

CHAPTER - IV

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS : GARDENS AND WORKERSBRIEF HISTORY - TERAI AND DOOARSTERAI

The Terai region lies in the plains of Darjeeling district. O'Malley describes it as, "a low lying belt of country traversed by numerous rivers and streams rushing down the hills and by the upland ridges which mark their courses. It is an unhealthy marshy tract, formerly covered by dense malarious jungle in which aboriginal tribes of Meches, Dhimals and Koches burnt clearings and raised their scanty crops of rice and cotton on a system, if system it can be called of nomadic husbandry. It has now been extensively cleared for tea gardens and settled tillage, but still contains large block of Sal forests interspersed with cultivated land and village sites"
(L.S.S.O' Malley 1907:2).

Originally the Terai portion of Darjeeling district was a part of the state of Sikkim. The Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in 1780. During next 30 years they overran Sikkim as far east as the Tista and Conquered and annexed Terai. Meanwhile war broke out between Nepal and East India Company and at the close of the war in 1817 by the treaty of Titaliya the tract which the Nepalese has conquered from Sikkim, was ceded to the company. The company made over the whole of country between the Mechi and the Tista to the Raja of Sikkim and guaranteed his sovereignty. Sikkim thus became a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan (Ibid : 19).

According to this treaty the Raja of Sikkim was bound to refer to the arbitration of the British all disputes between his subjects and those of neighbouring states. In 1828, two British officers Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant were deputed to Sikkim as the disputes on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers were increasing. The officers were sent to deal with these disputes. Captain Lloyd spend there a few days in "the old Gorkha station of Darjeeling". He was attracted by its numerous advantages as a site for a sanatorium. They reported it to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck. It was also recommended for military purpose as the key to a pass to Nepal (Ibid : 20). In 1835, the Raja of Sikkim granted the land unconditionally to the British. The tract was described in the deed of grant, dated 1st February, 1835 as "all the land south of the Ranjit river, east of the Balason, Kahel and little Ranjit rivers and west of Rango and Mahananda rivers". In 1841, British government granted the Raja of Sikkim an allowance of Rs. 3000 per annum as compensation and this was raised in 1846 to Rs. 6000 per annum (Ibid : 21).

In the mean time the relations between the British and Sikkim deteriorated. The development of Darjeeling under free institutions was a source of loss and frustration to the Lamas and leading men of Sikkim who had monopoly over all trades in Sikkim. They lost their rights over those slaves who settled as free men and British subjects in the Darjeeling territory. Frequent kidnappings and demands for return of slaves took place.

The relation deteriorated further when in November, 1849 Sir Joshep Hooker and Dr. Campbell were imprisoned, while travelling in Sikkim with the permission of the Raja of Sikkim and British government. Various demands were made as conditions of release but the Sikkimese eventually released both the prisoners unconditionally on the December 24, 1849. In February, 1850 British sent a small punitive force to Sikkim. They remained on the bank of the great Ranjit river for a few weeks. The British withdrew the grant of Rs. 6000/- per annum from the Raja of Sikkim and annexed the Terai and the portion of the Sikkim hills bounded by the Ramman and the great Ranjit river on the North, by the Tista on the East and by the Nepal frontier on the West. The area annexed was 640 Sq. miles in extent.

A greater part of Terai at that time was under forest. However, after annexation, large areas of forest land were brought down under cultivation, either for tea plantation or for paddy. The land had been allotted by the British government among 544 Jotedars in the Terai area immediately after annexation. Since then the settlement was renewed from time to time, the number of Jotes as well as Jotedars increased over time as the forests were cleared for cultivation (other than tea) in each year.

We have earlier mentioned that establishment of tea plantation was started in Terai 1862. A massive labour force was required for setting up plantations in this area. The local tribal people like Mech, Dhimal, Rajbansi rarely worked in tea

plantations in Terai. The probable reasons were 1) It was not possible to collect necessary number of labourers from these tribes as their population was not much. ii) These tribal people, after becoming alienated from their land did not like the establishment of tea plantations. iii) These sons of the soil wanted to maintain their livelihood by agriculture and hunting as still then a large portion of fellow and forest land was available. iv) The monthly wages of plantation labour at that time ranged from Rs.2/- to Rs.5/- per person (Sen 1979:60) which was less than the wages of agricultural labourers of these areas. v) The planters also were not interested to employ local people as they could easily rebel against their brutal exploitation with the help of their own people in the adjacent villages.

In the nineteenth century the tribal society in Bihar was in a state of turmoil, the reasons of which could be traced back in the seventeenth century when Hinduism crept into the ruling family of Chotonagpur. The Munda tribal Raja of Chotonagpur sought to elevate his status through the process of Hinduanising himself and his family. This alienated the tribal Raja and his kinsfolk from the rest of the people. This also brought in an infiltration of non-tribals into this region (Bhowmik 1981:43). These outsiders had some formal education. They were given administrative posts by the King in lieu of the local tribes. The tribal king also granted these people and Brahmin priests large portions of land (Jagirs) depriving the local people. Along with these, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs traders and moneylenders were encouraged to come there (Ibid:44).

The resultant of all these was that within a hundred years the tribal people lost their rights on their traditional property and became merely rent paying tenants.

Meanwhile, Chotonagpur as a part of Bihar was leased to the British East India Company in 1765. Introduction of British rule resulted in a change of masters. The judicial powers of local raja were initially curtailed and finally fortified (Ibid:44). The British administrators made no attempts to understand the traditional rights on land, which were unwritten, and treated documents as sole proof of ownership. The simple minded, illiterate tribal on the hand was innocent of the complicated deeds and documents relating to ownership, which were completely in contrast with his traditional right to proprietorship. The British could cleverly manipulate documents relating to their advantage and before the Adivasi realized it, he was relieved of his right to cultivation (Choudhury & Bhowmik 1986;324).

Unable to bear these tyrannies, Adivasis frequently rose in revolt. The entire nineteenth century is dotted with tribal uprisings - 1795-1800, 1811, 1820, 1831, 1885 and 1899. These reflected the unhappy state of affairs (Ibid : 325).

Besides these human exploitation, nature also betrayed these people. A series of famines and floods plagued the area. The first recorded famine occurred in 1868-69, followed by famines in 1873-74, 1893-94, 1897 and 1918.

All these eventually caused a steady out migration of tribal people to other places in search of land or work.

Thus this area (Chotonagpur-Santal Pargana region of Bihar) remained the focal area of tribal migration to the adjoining states during the last two centuries.

The phenomenal growth of the population since 1872 is due to two main causes, the development of Tea industry and the influx of settlers to exploit the waste lands of the district (Darjeeling) (L.S.S.O' Malley 1907:36). It will be observed that Darjeeling owns a large proportion of its population to the advent of immigrants. Barely half of the inhabitants have, in fact, been born in the districts. In the Terai it receives numerous settlers from the adjoining districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri who engage in cultivation and a large number of coolies from Chotonagpur-Santal Parganas who are attracted by the wages given in the tea gardens (Ibid: 38-39).

DOOARS

The word "Dooars" originated from the Hindustani word dwar meaning gateway. The Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district is a gateway to Bhutan.

The low, fertile strip of country lying along the base of the Bhutan hills was called Dooars. Formerly it was divided into Eastern Dooars, which is now a part of Goalpara district of Assam and is no longer known by the name and the western Dooars, the area which is lying along the foot of Bhutan hills between river Tista in the west and the river Sankos in the

east. It is a flat strip of land about 22 miles broad and nearly 200 miles long, bounded by Bhutan and Darjeeling district in the north and Coochbehar district and Baikunthpur forest in the south. Only this area i.e. the previous Western Dooars is now called as Dooars. The present Dooars area was formerly a part of Coochbehar (Sunder 1894:307).

In 1661 the Mughals attacked the Coochbehar state. During this war Bhutan sent military help to Coochbehar. Bhutan had also trade relation with Coochbehar before this war.

However, in lieu of the military help, Bhutan wanted the Dooars area from Coochbehar. The Cooches had no alternative, they were bound to meet the demands of Bhutan (Majumder 1984:18).

Political relations between the British government and Bhutan started in 1772, when Bhutan invaded the principality of Coochbehar, the then a dependency of Bengal. The Raja of Coochbehar sought British help and they send a force to assist the Raja. They expelled the invaders and forced them back into their own territories. In 1774, a treaty of peace was signed between the East India Company and Bhutan. In 1783, Captain Turner was deputed to Bhutan to promote commercial exchange, but the attempt was unsuccessful. From that time to 1826, when the British occupied Assam little interactions took place between the Bhutias and the British. It was then the Bhutias who usurped several tracts of low land lying at the foothills of Bhutan called Dooars. Captain Pemberton was sent to Bhutan to negotiate the matter in 1837, but his attempt yielded no definite results.

Then the British wrested the Assam Dooars from the Bhutias and agreed to pay £1000 per annum to Bhutan as a compensation for the loss (Hunter 1876:219-220) and in 1842 the Bengal Dooars (Ambari-Falakata Jalpesh Taluk) also were held in farm by the British government on an annual payment to Bhutan.

The Bhutias continued outrages and aggressions on British subjects in the entire Dooars. Several remonstrations and threats were given from the Britishers to the Bhutias, who paid no heed to it. They continued their raids on British territory, plundered the inhabitants, massacred them or carried them off as slaves.

In the last part of 1863, British sent Mr. Ashley Eden with a mission to the king of Bhutan to stop these depredation and outrages and to demand compensation. Mr. Eden was insulted grossly and came back with the ill success of his mission. He was obliged by force to sign two papers, agreeing to make over the Assam and Bengal Dooars to Bhutan and to surrender all runaway slaves and political offenders. (Ghosh 1970:5).

The British government disavowed the treaty, stopped all communications with Bhutan and strengthened the police force on the frontier. In June, 1864 the British government addressed letters to Bhutan declaring permanent annexation of Bengal Dooars (district of Ambari-Falakata) and the annual payments previously made by the British government to Bhutan for rent and revenue for Bengal Dooars and Assam Dooars had ceased. This letter also demanded the release of all British

subjects, as well as subjects of Coochbehar and Sikkim and the restoration of all property which had been carried off from British territory, Coochbehar or Sikkim, within the previous five years. The letters concluded by stating that unless these demands were fully met by the commencement of the ensuing September, further measures would be taken to enforce them. The Bhutan government sent no reply to these demands but in August of this year Bhutan government wrote a letter to the British, offering no apology for the gross insults offered to the British envoy, and altogether ignoring the government's threat of coercion, but proposing to receive a fresh envoy or to send one himself. This proposition was considered to be out of question. In November, 1864 the British government decided to make an expedition to enforce their demands. Accordingly an expedition was made in four columns and took up their several posts at Diwangiri, Sidli, Pasakha and Dalingkot. In December of this year the four columns made a simultaneous advance and within six weeks they had driven in the Bhutias and occupied eight or ten of their posts. In January, 1865 the Bhutias made a bold effort and recovered the territory they had lost and also drove out the invaders. The British sent a fresh army and within March, 1865 they reoccupied their positions in Dooars. In November of this year, a treaty of peace was signed between the government of Bhutan and the British government. By this treaty the rights of the British in the Bhutan Dooars including those of Assam and Taluk Ambari-Falakata and the hill territory on the left bank of the Tista had been recognised (Hunter 1876:220-221).

The Western Dooars (from now it would be called as only Dooars) was a temporarily settled area where the colonial state itself was the Zamindar. The area in Bhutan rule could be regarded as a stagnant social formation judging by the semifeudal production relations, archaic technique of agricultural production and the corresponding low level of productivity found there.

There was virtually no change in the land tenure system in Dooars even after the extension of British rule to the area. Although the new government expressed a vague desire to settle the land of Western Dooars with small capitalist cultivators who would mostly cultivate their own land, in practice the first British settlement in Western Dooars in 1871 gave formal recognition to the existing Jotedars and also to their tenants, Chukanidars.

Thus the colonial government did not touch the semi-feudal production relations that served well the general aims of the imperial government viz, to shift the burden of capital accumulation in the metropolis to the colonies without any corresponding expansion of the forces of production. Such a regime provides ideal conditions for the working of merchant capital (Choudhury 1984:98).

When land became scarce in Darjeeling where commercial tea cultivation began in 1856, the sub-montane tract of Dooars attracted the attention of planters. Plantation agriculture was imposed on this area by British merchant capitalists who were later joined by the Bengalee planters of Jalpaiguri town and also by some rich Jotedars of Dooars. The first tea garden in

the Dooars was set at Gazualdoba in 1874 by Mr. Brougham and within 1877 leases were issued to 22 gardens. Consequently a spectacular increase in the population of the district (Jalpaiguri) during the period 1872-1881 by 1, 14, 916 persons was noticed (Bhattacharya 1970:199). This increase of population went on almost steadily during the subsequent census years owing to the gradual development of tea industry and natural growth of population. The increase during the earlier census years were primarily due to influx of tribal labourers in the tea gardens. D.H.E. Sunder in his survey report of Western Dooars, 1895, attributed the large rise of population (1,14,277 between 1881-1891) in Western Dooars to immigration from neighbouring districts of Darjeeling, Dinajpur; Rangpur and Coochbehar on the one hand and from Bihar, Orissa, Chotanagpur and other provinces on the other.

The following table, presented in District Gazetteer (1951) shows the migration to the district from outside West Bengal.

TABLE 4.1

IMMIGRATION TO JALPAIGURI DISTRICT FROM OUTSIDE

WEST BENGAL 1891-1941

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ACTUAL POPULATION</u>	<u>IMMIGRANTS</u>
1891	433, 334	44, 329
1901	544, 906	95, 899
1911	661, 282	152, 174
1921	694, 054	163, 024
1931	739, 160	158, 757
1941	845, 702	156, 765

Source : Mitra 1951: Tii

The above figures for immigrants include all immigrants to Jalpaiguri district from outside West Bengal. The break-up of immigrants from different districts are available in the census prior to 1951. But before partition (i.e. 1947) Jalpaiguri was a larger district containing sixteen police stations, five of which were transferred to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). So, the figures for immigrants in 1951 census could not be compared with the same figures in the censuses prior to 1951. However, the extent of migration would be understood from the earlier censuses (Choudhury and Bhoomik 1986:334).

The 1901 Census shows that the number of immigrants to Jalpaiguri district was 188, 223. Most of them were enumerated in the Dooars region and "half of the immigrants were tea garden coolies from Chotonagpur and Santal Pargana" (Census 1901:66). The statement on migration also stated that 80,436 immigrants were from Ranchi district and 10,562 from Santal Pargana (Ibid, Appendix I:iii). The 1921 census report states that "the number of persons born in Ranchi and enumerated in Jalpaiguri district in the last census (i.e. 1911) was no less than 126,214" (Census 1921:145). The report further states that "the most numerous people among the labour force were Oraons and Mundas" who had migrated from Chotonagpur. In 1921, "90, 348 coolies were born in Chotonagpur and 20, 018 in the district (i.e. Jalpaiguri) and these were also children of imported coolies" (Ibid:389).

We have earlier (in the Terai portion) discussed the factors responsible for this large scale migration to the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars. Migration to the tea estates

was mainly 'family migration' and not of individuals. The tribals were encouraged to migrate with their families. The nature of production in the tea industry requires the participation of male and female labour. Moreover, since the planters wanted cheap labour, they had to have workers who would be permanently settled in the industry and who would be more or less cut off from their place of origin. Coercion and lack of alternative employment were ^{the} two ways of keeping down the wage rate (Ibid:334).

BACKGROUND OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENTS IN TERAI & DOOARS

The first tea garden was opened in Terai in 1862 and in Dooars in 1874. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was established in 1920, but the organized trade union movements started both in Terai and Dooars after a long time. It started in these areas only in 1946.

So, in Terai eighty-four years after the establishment of its first tea garden and in Dooars it was after seventy-two years after setting up of the first tea garden and twenty-six years after the formation of AITUC, workers of both the areas witnessed the first sign of organized trade union movements. Before it, some sporadic, short lived workers' movements took place in the tea gardens in Terai and Dooars.

TERAI

So, far, little was known about the workers' movements in Terai before 1946, but, a report of a British planter proved

that, sometimes workers voiced their grievances. The report stated that there were very few estates where there had been a labour strike, the usual cause of strike was an accumulation of either real or fancied grievances. It was a rare thing for more than one garden to stop work at a time and generally a section workers adopted this course, just to bring to notice of their manager about their story of grievances. It was obvious that much tact and wisdom was required to deal with these situations, more especially if the labour was 'non-agreement'..... In most cases it was good to insist upon the coolies returning to work before any sort of discussion of the situation was allowed and if the coolies persisted in an attitude of defiance, it was probable that neighbouring planters would assist with labour during the difficulty of the neighbouring planters as had been often done. (Dasgupta 1988:14).

These types of protests against their sub-human conditions were very few. If there was any, they were sporadic, unorganised and short lived. For a long time the workers did not have an organisation to focus their humiliation. The causes were :

- i) The managers did not allow any outsider to enter the garden. Even the relatives of the workers had to come with prior notice. If anybody came without notice, the host and the guest both were tied up with a wooden stand in the manager's quarter and were beaten up. This practice was known as ghantidara.

- ii) At that time Terai was virtually inaccessible. It had thick forests, several rivers and an inadequate transport system.
- iii) The workers had no relation with the outside world. Even the nationalist movement could not reach there.

The workers thus became an insulated community, cut off from the mainstream of national life.

Communication with the workers was very difficult, at the same time there were few attempts by the nationalist and others to involve the workers in the movement. Thus the workers became an enclave community and unorganized in truest sense.

It was in early forties that some attempts have been made by some communists to organize them. They were Souren Bose, Keshab Sarkar, Panchanan Sarkar, Nripen Bose, Yogen Mukherjee, Kanu Sanyal Charu Majumdar, Santi Basu, Chuninal Goyala, Jangal Santal, Biren Bose and others.

In 1945-46 the first trade union was formed in Maryview Tea Estate by the communists. This union was not a registered union. In Maryview Tea Estate, Sarbati Mian, an worker-leader had revolted against inhuman treatment by the manager and that is why he was removed from the garden by the management. With Sarbati Mian's removal from the garden the union was dismantled. Similar attempts was also made in Gangaram tea estate at that time. The workers had protested against the management, but this was not successful. These were the beginning of organized trade union movements in Terai and beginners were Communists.

In 1948, the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.) was banned and a number of important leaders were arrested. This resulted in a setback, but the attempts to form unions in tea gardens continued secretly. In this year, Keshab Sarkar, Chuninal Goyala, Souren Bose and some others had tried to organize the workers in Mohongaon, Chandmoni Tea Estate, but the police arrested Keshab Sarkar and Souren Bose with the help of managers. Then the communists had changed their tactics, they started to organize meetings in the adjacent villages, in the weekly haats. In these haats they also sold Soviet Desh, Tebhagar Katha to the workers. The farmers also came into contact with the working class movements. The secret activities of the communists were predominant in Fulbari, Tirhana, Thanjhora tea estates in those days.

West Bengal Cha Shramik Congress (W.B.C.S.C.) affiliated to INTUC was formed in 1948. Deven Sarkar was the first general secretary of that union; he was also the president of Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee at that time. From a personal interview with him I came to know that this union was successful in organizing the workers in the tea gardens like Dagapur, Mohongaon-Gulma, Sukna, Bhojnarayan, Maryview, Naxalbari, Chandmoni, Kamala etc. These gardens were mostly owned by the Bengalee planters of Jalpaiguri town. The planters were also patrons of India National Congress. So, they allowed W.B.C.S.C. to form unions in their gardens. In 1950-51 W.B.C.S.C. detached itself from the Indian

National Congress and joined the Krishak Majdoor Proja Parishad. In 1951, the name of this union was changed to West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.) and attached itself with Hind Majdoor Sabha (H.M.S.). However, after a few years, the influence of this union gradually diminished.

The first general election of independent India was held in 1952. Before the election the government lifted the ban order on the communist party. This election gave a boost to the communist organizers. They started to organize the workers under the camouflage of election campaigns. At that time workers did not know the use of microphone. In Manja tea estate, when the Communists used the microphone for election campaign, the workers got afraid and went away. The similar incident happened in other gardens also. Even in 1952 the managers of tea gardens were very powerful to check political activities inside the garden. In Pahar-gumiya Tea Estate when the communists went for election campaign, the manager of this tea estate tore the flag of the Communist party and ordered the communists to leave the place within five minutes. These two instances showed us the ignorance of the workers in one hand and the power of the managers on the other. However in 1954 the communists could organize the workers and the Red-flag union was formed in Fulbari, Thanjhora, Kharibari, Kamala, Maryview Tea gardens. The secretary of this union was Sri Biren Bose and the president was Sri Satyendra Narayan Majumdar. When the election was over, attacks in different forms were launched against the

communist organizers. So, again the communists started to organize the workers secretly, the workers were called to the villages and the organizers used to go the workers' houses under cover of darkness at nights. Red flag union was increasing its influence over the workers at that time. They organized movements centering around the demands of compensatory allowance, wage revision etc. Gherao was unknown to the workers of tea gardens before that time. In 1953, the workers of Thanjhora Tea Estate gheraoed the manager and put forward some demands. Thus, enough pressure was exerted on the managers to concede some of the demands. After this achievement both the male and female workers assembled in a place, the female workers tied red handkerchief on their heads and organized a procession. This incidence became a morale booster to the tea workers of Terai. Communists' influence among both the workers and peasants was increasing substantially during this time. The communists used to go to the labour lines of tea gardens with the peasant relatives of the workers. Regular political classes among the workers were taken by the communist organizers during 1953-54. The workers were taught about mass decision, labour laws, what should be done in a particular circumstance, etc. The famous workers magazine Naya Jamana, published from Dooars, were also distributed among the workers of Terai. Naya Jamana was purely a magazine of working class. It was published in Sadri language and all types of workers literate as well as illiterate belonging to different religions

were the subscribers of this magazine. The songs etc. published in this magazine were written by the workers. The editor of this magazine was Fagu oraon who was a worker. This magazine had a great impact on the tea plantation workers of North Bengal.

The cherished unity of working class and peasantry was also forged at that time. In 1954, when the management of Kharibari Tea Estate declared lock out the unity of the workers and peasants became manifest. The workers at that time did not know much about lock-outs and were ignorant about how to tackle such a situation. They, however protested against the lock out. The management did not open the garden for 8-9 months. This time the workers of this tea estate had to pass through a very critical time. The farmers of the Buraganz area came forward and stood beside the workers. They gave money, paddy etc. to the workers. The workers of Thanjhora Tea Estate could continue their struggle with the help of peasantry. Around 1955, the Red flag union was successful in having unions in twelve gardens in Terai. But, at that time the I.N.T.U.C. put up stiff challenge to the communists.

In Terai, both the communists and the Congress claimed to be the pioneers in the trade union movement in tea gardens. Congress tried to trace its origin in the 1920's when Mr. Seomangal Singh tried to organize the workers in Matigara and Hanskua tea estates against liquor addiction. Mr. Singh came from Bihar to Siliguri. He was a famous congress leader and

an organizer of nationalist movement at that time. Among the workers his role was more of a social worker than a trade unionist. He also tried to organize the workers against the British rule and for his activities in Matigara and Hanskua Tea Estates, he was imprisoned in 1928.

Mr. Iswar Tirky, the president of National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W), affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was an ex-service man. He was one of the pioneers among the congress trade unionists in the tea plantation of Terai. He came back home after taking part in the second world war in 1945. After returning home, he started to spread formal education among the tribals and tried to educate them against liquor addiction. In 1947-48 he established a social organization - Terai Adibasi Welfare Board. During this time another social organization named Terai Managal Samity was also formed. It was a Rajbanshi organization and the founders were Mr. Khagen Roy and Mr. Dijen Roy Sarkar. Mr. Tirky also became president of this organization too. In 1950-51 I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Sangha (D.C.K.M.S.) was established. The first president of this union was Mr. Atulya Ghosh and Theodar Manin was the general secretary. In 1951-52 Mr. Kiron Bhattacharya, one of the leading congress leaders of Siliguri town asked Mr. Tirky to join the trade union. In 1952-53 Mr. Tirky became the general secretary of D.C.K.M.S.

Mr. Seomangal Singh also became a trade unionist and tried to organize the workers under the banner of D.C.K.M.S. during this period. Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Union was

successful in forming in New Chanta, Pahargumiya, Hanskua, Saidabad, Putinbari, Fulbari (Patan), Bijoynagar, Maryview, Singhijhora, Jaipoo, Bhojnarayan, Gayerganga, Tirhana, Ord, Panighata, Laharghat, Manja tea estate etc. at that time. Mr. Tirky was a Christian. The workers belonging to Christian Community stood by him. In 1954-55 Terai Adibasi welfare Board and Terai Mangal Samity was merged and a new organization "North Bengal Adibasi Mahasabha" was formed. Mr. Tirky was the general secretary of this union. The main objective of this organization was the social upliftment of the adivasis in the five districts of North Bengal. This organization became defunct after three years. In 1957 Assembly election Mr. Tirky contested against Mr. Sonam Wangdi the official candidate of the Indian National Congress. He was expelled from the Indian National Congress for six years on this ground. This hampered the growth of Congress led unions in Terai.

The year 1955, was the landmark in the history of trade union movement in tea gardens. There was a sudden increase in the prices of tea in 1954. The planters could accumulate a huge profit. The workers demanded for bonus. The planters did not agree to concede the demand. Strike notice was given by the communist trade unions. Initially the I.N.T.U.C. affiliated unions did not agree to join hands with the communists. However, later, they also came in tune with the communists. Conciliation was started with the initiation of West Bengal government. It failed to bring about a settlement. Tea workers struck off work from August 29, 1955. During this time the worker leaders and

the employers were discussing the bonus issue in Delhi in the session of Industrial Committee on Plantations. This also failed to yield a solution as the employers remained rigid. However, the Chairman of the Industrial Committee on Plantations assured the workers' leaders that the deadlock could be resolved and he directed both sides to come to an agreement within three months, otherwise the case would be referred to the tribunal. The strike was then called off on September 7, 1955.

This was the first time in the history of tea Plantations that the workers inspite all differences, political, ethnic, social, religious organized a joint movement.

During this movement workers organised processions everyday. The peasantry of this area also joined these processions. Everyday processions started in the morning and continued till night. But there was no fixed time or place where the processions would be dispersed. Thousands of workers and peasants spontaneously participated in these processions. They used to carry food with themselves. There were pan-shops (shops of betelleaf), arrangements for gramaphones in these processions; even there were sometimes arrangements for showing bioscopes. It seemed to be a festival for the workers and peasants of Terai. The peasantry not only joined this movement physically but also helped the workers by providing them with food grains, cashmoney etc. The peasantry had been taught to believe that this workers' movement was also their movement. The cherished unity of working class and peasantry was evident at that time.

Workers of almost all the gardens of Terai had participated in this movement except Deomoni (now Kiron Chandra Tea Estate) and Sanyasithan Tea estate. The owner of Deomoni tea estate was Mr. Kiron Ch. Bhattacharya. Mr. Bhattacharya was the then President of District Congress Committee, Darjeeling. There was an agreement between the communists and Mr. Bhattacharya that strike would not be called in his tea estate. The agreement was that Mr. Bhattacharya would help to organize strike even in the gardens where Congress led unions were functioning but the communist would not organize this strike in his garden.

In January 1956, with the intervention of the Labour Minister and Ministry for Commerce and Industry, the members of the Bonus sub-committee of Industrial Committee on Plantations laid down a formula for four years from 1953-1956. The workers received more than they had wanted. This was a landmark in the history of Plantation workers' movement since India was the first country to accept the principle of bonus to plantation workers out of profit (I.T.P.A. 1955:21).

During 1957-1967 Communist trade unionists faced stiff resistance both from the planters and I.N.T.U.C. A number of communist workers were discharged from their work during these years.

Till 1959, in Terai and in Darjeeling hills the communist-led trade unions used the same name Darjeeling District Cha Maman Majdoor Union. This year i.e. in 1959 the communist trade-unionist in Terai formed a separate union - Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union.

There were a number of Congress-led Unions affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. in tea Plantation in North Bengal such as Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha, Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Sangha, Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress etc. before 1960-61. In 1960-61 Congress decided that there would be one I.N.T.U.C. affiliated union in one industry. Accordingly a new union National Union of Plantation workers was formed in April, 1961 and all the Congress-led unions merged with it except Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress.

In 1962 K.T. Chako, a Keralian Christian and an ex-employer of Tata was sent to Terai by an I.N.T.U.C. leader of Jamshedpur to organize the workers in Terai. He came, joined Terai Cha Bagan Sanjukta Majdoor Union and became the general secretary of this union. This union was formed by Mr. Tensing Wangdi in 1960. Mr. Wangdi was a congress M.L.A. from Terai and also the minister for tribal development. This union was active in Gangaram, Namala, Hanskua Tea Estates at that time. It was not affiliated to any central trade unions. In 1967, Mr. Chako changed its name to Terai Plantation Workers Union and affiliated it to H.M.S. to keep the union free from politics, party and government. From 1963 the influence of this union gradually increased and in 1970 it formed unions in around fifteen gardens in Terai such as Bijolimoni, Pahargumiya, Singhijhora, Sahabad, Gangara, Gayerganga, Hanskua, Marapur, Bagdogra etc. However, at present this union was lost much of its early influence over the workers and exists only in

a few gardens. Mr. Chako also works as an agent of Life Insurance Corporation and most of his clients are tea garden workers. This also partially contributed towards survival of this union.

In 1964 C.P.I. was divided on the issue of Indo-Chinese war and for some other reasons and a new party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) was established. In 1971 C.P.I. (M) organizers broke away from A.I.T.U.C. and formed a new central trade union - Centre for Indian Trade Unions (C.I.T.U). Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was controlled by C.P.I.(M) organizers and therefore it was affiliated to C.I.T.U. In 1977, the name Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was dropped and in Terai and Darjeeling hills, the C.P.I.(M) led trade unions started using the same name- Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman Majdoor Union. From 1962 to 1966 the communists were sometimes in jail and sometimes outside the jail. When they were outside the jail, most of them went underground.

During these years there was great tussle between the congress trade unionists and the communists to keep control over the workers. Frequent clashes between the supporters of these two rival trade unions took place at that time. Emergency was declared throughout the country in 1962 due to Indo-Chinese war. There was too much of nationalist propoganda done by the Congress government all over the country. On the otherhand a group of communists blamed Indian goveenment as an agressor. The workers of tea gardens were influenced by the nationalist propaganda. The I.N.T.U.C. trying to take the advantage. The

workers became confused. Inter-union rivalry was increasing. In that situation to bring co-operation among the workers and to stop inter-union rivalry, Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers was formed in this year i.e. in 1962. The initiation was taken by a staff union - the Tea Garden Indian Employees' Association, which had then close relation with the Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.). Now, the Coordination Committee consists of most of the major unions of tea plantation. There was another committee namely the Defence Committee, established after the Coordination Committee. The Defence Committee consists of a few unions.

In 1964, Ranjit Ghosh, a leader of Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress came to Terai from Western Dooars to organize the tea workers in Terai under the banner of R.C.M.C. He started forming unions in the tea gardens of Terai very rapidly. In 1967 it detached itself from I.N.T.U.C. for much interference of party, politics and government in trade union activities and affiliated itself to National Front of Indian Trade Unions (N.F.I.T.U.). Now, R.C.M.C. is one of the most influential trade unions in Terai having its wings in around 24 gardens in this region.

The second joint movement by the workers of tea plantation was in 1966 for increase of minimum wages. The Central Wage Board For Tea Plantation was appointed in December, 1960. It was taking too much time to complete its report. There was a sudden rise of price index after 1962. Tea Workers started agitations,

demanding the wages, based on the W.B. Government order of 1959 for the minimum wages for tea plantation workers which was decided in a tripartite conciliation.

The Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers issued a strike notice in August, 1966, when the employers did not agree to give the minimum wages according to the government order. Strike started from August 22, 1966. In Terai, initially the workers of most of the tea gardens, except the unions with Congress domination, had joined this movement. However when police fired in hills and shot one worker dead, the Congress led unions also joined. The strike was called off after a few days. It ended in a partial success as the tea plantation workers in the West Bengal received 40-50 lakhs of rupees as arrear, though they had demanded 7 crores of rupees.

In the early sixties, Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.) started to organize trade unions in Terai under the leadership of Mr. Nani Bhattacharya and Mr. Suresh Talukdar. In 1968, R.S.P. formed its first union in Terai in Sanyasithan tea estate. The name of this union was Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers Union (D.C.B.W.U.). Subsequently in 1969, in some other gardens like Kiron Chandra, Gayerganga, Bagdogra it was successful in having its branches. Swapan Bikash Roy, a lawyer of Siliguri town and Badal Mukherjee, an ex-head clerk of a tea garden of Terai are the prominent local leaders of this union. Now D.C.B.W.U. has extended its influence in some other gardens also (around 13 gardens).

The third joint movement of the tea workers took place in 1969. The first United Front ministry came into power in West Bengal in 1967 and the second in 1969. This brought some qualitative changes in trade union movements in the tea gardens as these governments had a pro-labour policy. The coordination committee framed a charter of demands which included revision of wages as the cost of living index had increased abnormally in 1968, implementation of the plantation labour Act of 1951 and the increase of employment etc. The employers refused to meet any one of the major demands. The Coordination Committee called for an indefinite strike from August 18, 1969. The strike continued for sixteen days and almost all the workers of all the gardens in Terai joined this strike. The conciliation started between the trade union leaders and the employers during the strike. The government intervened and on September 2, 1969 they came to an agreement. The strike was called off from September 3, 1969.

The agreement was reached on the following points :

- 1) All vacancies in the tea gardens which were caused by either death or retirement of permanent workers were to be filled up. In addition all tea gardens were to recruit new workers proportionately.

- 11) Bigha workers (workers employed temporarily during peak seasons) resident within the garden, would be given subsidised rations while non-resident bigha workers would be given cash compensation.

iii) Wages would be revised after a machinery was set up but extra leaf price (doubly) would be raised from 5.5. paise to 7 paise per kilogram.

After 1969, no big joint movements took place in the tea gardens in Terai. Strikes, gheraoes etc. in the individual gardens for specific demands, were however quite common. From 1970, all the important negotiations were followed by tripartite conciliations, in which representatives of different trade unions, employers' association (I.T.A., I.T.P.A., T.A.I., T.I.P.A.) and the representative officials of government took part. So, from 1970 to 1987 there was a number of tripartite negotiations which included Wage, Bonus, New employment etc. as the major demands. Now, every year before the Durgapuja the bonus negotiations take place and once in every three years wage negotiations take place as regular features. One of the major negotiation in recent years was regarding the additional employment in 1985. It was decided in that negotiation that 10,000 additional workers would be taken to fill in the vacancies of this 7771 workers would be taken in the gardens of Dooars, 1409 workers in the Terai gardens and 820 workers would be employed in Darjeeling hill gardens.

Meanwhile in 1981, a new communist trade union - Darjeeling Zilla Cha Majdoor Karmachari Union was formed by the Organization Committee for Communist Revolutionaries (O.C.C.R.) under the leadership of Mr. Kanu Sanyal. This union was active in Azamabad, Kamalpur, Gangaram, Lohagarh and Taipu tea estates.

In Terai, besides the above mentioned trade unions, some small trade unions were also formed but, could not exist for long or had to merge with larger trade union in course.

Terai Cha Karmi Sangha was founded in the late forties by Mr. Sushil Mukherjee who was a staff of a tea garden. The president of this union was the then head clerk of Gangaram tea estate. It was a Congress union. Since the influence of this union was not much, very few had been known about it.

In Sahabad tea estate, in the late forties, Anath Basu and Dr. Gobinda Das organized a union called "Krisanganj Majdoor Sangha". But this union became defunct in the early fifties.

In the late forties, another union known as "Bihar Cha Bagan Karmachari Union" was established under the leadership of Bhai Premananda of Patna and its secretary was Mr. Nalini Roy. This union was active in Sahabad and Motidhar tea estate. Later on, this union came under the leadership of Mr. Ishar Tirky.

Some prominent leaders of R.C.M.C. such as Pijush Mukherjee, Bendhu Bhagat, Antony Toppo Munda, Danish Lakra were expelled from this union in 1965 for direct involvement in politics. They formed a new union - Cha Majdoor Congress (C.M.C.). This union could form its branches in a very ^{few} gardens (around three) in Terai under the leadership of Mr. Shib Bose and Mr. Ratin Dey. This union did not exist now.

All these small unions were not affiliated to any central trade union organizations.

DOOARS

Organized trade union movements started in Dooars only in 1946. Even the flame of nationalist movement could not touch substantially the workers of tea plantation in Dooars. The workers of other organized industries like Jute, Coal, Textile, Railways, had already started struggling since 1918-20 against the British rule. The workers of tea plantation of adjacent Assam also participated in the nationalist struggle from 1921 and their participation became more pronounced in the latter years.

Why Tea Plantation of Dooars was not affected either by nationalist movement or the trade union movements of other areas for so many years? The probable reasons were :

- i) The whole area was covered with forests and a number of rivers. It had a very poor communication system which isolated Dooars from rest of the country.
- ii) British planters maintained their own army - the North Bengal Mounted Rifles upto 1947 and that was used to check the rise of trade union movements in this region.
- iii) The tea gardens were virtually a prohibited place for the outsiders. No outsiders, even the relatives of the workers could enter these gardens without the permission of the managers.

- iv) Most of the people of the Jalpaiguri town were not aware about the prevalent conditions in Dooars.
- v) The leaders of the nationalist movements in the area did not try to organize the workers.

However, before 1946 there were some incidents of sporadic movements in the tea plantation of Dooars. Those movements could not be called as organised movements in truest sense. The most popular form of their protests was to form small groups among themselves and not to attend their duties. In a government report in 1895, it was stated that the workers of tea gardens often expressed their independent will and tried to disobey the management. Sometimes even the workers themselves were the rulers of these circumstances (Dasgupta 1987:193). Another government report also stated that those who were influential among the workers, asked other workers not to do work and tried to create large scale disturbances forming a group (Ibid:193).

In another government report it was stated that management of a tea estate had to take helps of police to control a situation. In this garden the workers were forced to do extra work after completion of their stipulated work. One day they had thrown away the plucked leaves and broke the glass-door of store-room. This report also stated that sometimes strikes took place in the tea gardens at that time. (Ibid:194).

From the end of the 1915 and upto the middle of the 1916 both Eastern and Western Dooars witnessed the Oraon movement. This movement was a part of the Tana Bhagat movement of Chotonagpur in 1914. It was basically a socio-religious movement, but it also had distinct economic and political objectives. This movement also reflected the hope of Chotonagpur oraons to be free from brutal exploitation of Zamindars, Mahajans and the Government. The waves of this movement excalated to Dooars from Chotonagpur in 1915. It was exclusively a movement of the Oraons. A group of Oraons gave up the habit of practising magic, drinking liquor, eating meat, killing animals and luxury. According to them they were ordered to do this by their principal god Dharmesh. They even stopped cultivation, because cultivation could not eradicate proverty, femine, rather it unnecessarily caused suffering to Cow. It was also hoped that good days were coming for the oraons. Actually a new sect in the Oraon religion known as Kurukh came up and the Oraons who belonged to this sect were known as Bhagat. These were the socio-religious and ritualistic aspects of this movement but alongwith this they also made protest against the British government through their songs, poetries etc. They wrote songs which clearly indicated their dislikes for the British government. Not only that, the most remarkable point was that they had invited the Germans through their songs to liberate them. This was the time when the First World War had already started and the British was suffering a set back against the Germans and its allies. The workers of tea plantation of this region were aware about it for different

reasons. There was a shrinkage of employment opportunities in the tea gardens as the amount of export of tea from India became less due to this war and there was an extraordinary increase of prices of clothes and salt during the war time. The cause of British hatred among the tea plantation workers was due to the British planters' exploitation. It was known that the movement took a larger shape at that time and the management was also too much worried about this movement. However, from the middle of 1916 this movement became subdued.

We have already said that there was little impact of the nationalist movement on the workers, yet, there were some instances where we could find the workers' awareness about nationalist movements. A D.P.A. report of 1921 stated that workers specially of Damdim region regularly organised meetings on the alluvial land of the Mal river. Generally the Dafaders and the Chowkidars joined these meetings. Some of the participants of these meetings used to come to join these meetings with Mahatma Gandhi's name on their lips.

The occurrence of united protest by the workers against their sub-human condition was also rare before 1946. In 1936, there was an incident of united protest by the workers against the management. In 1945, the Dalgaon Tea Estate and Rangamati Tea Estate experienced the incidents of such united protests. There might be more occurrences of united protests, but from the

available documents, till now, only a very few had been known.

The united protests of the workers against the managements before 1946 were spontaneous, short lived and without any support of any political organization. But, those were the beginnings of organised trade union movements in Dooars. The Bengal Assam Rail Road Workers' Union (B.A.R.R.W.U.) was a non-political organization at that time. This organization also included the workers of Bengal Dooars Railway (B.D.R.). Most of the members of this organization were the supporters of Communist party and the majority of the whole time organizers were communists. In the mid-forties the organizers of B.D.R. and some other workers tried to contact the tea garden workers. They had to do it very secretly, under the cover at night, because no trespassers were allowed in the gardens. Generally the meetings with the garden workers were held in the railway gangmans' quarters at night.

The first trade union was formed in Hai Hai Pather garden (now Rupali) situated near the Mal. The beginning was a peculiar incident. One day some workers had gone to the manager of this garden and complained about the poor quality of ropes supplied to them for repairing of their huts. The manager was a communist-hater and was of the habit of harassing the workers unnecessarily. Instead of entertaining the complaint, he scolded the workers and called them followers of the Red flag who wanted to harass their employers. By this, the workers became more curious about the Red Flag union and some of them went to the office of the Red flag union (i.e. B.D.R. Union) at Dumohini, where the workshop of B.D.R. was situated. Latter on, this contact gave birth to

the first trade union of the tea gardens in Dooars. The Communists were also active in the Denguajhar, Bagrakote, Lakhipara gardens at that time. All these gardens were situated near railway stations.

Two other incidents, occurred during this time, also contributed sufficiently to increase the consciousness of workers of tea gardens about their rights. In 1946, the railway trade unions called for a nation wide strike on June 27. Their demands were higher pay, fair price shops for essential commodities, better service conditions etc. All the preparations for the strike were made, but the strike was withdrawn as the railway authorities conceded the demands. In Dooars, the railway workers, having success in collective bargaining, were returning home by rail, flying red handkerchiefs.

The workers of the tea gardens located besides the rail line witnessed it. That the workers took a lesson from it was evident from the fact that the number of labour unrests had increased after this incident in the tea gardens of Dooars.

The second one was - there was a general shortage of foodgrains in Bengal in 1946. The Communist Party of India started agitation throughout the state. In the tea gardens, managements were not supplying the quota of food grains to the workers. The workers of several tea gardens being influenced by the Communist trade unions also protested against it. All these further helped to develop the organized trade union movement in Dooars.

These were the situations in middle of 1946 and in the last part of this year the first Central trade union for tea garden workers - Zilla Cha Bagan Majdoor Union, was formed at Mal. The first secretary of this union was Sri Deb Prosad Ghosh (Patal Ghosh). This union, latter, was affiliated to A.I.T.U.C.

During this time the Share Croppers of Bengal were demanding an increase in their shares of harvest. There were large scale unrests among the sharecroppers of Bengal. They were protesting against their landlords under the leadership of Communist Party of India. The agitation engulfed the entire peasantry of Bengal. It also shocked the Dooars, but in a later stage, during the early 1947. This movement was known as Tebhaga. The literal meaning of Tebhaga is three parts. The sharecroppers were demanding that the harvest should be divided into three parts and they would get two parts and the one part be given to the landlord.

In Dooars, Patalbabu and his associates started campaigning about Tebhaga centering around Malbazar. They not only organised the peasants but also the rail and tea workers. The workers of rail and tea gardens also took it as their struggle for livelihood. They participated in the movement with the peasantry. This was the first time that the tea garden workers participated in an organised movement. A

solidarity was established among the workers and peasants of Dooars during this movement. In the 4th annual conference of the B.A.R.R.W.U. held at Landing in Assam between 6 and 8 December, 1946, a resolution was passed supporting Tebhaga movement (Dasgupta 1975:103).

Volunteer groups were formed comprising peasants and workers. The workers were majority among the volunteers. The Tebhagar Katha published by the trade unionists and rail and tea garden workers, were distributed among the peasants and workers. The Communists' dominated All India Kishan Sabha which had already started to organize the adivasi peasants. Regular meetings were held among the peasants and workers.

In Dooars the Joetdars not only took the half of the harvest but also charged hundred per cent interest on the loans of foodgrains given to share croppers. In Dooars, most of the haats belonged to the Joetdars. The agents of the joetdars used to buy the grains at a low price by force and resell it at the same haat at a higher price. Besides, they also imposed different types of levies on the peasants, such as :-

Sephahi Posha (maintenance of his guards),

Hari shave (religious gatherings),

Maiya Porha (education of his daughters),

Hathibandha, Ghorabandha (maintenance of elephants and horses)

and so on.

This was the condition of the sharecroppers in Dooars. The tribal peasants of Dooars had the similar experiences in Chotonagpur.

So, they quickly responded to the call of the All India Kishan Sabha. The tribal workers of tea gardens also started agitations with the peasants. They left work off and on to join the peasants in this movement.

This was the first time that the tea workers found an outlet to express their dissatisfaction in an organized way.

Indian National Trade Union Congress (I.N.T.U.C.) was formed in May, 1947. In July, this year, the then Congress secretary of the Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee wrote to the planters' associations namely D.P.A. and I.T.P.A. to seek their permission to form trade unions among the plantation workers (I.T.P.A. 1947:112). This was the time when Communists' influence had been spread very rapidly among the tea workers and the planters were too much worried about it. So, the above proposal was a boon for the planters. They had extended help to the Indian National Congress to form unions. Within 1948 two Congress unions were formed - West Bengal Cha Shramik Union under the leadership of Mr. Deven Sarkar, the then secretary of Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee and Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha led by Mr. L.M. Prodhan. Mr. L.M. Prodhan was a school teacher and a Gorkha league Organiser. He came to Kalchini from Kurseong to spread the influence of Gorkha League. However, Mrs. (Dr.) Maitrayee Bose, the I.N.T.U.C. leader won over him and convinced Mr. Prodhan to join the Indian National Congress.

In 1950-51 W.B.C.S.C. left the I.N.T.U.C. and next year (i.e. in 1952) it affiliated itself to Hindu Majdoor Sabha (H.M.S.)

It also changed its name into West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.). During 1950-60 W.B.C.M.S. was a major force in Dooars. When W.B.C.S.C. broke away from Congress, a new union - Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress (R.C.M.C.) affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was formed in 1952. It had some influence over the gardens near Mal, Nagrakata.

When the communists tried to organise the workers in the tea gardens of Western Dooars, the Eastern Dooars was more or less uncovered by them. The R.S.P. was very active in Eastern Dooars during that time. But before R.S.P., the area was under the influence of Gorkha League. It had formed a union called the Adibasi Gorkha League which merged with I.N.T.U.C. in 1950. Later on, the R.S.P. came there. In 1948, in Sarugaon Tea Estate the first union of R.S.P. was formed followed by Akhoy division of Mathura Tea Estate, Kohinoor and Majherdabri Tea Estates. The name of this union was Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) which was registered in 1948. The first president of this union was Sri Brojen Das and the general secretary was Sri Suresh Talukdar. Now, in Eastern Dooars and Central Dooars D.C.B.W.U. is one of the most dominating union.

But in the Central-Eastern Dooars, there were traces of organised trade union movements even before the R.S.P. and Indian National Congress tried to organise the tea garden workers. In 1946 or before it, the tea garden workers had to work from dawn to dusk. The children of the working women used to come to the

workplaces with lantern to bring back their mothers. Any one, who dared to disobey the manager's order was beaten up severely or was thrown out of the garden for a week. This practice was known as HaptaBahar. During this time, in the Dumchipara Tea Estate of Central-Eastern Dooars a group of fourteen workers came to their huts to take lunch. It happened during that time when the workers were not allowed to go to their huts for lunch. The manager ordered to cut their wages for a whole day. The fourteen workers protested but it was in vain. Then they formed a union called Cha Majdoor Samity with the help of some outsiders. The outsiders were Biradhaj Rai, whose mother and brothers were workers in this garden. A.B. Roy, a primary school teacher and B.K. Prodhan, a groceryshop owner in this garden. Later, Sunil Sarkar, a Forward Block organiser also joined them. This union was not registered and it had no political or central affiliation. This union gave a memorandum to the Munshi of this garden to pass it on the Manager.

This memorandum included fourteen demands such as medical benefits, ration for dependants, good behaviour from the management etc. The munshi refused to pass it on to the manager. The workers then gheraoed the manager and exerted pressure on him to accept the memorandum. The police came and tried to arrest the workers for illegal gherao. The police, however could not do it since a large number of workers had assembled there. The manager then was bound to accept the memorandum. The D.P.A. discussed on this memorandum and met some of the demands. However,

after this the management ordered for Haptabahar on these fourteen workers and filed suit against the outsider organisers of this union for trespassing. The organisers of this union then felt the need of a larger political support. Contacts were made with the Gorkha League, with the Indian National Congress, and with the Communists. Ultimately in 1948 the union merged with the W.B.C.S.C as the latter had a good support among the tea workers of this region at that time.

While we were telling about the trade union movements in Terai, we have discussed the causes and consequences of 1955 Bonus movement in the tea gardens of North Bengal. While in Terai the strike was started from August 29, 1955, in Dooars where D.C.B.W.U. (R.S.P.) was a dominating union, the strike was started from August 22, 1955. The Communist and the Socialist led unions started strike from August 29, 1955 both in Terai and Dooars. The Congress led union R.C.M.C. also did the same, but in some gardens where another Congress union D.C.B.M.S. (led by Mr. L.M. Prodhan) was active, they observed only one day token strike to express their support to this movement. The then labour minister of Central government Mr. Khandu Bhai Desai had assured the leaders of Congress Unions that their demands would be considered and told them not to join the indefinite strike. So, except those few gardens in Dooars, strike for a long period took place in almost all the gardens in Dooars.

In 1957, a group of Socialists had broken away from Praja Socialist Party (P.S.P.) and formed a new party Sanjukta Socialist

Party (S.S.P.). In Jalpaiguri district, leaders like Deben Sarkar, B.D. Rai joined S.S.P. but Ghanashyam Mishra, Badal Sarkar etc. had remained with P.S.P. They (P.S.P.) formed a new union in the name of West Bengal Cha Majdoor Sabha (W.B.C.M.S.). This union was active in some gardens in Dooars.

In 1963, Ghanashyam Mishra was murdered by the vested interests. In the next year i.e. in 1964 W.B.C.M.S. merged with W.B.C.S.U., but no official procedure had been followed. In 1967 W.B.C.M.S. got a new registration number and affiliated itself to H.M.S. (Raja Kulkarni group). This union now has a moderate number of followers in Dooars.

Meanwhie in 1961, the National Union for Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.) affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was formed and all the Congress unions in the tea gardens in North Bengal had merged with it except R.C.M.C., which retained its separate identity. In 1967, R.C.M.C. affiliated itself to N.F.I.T.U. to keep itself free from party, politics and government. Before it, in 1966 a broke away faction of R.C.M.C. formed a new trade union called Cha Majdoor Congress (C.M.C.). It had a very marginal influence in Dooars and now it does not exit at all, while R.C.M.C. has its branches in a few gardens near Jalpaiguri town.

The second joint movement of tea plantation workers took place in 1966. The Coordination Committee gave a strike call in August, 1966 on the issue of payment of arear, wage revision etc.

In Dooars, before the strike call, the followers of D.C.B.W.U. observed a token strike for one day on these demands. Continued strike was started from August 22, 1966 in almost all the gardens in Dooars. I.N.T.U.C. affiliated unions also joined this strike. The members of the Tea Garden Indian Employees' Union (T.G.I.E.U.) of Dooars also joined the strike from the very first day. The other organization of staff, West Bengal Tea Employees' Association (W.B.T.E.A.) struck work for three days. The strike was withdrawn after a few days when an agreement was reached.

In 1969, Coordination Committee framed a charter of demands which included increase of employment opportunities in the tea gardens, revision of wages and implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951 as the major demands. When the planters refused to concede any of the demands, the workers started strike from August 18, 1969. In Dooars, workers of almost all the gardens had joined the strike. The strike completely stopped the work in the tea gardens of Dooars. It was called off from September 3, 1969 as on the previous day the employers and trade union representatives reached to an agreement with the intervention of state government. The nature of both the agreements have already been discussed in the history of trade union movements in Terai.

The split in the Communist Party of India took place in 1964 and a new party, Communist party of India (Marxist) was formed. It was a severe jolt to The Communist trade union movement. In 1971 the C.P.I.(M) faction of A.I.T.U.C. formed a separate organization - Centre of India Trade Unions (C.I.T.U.)

In Dooars C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (C.B.M.U.) was formed in 1972. After the establishment of Left Front government in West Bengal in 1977, this union has spreaded its influence very quickly in the entire Dooars particularly in Central and Western Dooars. Now Cha Bagan Majdoor Union is a major force in Dooars. The earlier organization Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union (Z.C.B.W.U.) remained with A.I.T.U.C. (C.P.I.) and lost its control over the workers. Now it does not have much followers in Dooars.

The official I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Congress Union in tea plantation is National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.) . However, a section of Congress trade unionists formed a new central trade union - National Labour Coordination Committee (N.L.C.C.) in 1973. In tea plantation the N.L.C.C. affiliated union is Jatiya Cha Majdoor Congress (J.C.M.C.). It was successful in forming unions in some tea gardens near Mal, Metelli of Western Dooars.

In 1975, North Bengal Tea Planters Employees Union (N.B.T.P.E.U.) affiliated to U.T.U.C. (Lenin Sarani) was formed. U.T.U.C. (Lenin Sarani) is the central trade union organization of Socialist Unity Centre of India (S.U.C.I.). It has a very marginal support in Central and Eastern Dooars.

Communists were again divided in 1969. A group of C.P.I.(M) activists had broken away from it and formed a new party Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969. Most of the activists of this party were jailed between 1969 and 1977. In 1977 the Left

Front came into power in West Bengal. The C.P.I.(M.L.) activists were released after that. The C.P.I.(M.L.) then splitted into a number of groups. In 1979, some of the groups formed a new central trade union called Indian Federation of Trade Unions (I.F.T.U.). In this year the C.P.I.M.L.(P.C.C.) formed a new trade union in tea plantation - Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (P.B.C.B.S.K.U.) which was affiliated to I.F.T.U. In Western Dooars, at the beginning it could spread its influence in some gardens, but now it has been loosing ground gradually. In 1986, splitting of I.F.T.U. took place and a new central trade union, Bharatiya Shramik Sangha (B.S.S.) was formed. Now P.B.C.B.S.K.U. is affiliated to B.S.S. Another splinter group of C.P.I.(M.L.) namely U.C.C.R.I.M.L. (Nagireddi group) also formed a new union in tea plantation. It was also active in some gardens in Western Dooars. Now this group had joined the C.O.I.(M.L.) led by Mr. Kanu Sanyal.

In 1977, the Govt. of West Bengal appointed the Tripartite Wage Fixation Committee for the Tea Industry. This committee comprised representatives of the employers and the workers and was presided over by the state labour minister. In the memorandum signed by the three parties (i.e., employers, workers and government) on August 3, 1977, the employers agreed to recruit 9,000 more workers to the tea plantations in Dooars.

The last major agreement between the planters and the workers till 1987 was signed in 1985 regarding creation of additional employment opportunities. It was settled that 10,000

additional jobs would be created in the tea gardens in Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling hills.

Till now, we were discussing about the origin of trade union movement in Terai and Dooars and its background, origin of different trade unions and about their joint movements as a whole. Besides those, some large scale movements also took place in the individual gardens. In 1968, the workers of Hope Tea Estate in Western Dooars continued a strike for eight months, organised by West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.).

TRADE UNION IN THE THREE GARDENS

Lalfa Tea Estate

The owner of this garden was Sri Kiron Ch. Bhattacharya. He was once the president of District Congress Committee, Darjeeling and also a trade unionist. When communists were trying to form trade unions in the tea gardens of Terai during 1946-47, this tea estate was not under their influence. Mr. Bhattacharya knew that sooner or later the trade union would enter his tea garden and in this circumstance it was likely that the Communist would take the initiative. In order to prevent such a move, in 1951 Mr. Bhattacharya took initiative to form a Congress union in this garden. The president of this union was Mr. Bhattacharya himself. The workers did not have to pay any union fees as Mr. Bhattacharya bore all the expenses of this trade union.

Mr. Bhattacharya was thus able to isolate his garden from the influence of other trade unions. We have earlier discussed

that the Bonus movement of 1955 did not affect this garden as Mr. Bhattacharya made an agreement with the Communist trade unionists to exempt his garden from the continued strike. Till 1959, there was only one union in this garden, i.e. upto a year after the death of Mr. Bhattacharya. After this the garden suffered from a lot of disturbness. Mr. Bhattacharya was very popular among the workers due to his kindheartedness. He used to help his workers to their problems. The management and the staff became corrupt after his death. A growing dissatisfaction was observed among the workers. Then Mr. Tensing Wangdi, the then Minister in charge of Tribal Development and the local Congress leader took this opportunity. He organised some workers of this tea garden and formed a union in this garden in 1962. The name of this union was Terai Cha Bagan Sanjukta Majdoor Union. The influence of this union over the workers of this tea garden was also limited and it could not persist for a long time.

In 1966, the workers of this tea garden participated in a joint movement organised by the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers on the issues of arear and revision of wages. They struck work for few days.

In 1967, Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress (R.C.M.C.) formed its branch in this garden and in the next year it put forward a memorandum of demands to the management for implementation of Wage Board recommendation, employment of dependants of permanent workers. The management met the demands. In the same year R.C.M.C. and N.U.P.W. jointly submitted a demand to the management on the supply of bad quality of ration to the workers.

The year 1969 witnessed a number of incidents in this garden. Till this year the unions of this garden were either directly associated with the Congress or had an indirect relation with Congress. There was no leftist union in this garden at that time. Two leftist unions formed its branches here in 1969. They were Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) affiliated to U.T.U.C. and Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (T.C.B.M.U.) affiliated to A.I.T.U.C. The head clerk of this tea garden was a R.S.P. trade unionist. The D.C.B.W.U. was formed in this garden for his initiative. Soon after the formation of D.C.B.W.U. in this garden, this union placed a charter of demands to the management. The demands were - bonus, increase of wages, medical facilities, new recruitment, umbrella, better quality of ration, supply of drinking water, shortening of working hours etc. The management initially did not want to consider the demands. Then the workers of this tea estate started picketing for an indefinite period in front of the factory from June 30, 1969. The workers did not allow to take finished tea outside the garden during the picketing. After a few days the picketing turned militant shape. One day when the management was forcefully trying to take tea leaves outside the garden, workers broke the windscreen of the tea-loaded lorry. The management then sat with the union leaders for discussion and assured the workers about considering their demands. The picketing was then withdrawn after eleven days.

In the same year R.C.M.C. also put forward some demands to the management such as regular supply of firewood, umbrella,

sick wages and paid holiday on the day of death of the Rastrapati.

The Communist formed its trade union in this garden with the help of the then manager of this garden. The manager was a communist sympathiser. He invited the communist trade unionist to form union. The name of the union was Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union. It was then affiliated to A.I.T.U.C. but when the C.P.I.(M) section of A.I.T.U.C. formed another central union called C.I.T.U., the C.I.T.U. men took charge of this union.

The Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers Union organised the third joint movement of the tea workers on the demands for implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951, increase of employment in the gardens etc. in the same year i.e. in 1969. The workers of this tea estate also participated in this movement with the workers of other gardens.

In the same year a Coordination Committee of the three unions - R.C.M.C., D.C.M.W.U. and T.C.B.M.U. was formed also. This committee framed a charter of demands which included - new recruitment, bonus, leave wages, categorisation of sub-staff, firewood, maintenance and repairing of labour quarters, supply of drinking water, housing etc.

In 1970, R.C.M.C. again submitted a charter of demands to the management. The demands were regular supply of good quality of ration, blanket, increase of wages for lorry or tractor driver.

In 1977, Darjeeling District Cha Kaman Majdoor Union (In 1975, the name of T.C.B.M.U. was dropped; the C.I.T.U.

decided to use the earlier name Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman Majdoor Union instead of it) affiliated to C.I.T.U. called for a strike for filling up 19 retirement vacancies. The management agreed to fill up 14 vacancies and then the strike was withdrawn.

In 1980, R.C.M.C. made a demand for payment of arrear of wages. In the same year workers of this tea estate started Bonus movement. Their demand was 12%. The management initially agreed to pay 10%. The workers did not agree. The head clerk of this tea estate who was also a R.S.P. leader conciliated with the management on behalf of the workers. The management ultimately agreed to pay 12% bonus. This incident helped to increase the D.C.B.W.U. among the workers of this tea estate.

In 1983 R.C.M.C. started agitation demanding for implementation of increased wages, extra leave price etc. In the next year i.e. in 1984 D.C.B.W.U. submitted a demand for implementation of minimum wages for temporary workers. The management did not want to consider the demand. The supporters of D.C.B.W.U. started hunger strike. Then the management agreed to implement the minimum wages for temporary (bigha) workers.

In the same year R.C.M.C. put forward another demand for temporary employment which stated that the non-dependent workers should be given second preference for temporary employment.

D.D.C.K.M.U. made a charter of demands in 1985 which included 15 demands. The major demands were - filling up of new vacancies, repairing of quarters, L.M.F. doctors should be

replaced by M.B.B.S. doctors etc. In the same year D.C.B.W.U. put forward another demand for payment of full wages to the workers. R.C.M.C. also placed a demand in 1985 for payment of bonus on instalment.

In 1987, D.D.C.K.M.U., again started agitations for filling up of vacancies.

Angrabhasa Tea Estate

Organised trade union movements started in the Angrabhasa Tea Estate in 1952 when the West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B. C.S.U.) formed its branch in this garden. W.B.C.S.U. was the first trade union in this garden. But before this there was sporadic incidences of labour unrests, such as in June, 1984 the workers of this tea garden were seen agitating as a munshi was assaulted by the management and against the high quantum of ticca etc. The workers even struck work for one day in the later part of 1948. to reduce the task of sickling.

In the beginning of the organised trade union movement, the situation was such that the management even tried to ban tribal panchayat meetings in the garden. But, the management could not stop it as the association of the planters (D.B.I.T.A.) decided that the panchayats could take place in the gardens if they wouldn't disturb the normal works and were confined purely to social and religious matters.

However, the workers of this garden could organise themselves under the banner of W.B.C.S.U. and in 1952, they called on a strike for two days as the management dismissed

a chaprasi. The strike was organised by W.B.C.S.U.

In 1953, a strike was organised for one day in the garden. by W.B.C.S.U. to dismiss a munshi, who was a Congress supporter and pro-management in outlook. In the same year, the workers agitated several times for excess load of task(ticca). The workers even assaulted an assistant manager of this garden in this connection. The workers struck work again for three days in the same year, demanding two weightment of ticca instead of four.

In 1954, W.B.C.S.U. demanded for new school, water, church etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1955, this union framed a charter of demands which included weightment should be two times in lieu of four times, two hundred retrenched workers should be reinstated, schedule of ticca should be less, labour club, firewood, proper amusement facilities for the workers etc. In this year again labour unrest resulted for weightment of ticca. The management took some decisions against the workers in the middle of this year. The decisions included-free issue of tea to the workers would be discontinued, the system of giving advance would operate if the workers cooperated with the management and temporary workers would be given work for half day only in the months^{of} July, August and September. The workers started agitation against these decisions. Later in the year, the workers again protested

against weightment of ticca. The workers of this tea estate also participated in the Bonus movement of 1955. They struck work from August 29, 1955 to September 7, 1955.

R.S.P. led Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) was formed in this garden in the 1956. A peculiar incident of this year could show us the arbitrary nature of the management. Two dogs of the then assistant manager of this garden quarrelled with three dogs of a labour line. The assistant manager ordered an worker to kill the dogs of the labour line. The worker declined to carry out the order. The management then dismissed the worker. The D.C.B.W.U. made a protest against it. The worker then get back his job. In the same year W.B.C.S.U. was demanding for 25% increase of emoluments. The management did not concede the demands. The workers called on strike which continued for three days. But strike was unsuccessful.

The I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha (D.C.B.M.S.) was formed in this garden in 1957.

In 1958, D.C.B.M.S. organised a strike for one day to show solidarity with the Chowkidar who was dismissed for having hands in a theft case in the bungalow of an assistant manager.

In 1960, D.C.B.M.S. placed a demand for supply of firewood. In this year workers again started agitation for excess ticca and four times of weightment. They also observed strike for a day in this year in support of their demands. In the same year the W.B.C.S.U. put forward a charter of demands for firewood, permanency

of temporary workers, abolition of ticca when the leaf is coarse, quarters etc.

In 1961, W.B.C.S.U. organised a strike for one day on the issue of supply of firewood. The workers struck again for two times in this year. In one case some workers were not allowed to resume work as they were late by 25 minutes. In another case their demands were - mode of payment, ^{at} Extra leaf price should be changed, supply of firewood, distribution of fresh flour etc.

The W.B.C.S.U. again put forward a 12 point charter of demands in 1962 which included - children and wives of permanent workers should be given employment, separate house for married couple, supply of water, repairing of labour quarters, quantum of task should be written in Hindi etc.

National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.), the official I.N.T.U.C. affiliated union was formed in 1961 and most of the congress led unions (such as D.C.B.W.S. etc.) merged with it except the R.C.M.C. The N.U.P.W. was formed in this garden in 1964 and in the same year R.C.M.C. was also formed in this garden. In this year a worker was dismissed for his absenteeism. N.U.P.W. made a protest against it. Two strikes took place in 1964 in this garden. The reason for the first strike was that some workers were transferred from one division to another division. The second strike occurred when a group of women workers refused to do the task of eradication of creepers, they wanted to pluck leaves only. Both the strikes were unsuccessful. Besides, workers also protested against the ticca of cheeling work, change of weekly holiday of

factory workers, period of non-task work. In the same year, D.C.B.W.U. put forward a demand to give preference to the dependants of permanent workers for temporary works. In this year, there was a another type of incident in this garden. Mr. Deven Sarkar, the general secretary of W.B.C.S.U. had a meeting with the workers of this garden. The meeting took place ⁱⁿ the garden. The manager of this tea estate wrote to the Superintendent of Police of Jalpaiguri District accusing him of criminal trespassing in the garden.

In 1965, the D.C.B.W.U. demanded reduction of the workload and increase in the supply of firewood. In the same year W.B.C.S.U. gave a strike notice to the management for violation of Minimum Wages Act, non-payment of wages for annual leaves, supply of water, canteen, ration, mobile creche etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1966, D.C.B.W.U. placed a number of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of kerosene oil, land for cultivation, extra pay for extra work etc. The strike, called by the Coordination Committee for arrear, revision of pay etc. received partial response in this garden. This year also witnessed the most noteworthy incident in the history of trade union movement of this garden. The management of this tea garden demolished the houses of some dismissed workers. Mr. A. H. Basterwitch,

the R.S.P. leader met the manager to protest against it. The manager did not pay any heed to this protest. There were some other demands also; such as implementation of the 5th Industrial Tribunal etc. Mr. Baterwitch started hunger strike from November 8, 1966 in front of the gate of the tea estate. The hunger strike continued for three days. All the workers of this garden stopped work. The workers also demanded for transfer of the manager. The head office of the tea estate intervened. The manager was transferred and the head office assured the workers to consider the other demands.

In 1967 & 1968 D.C.B.W.U. and N.U.P.W. placed various charter of demands. The demands were - reduction of ticca, introduction of two times of weightments, stopping of arbitrary change of jobs for the workers, immediate stoppage of all anti-labour and anti-union activities, fire-wood, equal distribution of Khet (cultivable) land, repairing of houses, free quarters for every worker, a dispensary in Birpitijhora division, festival holiday for chowkidar, ration, filling up of vacancies etc. The workers once gheraoed the assistant in 1967 and started "go-slow" movement in the same year on the issue of these demands.

The third joint movement of the workers, organised by the Coordination Committee for increase of employment, revision of wages, implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951 was totally successful in this garden. The workers

of this garden struck work from August 18, 1969 to September 2, 1969.

From 1970 to 1972, there was no significant movement or no significant demands were placed by the workers in this garden.

In 1973, N.U.P.W. put forward two demands for labour housing and filling up of sub-staff vacancies.

In 1974, D.C.B.W.U. placed a number of demands to the management. Those are - confirmation of all daily rated dafadars who are serving for more than six months, filling up of vacancies, payment of sick wages, quality of ration should be improved, regular cleaning of drains of labour lines etc.

The union activities were more or less nil during 1975 to 1977. A growing dissatisfaction was seen among the workers. A group of D.C.B.W.U. came out from it and made contact with the local C.P.I.(M) leader. With the help of this leader they formed C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (C.B.M.U.) in this garden in 1978. This union submitted a charter of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of firewood, construction of cement floors in the labour quarters, water-taps in the labour lines etc.

In 1979-80 labour unrests took place in the garden on the previous charter of demands and for advance for Rathjatra.

In 1981 D.C.B.W.U. framed a charter of demands which included demands for firewood, conversion of temporary sub-

staff to permanent, stopping of reduction of the number of paniwalas, dafadars etc., supply of ration for the dependants, jobs for the educated and efficient tribal youths, timely repairing of labour quarters etc.

In 1983, the workers made a protest against the transfer of a staff.

In 1985, the workers of this garden organised demonstrations for new employment opportunities, ration card, promotion of minors to adolescents, repairing of doors and windows of their quarters. These demonstrations were organised jointly by the D.C.B.W.U. and the W.B.C.M.S. In the same year both the above unions put forward some other demands also - additional employment, increase in the number of doctors and midwives, tubewell, converting Kuccha labour quarters to Pucca, supply of kerosene oil, regular supply of concessional ration, club house, school transport etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1986, the workers of this garden again demonstrated demanding ration on credit, not to employ women workers in cheeling works.

C.B.M.U. made a twenty-point charter of demands in 1987. The main demands were - Badle appointment for incapable workers, ration for the dependants, separate quarters for the workers with large families, construction of Pucca roads in the labour lines, demand for a cemented water point for every ten houses, ration and four peels firewood for the temporary

workers and monthly rated workers. In this year of April 17, the workers gheraoed all the staff and managers for a few hours. Their demand was : wages due to be paid on 22nd April should be paid on 18th April on account of Easter-Saturday. The management did not agree as the papers were not ready and also apprehended that it might be a practice in future. The police came and dispersed the agitated workers. Women workers took a leading role in this movement.

KURTY TEA ESTATE

The first trade union in Kurty tea estate was formed by the Socialists in 1950. The union was West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (WBCSU). During this time the Communist Party had already formed trade unions in a number of gardens in Western Dooars. Debprosad Ghosh (Patalbabu) and his Adivasi and Nepali associates off and on held meeting at Metelli haat. They also took up the task of selling and distributing books and leaflets (written in Sadri) etc. to the tea garden workers. Through these meetings Patalbabu came in contact with some workers in Kurty Tea Estate. Prem Oraon was one of them. He joined C.P.I. and took initiative to form C.P.I. union in this garden. He, however, did not succeed, because the Socialists in the garden were very popular at that time.

During this time the workers of this tea garden, under the leadership of Ghanashyam Mishra the famous socialist leader, were agitating against the management for poor-quality of ration

items. The extent of agitation could be understood from a telegram sent to the Regional Labour Officer, Jalpaiguri and Assistant Labour Commissioner, Darjeeling by the manager of this garden. The telegram stated : "Mishra causing trouble in Kurty Tea Estate on account of ration scales stop. Your intervention immediately solicited". This agitation continued from 1951 to 1953.

In 1953, the workers of this tea estate organised a strike for two days. Their demands were - issuing of ration at prorata rates must be ceased, Extra-leaf price (doubly) should be increased, increase of wages, the quantum of rice in the cereal ration should be increased, security of service should be ensured. The strike was unsuccessful as the management did not concede the demands.

The workers of this tea estate also participated in the Bonus movement of 1955. They struck work from August 29, 1955 to September 6, 1955.

In 1956, the workers of this tea garden again stopped work for two days in the month of June. Their demand was to dismiss a lorry driver who had abused a women worker. The management ordered an enquiry and on the basis of this report the lorry driver was suspended for fourteen days. In the same year, in November, the workers put forward some demands, such as, the maundage weighment ticca of Mikania creepers must be stopped and the work should be stopped at 12 O'clock. The

management refused to meet the demand. The workers then stopped work for 2 days. The strike, however, was unsuccessful. The workers then started a 'go-slow' movement. This angered the management. Fourteen workers were given charge sheets and then suspended.

From 1957 to 1958 W.B.C.S.U. submitted several demands to the management regarding - supply of firewood, kerchiefs, jobs for the retrenched jobless workers, implementation of minimum wages, lessening the quantum of ticca, jobs to the wives of the workers and other dependants. In support of these demands the workers went on strike for a day. Finally some of the demands were conceded by the management.

In 1959, the workers again went on strike for two days in the month of September as the secretary of the garden unit of W.B.C.S.U., who also was an ex-employee, was stopped by the management from entering the factory.

In the next year i.e. in 1960, W.B.C.S.U. again submitted a memorandum of demands to the management which included - supply of firewood, permanent services for temporary chowkidars, treatment of blind persons during the service, supply of drinking water, weighshed, club room etc. The management agreed to meet the demands.

In 1963, the workers of this garden struck work for two times in protest against the dismissal of some workers.

In 1966, Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union was formed in this garden. In the same year the supporters of this

union gheraoed the office staff , broke the glasses of windows on the issue of bonus. They also organised a strike in January of this year. The management reacted with coercive measures and dismissed ten workers. The workers of this tea garden also participated in the joint movement of tea workers organised by the Coordination Committee in this year.

In 1969, Z.C.B.W.U. again put forward a memorandum which included demands like, jobs of unemployed youths, re- instalment of the dismissed workers, ration, good quality of tea , sugar, kerosene, firewood, latrine, proper treatment and full wages for sick worker, clubroom, increase of wages, extra leaf price must be given seperately from daily wages etc. In this year, workers of this garden also participated in the joint movement organised by Coordination Committee for increase of employment opportunities in the tea gardens, revision of wages and implementation of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. The strike was started from 18th August, 1969 and was called off on September 2, 1969.

With the growth of the Z.C.B.W.U. under the leadership of Prem Oraon, the influence of socialists over the workers in this tea garden was gradually diminishing.

In 1970, a clash took place in a labour line of this tea garden. In this clash two socialist workers were murdered and one more was severely injured. In the same year, West Bengal

Cha Majdoor Sabha affiliated to H.M.S. formed its branch in this garden. Its influence was restricted particularly to one ethnic group (Tanti) of a labour line (Tanti line). One of the most noteworthy incidents of the trade union movements in this garden was happened in this year. The management of this tea estate planned to remove the factory from this garden to another tea estate of the same ownership. The workers of this tea estate protested against it, because if the factory was removed a huge number of workers would have lost their jobs. The management did not pay any heed to the workers' protest. As a part of the shifting process the management started to send the green leaves from this garden to another garden for processing. Till then the workers' protest was peaceful. Prem Oraon, the then secretary of garden unit of the Z.C.B.W.U. could realise the consequence of such a move. He organised the workers and started picketing in front of the gate of the garden. In the mean time, the workers of the other factory, where the leaves were sent for processing, stopped processing these leaves in support of the workers of this garden. When the movement continued for fourteen days, the Calcutta head office of this agency house sent some observers. The union gave them an ultimatum to stop factory - shifting. The management did retreat and cancelled the idea of factory-shifting. During this movement Prem Oraon lost his right leg through an accident when he forcibly tried to drive away a tractor.

In 1973, the workers of this tea garden observed a strike for one day in November for political reasons.

In 1975, Z.C.B.W.U. made a protest to the management to stop bringing casual workers from outside the garden.

In 1976-77, Z.C.B.W.U. sent a number of memorandum of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of firewood and water in the labour lines, repairing of labour quarters, repairing of the roads in the labour lines, supply of milk, biscuits and other food items for the children in the creche, supply of medicine, payment of gratuity, ration for sick workers, vacancy fill up, building of a temple etc.

C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was formed in this garden in 1977. In this year Z.C.B.W.U. demanded for 20% bonus but C.B.M.U. did not agree to it. They were ready to concede much lesser percentage of bonus.

In 1978, Z.C.B.W.U. called a strike for a one day but C.B.M.U. opposed the strike.

In the next year (i.e. in 1979) also, Z.C.B.W.U. called a strike for one day to withdraw the chargesheet given to a chowkidar.

In 1980, both the Z.C.B.W.U. and the W.B.C.M.S. started demanding for filling up of vacancies, repairing of labour quarters, supply of firewood, establishment of school building, labour club, latrine, supply of ration, twenty per cent bonus etc.

From the beginning of the eighties to the eighty four, no significant movement took place in this garden. The union activities were virtually nil during that time. Meanwhile a worker was sent to the educational courses of the Central Board for Workers Education, Siliguri, during that time. There, this worker came in contact with a defence personnel who was a supporter of C.P.I.M.L.(P.C.C.). The worker became convinced by the defence personnel. Returning to the tea garden, this worker organised some workers and formed Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (P.B.C.B.S.K.U.) affiliated to I.F.T.U., a trade union of C.P.I.M.L. (P.C.C.) in 1984. The union quickly gained popularity among the workers of this tea garden for its activities. In this year this tea estate witnessed a large scale workers' movement in the history of its trade union movements. This movement occurred on the issue of the appointment of a staff. A vacancy was created in the office on the retirement of a staff. The management selected an outsider for the post. The workers' and the staff organisations demanded that the appointment must be given to one who is an insider either to a spouse of a staff or to the spouse of a worker. The management did not concede the demand. When the selected person selected came to join, the workers and the staff togetherly prevented him from joining. They remained assembled in front of the gate of the garden. The management then suddenly declared lock out and all the managerial staff left the garden. During the continuation of the lockout, the government intervened and through a tripartite conciliation

it was decided that (i) the unions would have to allow the selected person to join, (ii) the company would consider their demand for the future vacancies. The company then called off the lock-out after forty days. During the forty days of lock-out the workers had to suffer a lot. They were virtually jobless as they were not provided with temporary works in the adjacent gardens, because the management of this tea estate had requested the management of other tea gardens of this area not to give jobs to the workers of this tea estate.

During 1984-85 both the Z.C.B.W.U. and C.B.M.U. were loosing their influence over the workers. Most of the workers became the supporter of P.B.C.B.S.K.U.

In 1986, the workers of this tea estate struck work for one day on the demands for supply of firewood, land for cultivation, sick wages etc.

In 1987, Z.C.B.W.U. and P.B.C.B.S.K.U. put forward a number of demands. The demands were - regular supply of firewood, pucca construction of labour quarters, repairing of labour quarters, double wages for work done on sunday (weekly holiday), adequate protective equipments for the sprayers, free supply of medicine, filling up of vacancies and so on.