. Conflict between the railway trade unions and the authority; between the railway men and the management even between the leaders and the ordinary railway workers were also prevailed all along the struggle. A kind of strain was always felt in the entire course in both the sides. A deadlock situation arose during the strike days as none of the parties agreed to settle the issue. Surprisingly the leaders did not understand that delayed discussion or delayed settlement had gone against the interest of the workers which might isolate them.

Railway men's strike of May 1974 was probably the first general strike in the Indian Railways since its inception. Before 1947 there were another three attempts taken by the working class of India in the year 1949, 1960 and 1968 but unfortunately all these attempt failed miserably. The year 1973 had suffered from a number of labour unrests on different issues. Industrial relation in the railway deteriorated and lost all the past glories and legacy of transportation industry. Over the years the labour-management relation in this industry became so messy and chaotic that nothing had worked to settle any problem. This strike was supported by the mass of the people, as it also represented prevailing resentments among the people against the Government. However this strike had cleared that for restoring industrial peace and its smooth functioning, the relation between the employer and employees must be reshaped and the attitude of the Railway Ministry must be changed while dealing with the workers' demands and grievances.

Mainstream had admitted that 'the Indian railway men's nation- wide strike, from 8th to 28th May, 1974 was no ordinary event, rather it involved the railway network of 60,000 km. spread over the country employing an estimated strength of 17 lakh workers (Mainstream, 15.6.1974). Not only from the point of the mileage or the involvement of the workers in the strike, but it was really not an ordinary event because the heroism that was exhibited by the ordinary railway workers against the powerful autocratic Government led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi made it historical. The unity and solidarity of the rank and file workers had emerged as a new force of challenge and was marked as a new awakening and maturity of the working class in India. This struggles were not only the result of any sudden action, it was caused due to years long deprivation and several other developments that took place in the political plane of the country. This struggle was participated not only by the organised section but was immensely joined by the organised sectors of the railway industry.

The craft unions throughout the country with few exceptions had involved whole heartedly in the movement. thus it was termed as the biggest confrontation between the working class and the Indian State. It was the struggle whose impact on country's economy was unprecedented. It had actually affected several other sectors of national economy, e.g., tea industry, engineering industry because it cut the supply of coal, iron and other raw materials. Traders had taken the opportunity of the situation and created artificial scarcity and shortage of different essential commodities like sugar, oil etc. Thus it led to heavy price rise and daily consumer items vanished from the markets. Railways lost hundreds of crores of rupees and the Government spent other hundreds of crores to suppress the movement instead of negotiating with the working class.

The intensity of the workers' participation was historical in the pre and post independent era. Workers fought a heroic battle against the authority. The weapon in the workers' hand was their number and the strength was their unity. The strike was unprecedented in many respects; the moment the news of arrests of the national leaders of the railway trade unions were flushed out, the workers from other transport industries and employees of the electricity, taxi drivers of Mumbai and workers from many other sectors showed their solidarity towards the railway men's struggle. Not only within the country but different international trade unions and other organisations had supported the railwaymen's cause and their struggle whole heartedly. Samaddar rightly conceived that "the NCCRS was formed in February 1974 with the trade unions like AIRF, AILRSA, AIREC, AITUC, CITU, BRMS and around 125 railway trade unions joining hands to launch the biggest labour strike ever seen by the country, around 15 lakh railway employees engaged and the total railway traffic was immobilised". He also indicated "the importance of the strike could be understood from the fact that the main leaders being arrested by the Government" while negotiations were going on.⁶⁶ Thus, the success of the railway strike depended on the zonal and local union leaders and the rank and file workers also (Samaddar, 2015; p. 44).

⁶⁶ Fernandes was arrested from Lucknow railway station on 2nd May, followed by country-wide arrests of thousands of railway workers

All the trade unions except NFIR got involved in this agitation. NFIR kept safe distance from this strike because it was affiliated with the ruling party, the Congress. The reason behind its inactiveness was to restrict the workers agitation against the authority. The Railway Board always aimed at discouraging and limiting workers' actions in the industry and resorted to the policy of compulsory recognition of the trade unions. Board utilised these recognised unions to regulate workers action. Surprisingly, not only in the railway industry whenever Government's intervention was needed it had all along acted as the agent of the employers as in the case of 1974 railwaymen's strike. In other industries like cotton textile, automobile or in jute industry it obviously took the sides of the management. Therefore through this trade union tactics it had pressurised the employees not to raise their voice against the authority. In 1974 all the trade unions in the railway industries (except INTUC backed ones) launched a nation-wide movement which achieved some sort of success in spite of opposition from INTUC. As a large number of railway workers had joined and railway services became immobile (Bhowmick, 1996; p. L-41). As Ananth quoted that Fernandes was reported to have said that "realise the strength which we possess - seven days strike of Indian Railways every thermal station in the country would close. A ten days' strike of the Indian railways, every steel mill would close down and the other industries in the country would come to halt for the next twelve months. If once the steel mill furnace was switched off, it took nine months to retire. A fifteen days' strike in the Indian Railways, the country would starve" (Ananth, 2016; p.18).

The strongest centres of the struggle were the areas where a large number of homogeneous groups of labourers stayed together and composed the population, such places were - Mugholsarai, Chittaranjan, Jamalpur, mainly the workshops where working class had strong trade union culture and connection. In these places the Government unleashed heavy repression and terror attacked on the railway workers. The solidarity and patience of the workers were beyond imagination. They braved brute force and where the Government declared the strike as illegal and imposed DIR, MISA against the railway workers. As a result they escaped from railway colony and took shelter in the nearby jungles and different places in order to avoid arrest and police torture. Most of the railway colonies wore a deserted look. All the windows and doors were tightly closed and the roads, streets and

market places all were emptied or deserted. Railway workers and their families were badly beaten and even the women members were physically assaulted.

The eastern region was affected in many respects, e.g., the region was rich in coal and steel production, the complete immobility of the railway transport made it very difficult for the administration to run other industries situated in different parts. Railway Board and the government focused their attention in this region and utilised heavy armed forces and resorted to every kind of measure which compelled the workers to join their duties and run the trains. The highest number of arrests and removal from railway services took place in this region- South Eastern Railways, Eastern Railways and N.F. Railways. Where the intensity of the strike was high, the torture was immense. Harassment and nuisance were enforced only to break the workers confidence and their resistances. The reactions of the government had itself proved that the struggle had really the capacity to challenge the might of the state. Thus the struggle was glorious because the railway workers had forced the government to accept the validity and justness of their demands.

The unity achieved by the railway workers was the first stepping stone towards their success. For launching an all India general and indefinite strike solidarity of the working class was the most essential pre condition. Not only unity but the determination, courage and firmness that were carried on by the millions of ordinary railway men were unparalleled in the history of labour movement of the country. Abnormal and unequalled repression and use of police and armed forces were bravely bore by the railway men during the twenty days of the strike. The anti working class policy and activities of the Government was never seen before. The intensity of the struggle, tenacity of the workers and the tyranny of the Government made this movement an extra ordinary and exceptional in comparison to the earlier ones. The strike was called off unconditionally and the decision was taken by the members of the Action Committee of the NCCRS unilaterally. The workers resumed their duties within the two days of the withdrawal.

The next phase of the battle was more dangerous and grave that started immediately after the strike ended. Immense torture and numerous cases of victimisation were unleashed against the railway workers which envisaged a strenuous consequence of the struggle. Workers had to overcome it. This must also be fought with same vigour and spirit of unity,

boldness and firmness as it was during the strike days. Victimisation and vindictiveness had become the weapons in the hands of the authority. This attitude of the management brought extreme hardship in the life of the railway employees, punishment transfer to the remote and rural areas was the most common one. Delayed payment of salary was another method but the loyal workers got the flu pay packets, incentives and over times. These activities of the authority had indicated Government's anti working class attitude and non co-operation with the working class. It also attempted to disable the activeness of the NCCRS, so that the railway men's struggle could be sent in the cold.

The reason behind the unconditional withdrawal of the strike was that it got started fizzling out in many important railway centres and it was going out of hand. The causes of failure of the struggle were manifold. Inter union rivalry was one of them. Left parties perceived the strike as a political battle against the Congress ruling party. They had heavily accused the ruling Government for its repressive measures and intended to capture power in the next Lok Sabha general election. Most interestingly those places where CITU was in strong position, the strike was proved to be weak. Critics were of the opinion that CITU set the examples of betrayal and unfaithfulness. The Ludhiana Loco shed claimed to be the strong hold of CITU did not join the strike and remained in their jobs from 8th May onwards, all of them earned monetary rewards from the authority (Biswas, 1977; p. 12). The members of NFIR including the Congress hooligans took active part in breaking the strike and it betrayed its fellow workers. CPM blamed AITUC chief S.A Dange for confusing the workers whether to be with the struggle or give it up. Interestingly the Socialist Party also faced split on the question of supporting the railway men's strike, whereas Fernandes was the Chairman of this party. But the members got fragmented on this issue. Various parties like Lok Dal or Jana Sangh showed some kind of antipathy about the railway men's struggle and their hardships. As Ananth pointed out that 'apart from making noise in Parliament and outside, the political leaders did nothing to maintain and mobilise solidarity actions even in places where they were strong (Ananth, 2016; p.19). Peculiarly, Jaya Prakash Narayan remained silent on the issue of railway men's strike though he was the General Secretary of the AIRF in 1948.

The CPI (M) believed in continuous revolution and compromise with the ruling elite was not at all acceptable under any circumstance. But the organised attack of the state with

full vigour was really difficult to resist. Railway authority and Government could not expect the complete shut- down of the industry and immobility of the railway transport system hence they unleashed terror attack on the railway working class. It was beyond the capacity of the railwaymen to continue their struggle for a prolonged period. The Government behaved as if a war like situation had been prevailing in the country and interpreted the struggle as an attempt of destroying the pillars of democratic government. However, J.M. Biswas had suggested certain measures for further struggles in future-

- a) Ensuring that the situation arising out of the railway strike would not be taken advantage by the forces of right reaction;
- b) It had to be taken care of that the unity of the railway workers forged through struggle, would not be utilised for furthering the sectarian aims of any party or groups their off,
- c) That the unity of the railway workers would be broadened further and guarded from fighting and division (Biswas, 1977; p. 20).

The railway men's strike of May 1974 was a milestone and played a pioneering role in reaching maturity. It set an example in inspiring and producing dynamism among the working class. It also ensured the economic, political and social transformation of the mass of the people. Indian railways were the largest employer of the country employing enormous number of workers (nearly 14 lakh workers). In all hours of day and night, winter and summer, in kind of climatic conditions - favourable or unfavourable, more than 10,000 trains were running from one place to another in India. It involved a certain amount of risk to the life and property of its users, this risk became significant when the railway staff was overworked, extremely tired, malnourished, insufficiently clothed, inadequately housed improperly trained. They remained under immense work pressure and resultantly grievances also increased. For this reason it was the responsibility of the railway authority and the government to ensure satisfactory working and living conditions for the staff members of the railway industry. It was also to take measures to expedite the process of redressing the workers' discontentment (Rao, 1974; p. 183).

Ironically, the workers were not capable of fulfilling their minimum livelihood and the Government was not at all interested in taking measures for providing better living to the

railway workers. Peculiarly, the attitude of the government and the magnitude of its repression had revealed the nature of governance and intention of the ruling elites. It was also true that the heavy use of brute force and the volume of torture had insisted the railway workers to surrender. But several factors were responsible for the failure of the struggle, e.g., not only the despotic nature of State Administration and barbaric repression but the attitude of the railway trade unions, their rivalry and betrayal had broke the morale of the workers. All these factors together had contributed to this end. (Dange, 1974; p.1).

In our study we have found one incident that how the authority and the officials forced the employees to join their duties. Dhar was a deputy magistrate of Chandannagar, during the strike days in 1974 he was posted at Kamarkundu railway station on Tarakeshwar - Sheoraphuli line. When the strike started on 8 May 1974, Dhar observed that the railway stations in this area were completely empty but the employees were waiting outside the station and watching the situation and the trade unions were constantly announcing not to join their duties. The entire area and the railway station became immobile but this region was important for agriculture and trading of essential commodities, thus Dhar decided to keep the trains running. He tried to convince the employees to join their duties and assured them to give protection. He arranged for patrolling system in the residential areas and managed extra staff from Howrah to continue the railway services. On the third day he was successful in running dummy trains with some passengers. The station master with very few staff had joined their duty. Hence it became easy for him to keep the transport alive. An operative rake was arranged which ran as a shuttle up to Howrah. He requested the traction driving inspector, signal inspector and permanent way inspector to drive the rakes. They hesitantly agreed but opined that with a defective rake how one could approve the mobility of any train. At last after 11th May 1974 Dhar was able to run one special train between Tarakeshwar and Chandannagar up to Howrah with the assistance of the technical staff. Some reporters said he got huge popular support as the first train was run in this area but according to some an unnecessary force was used to keep the rake mobile. This was a story of a dutiful officer but this was not the end of the story because the officer while performing his duty attempted in several ways to break the struggle of the railwaymen. In order to tackle the situation for maintaining normalcy Dhar had faced a lot of trouble and difficulty which symbolised the strength and intensity of the workers' involvement in the movement.

The method of breaking any workers' resistance through the use of brute force was a new phase of Indian polity. The State had exhibited the intolerance, uncompromising, unsympathetic and authoritarian attitude towards the mass of the country. The activities of the trade unions during the strike period too, showed the actual purposes of launching the indefinite strike throughout the country. The people in Government- Centre or State, were the representatives of petty middle class they had a great lust for money and power, hence administration and politics were the source of these things. On the other hand the leaders of trade unions pretended that they were only striving for workers' cause and had no other political ambitions but unfortunately failed to bring any revolutionary change for the working class of the country.

Interestingly, after independence some kind of maturity was observed among the large number of workers who attempted to consolidate themselves socially and culturally. Therefore the workers from different social and cultural strata, homogeneous or heterogeneous groups were seeking for their own identity as an industrial working class of the country. Another factor which had yielded a balance in the trade unions, was the emergence of craft based unions in the railway industry. These grassroots leaders were enormously powerful and motivated the workers that any agitation for this level could be able to shake the root of any authority of union. This change in the root of the worker had not been noticed by any of the leaders neither by the national leaders in power and administration nor by the trade union leadership. Labour unrests like this were quite inevitable in such economic and political background. Though the workers' agitations and industrial disputes had been growing like anything and the protest movements were at its peak, the entire political and economic situation of the country were unstable rather in a turmoil situation which prevailed throughout the country. The parties of all political shades must clearly assert their own opinions regarding the workers' strike. Although the strike was suppressed with brutal force and massive deployment of armed forces and the workers were bound to surrender but one could not claim this movement as a failure. It had achieved later what it aimed to attain.

Rajni Kothari had argued that the suspension of the political process also brought some relief to the whole atmosphere of chaos, confrontation, and bandhs etc. that used to take place almost every day without any reason. According to Kothari the dramatic conduct

of the Parliamentarians had abolished all decency and dignity of the House (Kothari, 1977; p. 14). Kothari referred to the decision of emergency which was implemented by the Indira government in June 1975. All the economic crisis or political upheavals to manage the labour unrests were the prelude to the implementation of the Proclamation of the Emergency on 26th 1975. However the railwaymen's strike of 1974 was a unique demonstration of unity and solidarity of the working class which had the strength to compel the people of all strata to rethink about the conditions of the industrial workers in India. It had the power to put a halt on the wheels of the nation. Unity was achieved as the essence of the effective resistance by the working class against the bureaucratic and authoritarian attacks on them.

Nevertheless, the Government India under the leadership of Mrs Indira Gandhi realised that the striking railway workers received support and sympathy from all over the country including various international forums. Though the strike had revealed not only the actual intention of the central government but also exposed the underlying weaknesses and controversies of the trade union leaderships, e.g., the famous Dange -Limaye conflict became an open matter of discussion which caused damage to the confidence of the striking workers. This issue was well taken up by the authority and they used it to create divisions among the unions. Another issue which had negative impact on the railway men's struggle was the call for 'West Bengal bandh' by the left parties on May 7th 1974 out of inter unionism rivalry and over jealousy for each other. The impulsiveness behind the decision of the central government employees to go on strike throughout the country from 10th May 1974 and its decision of withdrawal of the strike had a harmful effect on the railwaymen, especially when they saw a bad response from the employees.

In the sense of long term development of the trade union movement the battle of hundreds of thousands of railway men and their families had proved the enormous revolutionary potentials of the working class and a real threat to the capitalist ruling class in spite of the heavy repression and savage attack on them by the government of India.