

CLASS CONFLICT AND NATION BUILDING :
GANDHI AND THE INDIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT*

By

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The emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics as a nation-builder and the emergence of the working class as a potential political force in India nearly coincided in the 1920s. Although Gandhi was predominantly concerned with national politics and the freedom movement, he had also developed systematic ideas about labour problems and industrialisation. Indeed, as we will see in the first few paragraphs of this paper, the task of nation-building and concern with labour problems are logically connected as well. For obvious reasons, Gandhi could not be a labour leader *per se*; but he did develop a specific approach to the issue of labour movement and organisation, and through his approach, he was trying in his unique way to solve the problem posed by the working class for nation-building. The present paper will make an attempt to briefly describe and analyse the specific approach of Gandhi.

I

The task of nation-building involves two major issues : it involves, first, the creation of a public authority which can legitimately exert itself throughout the national territory; secondly, it involves the creation of an integrated national community. These are closely inter-connected processes. While the former has its own problems,¹ the latter faces problems thrown up by the modernisation process of which nation-building itself is a part. An important aspect of modernization, for instance, is industrialisation and implicit in industrialisation are the forces of social disintegration. For industrialisa-

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1. See Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990) on the problem of creating public authority in some Western and non-Western societies.

tion by creating the working class generates a "revolutionary potential" in society. As it has been well-recognised, this industrial working class is very different from "the poor" of the earlier epochs.² They are potentially organisable, and also, they do pose a threat to the social *status quo*.

While the creation of an integrated national community may be endangered by a host of factors, the potential conflict situation arising out of the development of the industrial working class would constitute a major divisive force. An integrated national community, then, would involve a process of horizontal integration (to deal, for instance, with linguistic, communal, regional cleavages) as well as a vertical one (to deal with social classes, for example). Vertical integration would, of necessity, require reincorporation of the newly created working class to the rest of the community. Such reincorporation or "civic reintegration" of the work-force, as Bendix calls the process,³ can be generally achieved either through revolution, and in a classless society that such revolution is supposed to create, or by persuading the workers to become partners in an "expanding-sum game".⁴ But these two alternative choices—in so far they are choices—might not be available to the nation-builders for an indefinite period of time, and the threat of a revolutionary solution may always be present.⁵

II

With the beginning of the process of industrialisation, problems of vertical integration began to appear in India as well. Although the foundations

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2. Jurgen Kuczynski, *The Rise of the Working Class* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967); also, Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).
 3. Reinhard Bendix, *Work and Authority in Industry* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1956), pp. 434-37.
 4. The operation of the latter process, as it happened in the case of Great Britain, has been excellently analysed in Samuel H. Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969). See especially pp. 240-42.
 5. There are at least two other distinct approaches to working class integration in the national society, namely, corporatism and syndicalism. For an excellent and up-to-date discussion of corporatism, see Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" in *The New Corporatism*, eds, Frederick B. Fike and Thomas Stritch (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1904), pp. 85-131. No such well-integrated discussion of syndicalism from this perspective is known to the present author. The following may be consulted: Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Glencoe: Free

of modern industry were laid down by the middle of the 19th century, it was not until World War I that industrialisation started in a real sense in India. So also, "the loosely organised refusals to work" by the workers in the early days referred to by Buchanan⁶ turned into numerous and fairly organised strikes in the 1920s. Looking at a few statistics we find that in one decade, between 1911 and 1921, the total number of factories almost doubled (from 2,654 to 5,144) and the number of factory workers rose by half a million (from 0.86 to 1.36 million). Workers as percentage of the total population also increased from 0.35% in 1911 to 0.55% in 1921, the highest increase in any one decade between 1891 and 1931. The year 1921 had the record number of strikes between the years 1920 and 1937.⁷

Yet, it may appear from these figures that while the number of industrial workers did, in fact, increase in the first two decades of this century, we are still somewhat over-emphasizing its disintegrating effects. For, after all, the factory workers still amounted to a meagre 0.55% of total population. In response to this, two points should be made here. First, that considered as a proportion of total population, it is true that the number of industrial workers in India in the 1920s was insignificant. Yet, in absolute terms, the number was significant indeed (and given India's demographic size, the absolute number should be considered as more significant than the percentages). It was also significant because these workers, located in and around the major urban centres, were localised and hence, could be organised and mobilised relatively easily. Secondly, whether the number of industrial workers would stagnate or multiply depended on the degree and policy of industrialisation. A deliberate policy of quick industrialisation on the part of the nationalist elite could easily exacerbate the integration problem.⁸

Press, 1950); David Beetham, "Sorel and the Left," *Government and Opposition* 3 (Summer, 1969) : 308-323; Mathew Elbow, *French Corporative Theory, 1789-1948* (New York : Octagon Press, 1966).

6. D. H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India* (New York : Macmillan, 1934, p. 416).
7. *Statistical Abstracts British India* (London : HM's Stationary Office, 1865-1947).
8. In fact, some steps towards increasing the tempo of industrialisation were already being initiated by the British-Indian Government. In 1916, for instance, the Indian Industrial Commission was appointed "to examine and report upon the possibilities of further industrial development in India and submit recommendations for a permanent policy of industrial stimulation." The Commission in its report in 1918 advised the Government to play an active role in industrial development and recommended

In fact, more important than the figures mentioned above is the fact that the labour movement which had its humble beginnings in the 1880s, was taking a definite shape as *labour* movement in the post-World War I period. It had also started to take some organisational strides, the most important of which was the foundation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920. Workers' problem were becoming complicated. Secondly, the workers in India by this time had started to show, for a number of reasons, signs of what the Bengal Committee on Industrial Disputes called, "developing a new consciousness of its own solidarity and value."⁹ And interestingly, it was at the same time that the political movement also started to be intensified. It was gaining new momentum and mass base under Gandhi's leadership. For the leaders of the political movement, who were essentially engaged in the task of nation-building, the obvious question, then, was how to deal with this rising working class movement; what should be the relationship between these two movements? Does the political mass movement mean a movement of the workers too? Therefore, it was not without reason that the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in its editorial on March 13, 1923 wrote,

...the question which the Indian National Congress will soon be called upon to solve is whether it will allow this newly evoked mass energy to struggle blindly on through sporadic outbursts and to organise itself outside the Congress movement or whether, under proper direction it should be harnessed to the cause of the *swaraj* in India, and made to strike at the very root of economic and political subjection. The problem has not been faced in the right spirit upto now.

These questions, obvious as they were, did not escape the attention of Gandhi. In the following pages we will see how Gandhi was trying to deal with them. We will argue that Gandhi was in favour of a very slow process of reintegration of the working class through non-revolutionary means and within the framework of reinforced traditional values. We will see that

several administrative and organisational changes. See Vera Anstey, *The Economic Development of India* (London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), pp. 216-18.

Such initial steps, if seriously followed up, would certainly have strengthened the "signs of social disintegration" which, according to Anstey, were already there, if somewhat unobtrusively. Anstey, p. 471.

9. 'Report of the Bengal Committee on Industrial Disputes', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, June 22, 1921.

even if Gandhi was not much successful in really reintegrating the work force, he was immensely successful in subduing their revolutionary potential.

III

Gandhi enunciated his ethic of labour movement in the first fifteen leaflets that he wrote for the struggling workers at Ahmedabad.¹⁰ Besides, in 1920, he spoke before many workers' meeting at different places throughout India. These, as well as his articles on the problem of workers and strikes in *Young India*, *Harijan*, *Gujrati* and other papers represent the core of his argument about labour movement in India.¹¹ It seems that the main elements of his argument are the following.

First, Gandhi regarded labour as one of the factors of production. Therefore, labour can justly claim only what is due to it, but no more. In this sense, he fully accepted the class basis of society. He believed that society will always remain divided among unequal members, for inequality is inherent in man. Men differ in intelligence and tact. The capitalists possess these qualities while the labourers do not. "It is clear", Gandhi said, "that labour will never attain to that intelligence. If it does, it will cease to be labour and become itself the master. The capitalists do not fight on the strength of money alone. They do possess intelligence and tact."¹²

In a speech on the rights and duties of labour at a workers' meeting in Madras, Gandhi said that the duty of the workers is to work, for that is why they receive their wages. Their right is to get wages fairly so that they can maintain themselves and educate their children decently. Owner's duty is to see that the workers' necessities are fulfilled.¹³ Time and again he asked the workers to realise that just as they need the capitalists so also the latter need them: "Each is dependent on the other."

10. Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth* (New York : Norton, 1969).

11. Most of these speeches and articles have been collected in a single volume by Bharatan Kumarappa under the title, *Gandhi, Towards Non-violent Socialism* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1951; cited hereinafter under Kumarappa). Also relevant, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vols. 17-21, 23, 26 and 30 (Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1965-68; cited hereinafter as CWMG).

12. *CWMG*, 17:17-20.

13. *Ibid.*, 323-327; also, vol. 18:164-67.

Secondly, Gandhi believed that labour possesses a great power in society, but this power of the workers lies in combination and in the development of their self-consciousness. In a speech before a mine workers' meeting in 1936 he said:

If the workers only knew what they could do for themselves by training and intelligent combination, they could realise that they were no less proprietors of the mines than the managers and the shareholders.¹⁴

Again, late in 1947, before a gathering of workers at Metiaburuz he expressed the hope that religion should not divide the workers, for "they were all labourers." He said, he

...wanted marriage between capital and labour. They could work wonders in cooperation. But that could happen only when labour was intelligent to cooperate with it-self and then offer cooperation with capital in terms of honourable equality. Capital controlled labour because it knew the art of combination.¹⁵

Thus, not only did he want the workers to realise all their strength and potentiality, must combine among themselves, but at the same time he also asked them to offer cooperation to the capitalists. Thus, *combination* among the workers, and *collaboration* between them and the capitalists (the latter, however, will become "trustee-owners") were to be the most important basis of non-violent society.

This automatically leads to the other vital element in Gandhi's thought on this matter. Gandhi was opposed to the idea of class war. Time and again he emphasised this point. With reference to the appeals of Mr. Saklatvala, the communist member of the British Parliament who came to India in 1927, to him to organise the workers and take a stand on behalf of them, Gandhi wrote,

I am not opposed to the organisation of labour, but as in everything else, I want its organisation along Indian lines, or if you will, my lines... I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their coordination to be perfectly possible.¹⁶

14. Kumarappa, p. 70.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

16. *Young India*, March 17, 1927.

In a speech at a gathering of millhands at Ahmedabad which was considering the formation of a labour union, Gandhi was very categorical:

To those who believe that the unions we are establishing are for the purpose of fighting or coercing the millowners or that they shall be able to use these unions for such purposes, I would advise not to join the proposed union at all. I have never done anything in my life to coerce owners or harm their interests, and I will never allow myself to be an instrument to this.¹⁷

Gandhi was rejecting the idea of class struggle not in order to advocate that there should be cooperation between the exploiters and the exploited. Rather, he questioned the concept of exploitation itself. He refused to believe "that the capitalists and the landlords are all exploiters by an inherent necessity, or that there is a basic irreconcilable antagonism between their interests and those of the masses. All exploitation is based on cooperation, willing or forced, of the exploited".¹⁸ He explicitly said that the "idea of class struggle does not appeal to me. In India a class war is not only not inevitable, but it is avoidable if we have understood the message of non-violence."¹⁹

Not only did Gandhi reject class struggle; he also rejected the use of violence in any struggle between the workers and the employers. Thus, in a true labour satyagraha the workers would tell their employers that they must either concede their minimum demands or do without them. "In the meantime, they (must) put up with suffering."

At times Gandhi went out of his way to convince the owners that his movement was not aimed against them. Thus, while urging the owners to hold "all your riches as a trust to be used solely in the interest of those who sweat for you" and to "make your labourers co-partners of your wealth," he also added that he did not mean "to suggest that unless you legally bind yourself to do all that, there should be a labour insurrection. The only sanction that I can think of in this connection is of mutual love and regard as between father and son, not of law."²⁰

17. *OWMG*, 17:49.

18. Cited by Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, *Evolution of the Political Philosophy of Gandhi* (Calcutta; Calcutta Book House, 1969), p. 229.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Kumarappa, p. 61.

Gandhi also rejected the idea that strikes should be used for any political purpose. He was not opposed to strikes as such, though he would accept it only under certain specific conditions. The Assam-Bengal railwaymen's and steamship workers' strike in the early 1920s brought up the question of sympathetic strikes. Gandhi accepted sympathetic strikes as a moral right of the workers but, at the same time, he warned against such strikes when they are purposefully called for embarrassing the government. Also, he was against "premature precipitation of sympathetic strikes."

But Gandhi admitted the ubiquitous nature of politics and urged the workers to try to acquire an understanding of politics as citizens. During the non-cooperation movement he told them to participate with their families in the great national movement by renouncing foreign cloth and observing non-violence.²¹

Gandhi always insisted that the workers should develop a strong sense of commitment to the industry concerned. Almost whenever he would say anything on the subject of labour he would insist that neither the workers nor the capitalists should do anything that might badly affect the "healthy existence or growth of the great industry;" that the workers should consider the industries as much of their own as of the capitalists. Time and again he uttered messages such as,

You and I believe in cooperation. If we sometimes noncooperate with millowners we do so to reach cooperation ultimately. We want Ahmedabad and its mill-industry to prosper but we want the prosperity broad-based on the harmony of all the varying elements.²²

Finally, as already mentioned, Gandhi was in favour of labour organization. The Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (ATLA) was definitely his creation. He also advised, as we have noted above, that the real power of workers lies in "intelligent combination". But in spite of this, Gandhi was never a supporter of the AITUC or even of the idea of it. The reason for his opposition to the idea of a central labour organization was "exceedingly simple". In reply to Saklatvala's appeals to him, he explained:

Labour in India is still extremely unorganised. The labourers have no mind of their own when it comes to matters of national policy or even

21. *CWMG*, 21:131-35.

22. Kumarappa, p. 73; also, pp. 76-88.

the general welfare of labour itself. Labourers in various parts of India have no social contact and no other mutual ties. It is provincial, and even in the same city it is highly communal. It is not everywhere wisely guided. In many places it is under selfish and highly unscrupulous guidance.

There is no absolute cohesion among provincial leaders; and there is little discipline among subleaders. The latter do not uniformly tender obedience to their provincial chiefs. Leaders in different provinces have no single policy to follow. In these circumstances an all-India Union can only exist on paper.²³

Thus, Gandhi was of the opinion that an all-Indian organisation was not only unnecessary at the time (i. e. in 1920s), but it was also undesirable. Hence, he regarded it to be "suicidal" "for Ahmedabad TLA to think of belonging" to an all-India body. His own ideal was that there should be more individual trade unions throughout the country, and that the ATLA should "serve as a model to the rest of India."

IV

Through this very brief presentation of Gandhi's ideas on the problems of industrial workers in India we have tried to indicate his grasp of the problem as well as the nature of his solution. As far as the vertical integration of the national community is concerned, the growth of industrial workers raises, for Gandhi, three major questions: first, on what lines are these workers to be organised, if they are to be organised at all; second, what should be their form of political participation; and third, how should they organise their relationship with the owners/management, that is, in other words, the question of industrial relation.

To the first of these questions, Gandhi's answer was very clear and categorical. The workers will surely have to be organised and organised well. But they should be organised by industries, plants, and localities rather than nationally through a central labour organisation. Quite simply, he was arguing that a strong and viable central labour organisation can only follow rather than precede the organisation of smaller unions. Interestingly, Gandhi was not

23. The letter is dated May 10, 1927. For Gandhi-Saklatvala Correspondence, P Saha, *Shapurji Saklatvala—A Short Biography* (Delhi : People's Publishing House, 1970), pp 67-88,

at all unmindful to the fact that the cohesion of federal organisation is likely to be weakened rather than strengthened if the constituent units antedate the federal body.²⁴ It was in clear recognition of this principle that Gandhi created the Congress Working Committee in order to strengthen the central organisation of that body. Yet in the field of labour organisation, he was following a diametrically opposite line ostensibly for the same end. The logic of it lay in his concern for national integration. A central organisation of labour can be thought of only when a large number of constituent unions have already been organised on the basis of sound organisational principles and accepted norms of behaviour. Such organisational principles should reflect the workers' self-awareness (rather than their dependence on politicians) and the norms of behaviour should reflect their commitment to non-violence and arbitration as the means for dispute settlement. Until a general consensus is reached on these, any attempt to organise the workers on an all-India basis would tend to exacerbate class cleavage and thereby undermine national integrity.

This explains why Gandhi was so strongly opposed to the idea that the ATLA should have any relationship with the AITUC, while at the same time being very emphatic about "Ahmedabad...rendering a service to labour all over India."²⁵ Neither did he ever shrink from expressing his idea that the organisation of individual unions on the Ahmedabad model was more important: "If I had my way I would regulate all the labour organisations in India after the Ahmedabad model."²⁶

But then, and this leads us to the second major question, would not the working class participate in politics at all? If they would, what would be its manner and form? To the first question, Gandhi's answer was, yes. The workers would surely participate in the politics of the national community. They could always become members of the Indian National Congress as individuals. And further, the workers, could also participate, not merely alone but along with their families as well, in the freedom movement, the highest expression of the Indian national political community at the time. But in the latter

24. David B. Truman makes the same theoretical point while comparing the relative organisational problems faced by the American Federation of Labour and the Congress of Industrial Organisation of the United States. See his *The Governmental Process : Political Interests and Public Opinion*, (New York : Alfred Knopf, 1951), pp. 120-121.

25. Saha, p. 81.

26. *OWMG*, 21 : 47.

case, their participation should be limited, as we have seen, to renunciation of foreign cloth and the observance of non-violence.

While he thus admitted individual political participation by the workers, he was opposed to the idea of organisational involvement of the congress in labour matters or of the labour organisations in the Congress affairs. His own relationship with the ATLA was always personal, not through the Congress. In 1941, he rather proudly remarked that the "organisation (ATLA) has never taken part in the party politics of the Congress..."²⁷

On this issue too, it is evident that Gandhi was quite sensitive to the fact that the two important components of modern society—the owners and the workers—have a natural tendency to conflict, and that such conflicts, if permitted, may tear the whole fabric of society and destroy the very foundation of peace and non-violence. Hence, political participation of the workers which is necessary and which alone can make the emerging political community truly *national* should be distinguished clearly from politicisation of the workers' organisations, and the boundary between politics and industry should never be allowed to blur. It is only in this way that an overlapping of political and economic conflicts may be prevented and the conditions for cross-cutting cleavages may emerge.

On the other hand, it was not advisable to let the Congress be influenced by labour either. For in that case, the Congress may tilt more toward the protection of their interests, if for nothing else, simply because of the weight of their number. Such a situation, according to Gandhi, would be dangerous for the freedom movement, for it would not only alienate the native bourgeoisie from the Congress but may even drive them to the side of the Government for self-protection. Apart from the financial loss this would cause the strength of the Congress would further decrease by the dissipation of its energy due to unnecessary involvement in employer-employee conflicts.²⁸

27. *Ibid.*

28. For a critical exposition of this argument, see Indulal Yajnik, *Gandhi As I Know Him* (Delhi : Danish Mahal, 1943), pp. 195-201. For similar reasons the Congress renounced its connections with the peasant movement in the late 1930s. The point was made explicit by Gandhi himself in an interview with a group of young communists in England in 1931 when he said "A Zamindar is merely a tool of the system. It is not necessary to take a movement against him *at the same time as against the British system.* It is possible to distinguish between the two." Kumarappa, p. 157 (*italics mine*). On the relationship between the Congress and the peasant movement,

While Gandhi was thus deciding the manner of political participation of the workers, he was also setting the norms of industrial relation. We have seen that he rejected strike in favour of arbitration as the means of conflict resolution in industry. Yet, strikes, when they must occur, should not contrapose the workers and owners in complete disregard of their all other identities. Traditional identities should be preserved as much as possible. In Erikson's treatment of the Ahmedabad labour *satyagraha* this has been amply demonstrated. On the significance of the choice of the place for this *satyagraha*, Erikson says, "He had to call for a rapid modernisation of awareness and aspiration and yet also to acknowledge and even preserve those aspects of the ancient social structure which alone could provide irreplaceable element of a traditional identity. So Gandhi could do no better than to settle in a modern place that had preserved some ancient structure."²⁹ The ancient structure in question was the caste structure which had been little eroded in Ahmedabad by British ways.

Of the leaflets that Gandhi was issuing during this "Event", the sixth one was particularly instructive in this connection. In this leaflet, Gandhi tried to show in a simplified manner how in the traditional *jajmankamin* system "disputes between a master and servant are settled between themselves amicably," and thereby, he attempted, in Erikson's words, "to give in a new and industrialised world what traditional values still existed on both sides". The leaflet also significantly contained the following message:

The employers ganging up against the workers is like raising an army of elephants against ants. If they had any regard for dharma the employers would hesitate to oppose the workers. You will never find in ancient India that a situation in which the workers starved was regarded as the employers' opportunity. *That action alone is just which does not harm either party to a dispute.*³⁰

see Benoy Bhusan Choudhury, "Agrarian Movements in Bengal and Bihar", in *Socialism in India*, ed. B. R. Nanda (Delhi : Vikas Publications, 1972), esp. pp. 219-229; Barrington Moore Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 370-378.

29. Erikson, p. 261. Ravinder Kumar makes the same point about maintenance of traditional identities while focusing on the Rowlatt Satyagraha. See Kumar (ed.). *Essays on Gandhian Politics—The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 15.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 341-342 (italics author's).

Clearly, Gandhi was trying to develop the procedure of dispute settlement as well as the norm of employer behavior. A proper settlement should characterize a consensus between the employers and the employees—a consensus which would be mutually beneficial. Evidently, Gandhi was suggesting an “expanding-sum-game” (rather than a radical departure from the existing property relationships) to which both the employers and the employees would be parties. But if the fundamental principle of conflict management would be capitalistic, such principle should be founded not on a ‘culture of consumption’ as in the West but rather on a ‘culture of abstention’—a culture that would find expression in “trusteeship” (for the employers) and in wage demands fair enough for the workers to “maintain themselves” and to educate their children decently.”³¹ The recommended model was one of paternalism.

But Gandhi would not stop there. He had also to set the norms for a proper labour movement. Such a movement is just only when it is for a demand the satisfaction of which is necessary for the workers, bearable for the industry and a worthy public cause. Only when he was convinced of these that he agreed to get involved in the Ahmedabad labour *satyagraha*. As he wrote in his letter to the secretary of the Millowners’ Association:

I am not particularly disposed to favour workers as workers; I am on the side of justice and often this is found to be on their side. Hence, the general belief that I am on their side. I can never think of harming the great industry of Ahmedabad.³²

V

So far we have argued that Gandhi was aware of the dangerous consequences of industrialisation on national integrity and social cohesion, and that he developed two major responses to deal with them. One was to maintain definite boundaries between the labour and the political organisations and movements; the other was to reinforce the traditional values among both employers and employees so that they are ultimately able to evolve a set of industrial relations norms through a process of consensus.

Ravinder Kumar has persuasively, and indeed, correctly argued that Gandhi rejected class as the centre of Indian social structure and assumed

31. *CWMG*, 17 : 323-27 and 18 : 164-67.

32. Erikson, p. 329:

that Indian society is a "constellation of caste, community and religion."³³ The point we have tried to make here, however, is that if Gandhi knew that class is *not* the centre of Indian social structure, he also knew that it has the potentiality *to be so*, and he was not ready to take any chance. While he recognised, through his emphasis on the task of labour organisation, that an organised work force is to be preferred to a volatile one, through his attempt to create a consensus on traditional values and loyalties (e. g. by advancing 'father-son' relationship as the model for employer-employee relationship) he hoped gradually to reintegrate the working class within the emerging political community.

But this was not all. For even these may fail to effectively blunt the "revolutionary potential" if there takes place a sudden expansion in the proportion of the workers in society. The latter can be checked only by controlling the rate of industrialisation. Hence, Gandhi was strongly pleading against industrialisation itself. His opposition to large-scale industrialisation in India is too well-known. Even in the late 1930s he advised the Congress for wholesale "purge" of those who were advocating industrialisation and declared that "without Khadi there is no Swaraj for the millions..."³⁴

It is doubtful, however, if Gandhi's position had any particular retardation effect on investment activities in India.³⁵ Yet, by creating an anti-industrialism and antimachine wave, by giving respectability to Khadi and cottage industries in an age of large-scale industrialisation, by emphasising traditional values, and by urging the preservation of traditional, non-worker identities of the workers, Gandhi successfully subdued the revolutionary potential of the working class in India.³⁶

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33. Kumar. *op. cit.*; see also his "Class, Community or Nation", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 3 (No. 4) : 357-376.
34. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November 20, 1938, cited by Sankari Prasad Basu, *Subhas Chandra on National Planning* (Calcutta : Jayasree Prakasan, 1970), p. 131; see pp. 118-48 for an interesting discussion of the issue.
35. In fact, as Vera Anstey observes, "the pace of industrial progress (measured by quantity of output) was greater between 1919 and 1938 than it had been from 1900 to 1914." If there had been a relative stagnation in some industries between 1925 and 1938 it was due, as both Anstey, and more elaborately, Bagchi show, to economic and international factors. Anstey, pp. 519-20; Amiya K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939* (Cambridge : University Press, 1972), pp. 85-92.
36. We say that Gandhi subdued rather than resolved the problem of integration of the work force into the national community because the post-independence developments

We began the paper with an underlying assumption that the process of industrialisation is likely to have the same effects wherever it occurs. But Gandhi, I believe, through his approach to the problem as well as through the solutions he offered challenged that assumption. Gandhian experiment seems to confirm the hypothesis advanced by Reinhard Bendix. Bendix argued:

“Against the view that industrialisation has the same effects wherever it occurs, I wish to maintain the importance of time and sequence as crucial variables. Once industrialisation has occurred anywhere, this fact alone alters the international environment of all societies”.³⁷

Thus, industrialisation cannot occur, according to Bendix, “the same way twice”. Indeed, the transition from pre-industrial to an industrial structure was taking place in India under conditions which were quite different from those of the European societies. Before we conclude, let us point out just one aspect of it.

We mentioned that in the early decades of this century the number of factory workers was increasing rapidly in India. But during the same period population also rose at a much faster rate. Between 1901 and 1911, it rose by 1.2%. Further, there was almost no redistribution of population from rural to urban centres. Population in rural areas was 90.1% in 1901, and 90.5% in 1911—a little increase in fact. And in 1931 it came down to 89%, that is, a reduction of only 1.5% in twenty years. This shows that while industrialisation was taking place in the post-World War I years, it was not such that it could suddenly disturb the balance of rural India to any great extent. In other words, the process of industrialisation with consequent conflict potential was taking place in a situation which was enveloped by a vast rural India characterised by very little change. This, in addition to the fact that the

clearly show that an important section of the organised labour in India—if not the whole of it—generally lacked a feeling of participation in the national community. The Government of independent India had to face the problem anew and over the last thirty years, through various legal and other means, it has developed a somewhat different approach for the solution of the problem.

37. Reinhard Bendix, “Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered”, in his *Embattled Reason—Essays on Social Knowledge* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 293.

industrial workers in urban India continued to maintain their rural ties, facilitated Gandhi's task (particularly that of maintaining traditional identities of the workers) enormously.³⁸ While he was emphasising traditional values and loyalties in the urban centres of industrialisation, he was also advocating gradual changes in the villages³⁹ and thereby, attempting to maintain an overall social balance in the midst of change.

38. For a theoretical discussion of the problem of developing exclusively working class identities and organisations, see Bendix, "Inequality and Social Structure : A Comparison of Marx and Weber", *American Sociological Review*, April, 1974.

39. The implications of this aspect of Gandhi's overall programme has not, however, been developed in the present paper.