

87  
0734

# ALL GLORY TO THE VALIANT STRIKERS

31

*A Review of the Strike of Central  
Government Employees, July 1960*

by

S. A. DANGE

AITUC PUBLICATION

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This short booklet contains the reprint of the 'Foreword' written by S. A. Dange, M.P., General Secretary, AITUC, to the publication, *FIVE GLORIOUS DAYS, Vol. I.*

For a detailed study of the developments relating to the strike, the impact of the strike, its aftermath and other aspects, readers are requested to refer to AITUC's fully documented publication, *FIVE GLORIOUS DAYS, Vol. I.* (250 pages approx., Price Rs. 3.00)

AUGUST 1960

PRICE : 75 NAYE PAISE

---

Published by K. G. Sriwastava, Secretary, All-India Trade Union Congress, 4, Ashok Road, New Delhi and printed by D. P. Sinha at the New Age Printing Press, Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi.

The AITUC is bringing out this publication in order to collect in a handy form all the facts so far available concerning that grand and mighty action of the two million employees of the Government of India—namely their General Strike of July 12-16. The aftermath of the great struggle will linger on for a long time. In order to shape the future and defend those who will have fallen victims to the arrogance of mad bureaucrats and the wounded pride of domineering ministers, already shrieking like would-be dictators and demanding “unconditional surrender”, it is necessary to keep on record these facts.

The record presented here is neither complete nor exhaustive. Moreover, many of those who are victimised today, might find their way back, because our would-be dictators are only in the making and there is still the possibility that the strength of the people may make them relent and resile from that dangerous path. Even then it is necessary to be vigilant and struggle. The present record of the strike will serve a purpose in that task.

I do not propose to review the struggle in all its aspects. I may do so at a later stage, when I shall be free from my illness and be in a position to move about. Just at present a few questions that are uppermost may be mentioned.

### **The Basic Questions**

Was it necessary to strike? Was it inevitable? Was it wise to run in such frontal opposition to the big, mighty Central Government of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru? Was it not hasty? Was it not harmful to the economy and the country? Were the negotiations and the Government offers sufficient to stay the action? Was the strike response a success? Were there not serious mistakes in the conduct of the strike? Once on the way, why was it called off

only on the fifth day? Should it not have been fought to the bitter end and let it fizzle out rather than call it off? What have the workers gained out of it? Are not the hundreds of victimised a sad loss and what can the movement do for them? Was there unity among all parties and TU organisations or were there serious differences? Was there proper organisation commensurate with the seriousness of the action? Will those diverse forces, who joined in the united action remain united in the future developments or separate? On the whole, has the movement, the working class and the people gone ahead or is it a setback?

Many, many such and other questions are being asked both among the workers and the general public.

Let us take the question of being hasty, not giving enough time to Government, not doing things by negotiation and being in general unreasonable in demands or methods.

What was the main demand in this strike and since when has it been before the Government?

The most outstanding and vital demand was for increase in dearness allowance, to protect the workers from a continuous fall in their real wages due to the rise in prices.

### **The Perpetual Price Rise**

The rise in prices is not a phenomenon of one or two years but has been continuous for the last twenty years. From 1939 to 1945 it could be attributed to the war; from 1945 to 1948 part of it could be attributed to the post-war crisis and shortages. But the crisis since then is not only due to shortages. Shortages and rise in prices during war time, when they were most serious had to be controlled by various methods of controlled distribution at fixed prices. But price rises became most disastrous as soon as the Congress Government took over power, decontrolled the markets and allowed their financial patrons, manufacturers, bankers and speculators to loot the people.

I need not go into that history. But people have to be reminded of it, because some people look at the price rises as if it is a natural phenomenon like rains and drought or God's wrath. In all capitalist and imperialist countries, capitalist profit-mongering has been the cause of rise in prices and fall in real wages.

In no socialist country can you find such a state of affairs.

The inevitable result was a demand for dearness allowance. What has been the attitude of the Congress Government and their supporters to the demands in the last twelve or thirteen years? They invariably denied D.A. and only yielded when the workers prepared for strikes or actually went on strike.

"During the eleven years ending 1958, the wholesale price level had risen by 42 per cent," says the Second Pay Commission.

"... The annual average consumer price index number (1949=100) shows a net rise of 33 per cent between 1947-1958 ... the increase in 1948 being 12 per cent and that over the last three years 21 per cent." (*Report, page 37*)

Thus the Pay Commission itself notes that there was 21 per cent increase in consumer prices by 1958. And it was at this time that the present agitation for D.A. gathered momentum. Was it then unreasonable and was it hasty for the Government employees to agitate against the serious wage-cut which was being imposed on them by the capitalist market and the Government?

One may say now that everybody admits that there has been rise in prices and cost of living. Even Government recognises it and gives wage-increases or D.A., when it sees the real hardship and has the money for it.

This argument is totally false and misleading.

## **False Prophets**

There has been a continuous attempt on the part of the bourgeois economists and the Government to mislead the workers and the Government employees on the question of rise in prices and cost of living.

The First Pay Commission, even when it granted D.A., told the world (May 1947) that prices would soon fall and stabilise at 185-200 taking 1939 index as 100. Hardly had these gentlemen finished their job than the index jumped from 310 in 1947 to 346 in 1948.

Then the Gadgil Committee in 1952 again tried to be prophetic and said the index would stabilise at the level of October 1952, and would not fall below the range of 265-284. The prophecy made specially to allay the working class agitation for more

D.A. proved false. The working class consumer price index of 1952 at 367 with 1939=100 rose to 377 in 1953.

The Second Pay Commission observed: "The course of events has belied the hopes of the Varadachariar Commission (First Pay Commission) and even the cautious expectations of the Dearness Allowance Committee (Gadgil). To mention but a single indicator, the consumer price index for the year 1958 was 414 (August 1939=100)." (*Report, page 35*)

## Double-Talk

And what is the prophesy of the Second Pay Commission after seeing the failure of the previous prophets? They tried double-talk.

They say "... judging from measures taken by them (Government) during the last three years, it may be expected they would take suitable steps to hold inflationary pressures under check." (p. 41)

Yet these three years had shown a rise of 21 per cent in the consumer price index. (*Report, page 37*) So it was visible to them that the Government's "suitable steps" had failed.

Hence not to be caught again as false prophets or be charged of deliberately misleading the people on behalf of the bourgeoisie or the Government, they wrote: "We have already mentioned the virtual unanimity among the competent witnesses on the likelihood of an upkeep of prices..." (p. 41)

Even then they talked of 'likelihood', not certainty. This was in August 1959 when the Commission signed its report. At that very moment the working class consumer price index number had jumped from its average of 112 in 1957-58 to 118 in 1958-59 (1949=100).

The Commission had hopes that the price index may stabilise somewhere at 115. Hence they proposed that Government reconsider the question of D.A., when the index would be 10 points above 115 for a period of 12 months.

What is the conclusion from the above? That all the prophesies of the bourgeois economists, Pay Commissions and their hopes to stabilise prices proved false. They were falsified by the capitalist masters of our economy. Hence their denial of

D.A. or their delay in giving it and their refusal to give it in full amounted to misleading the people and the workers. They tried to weaken and isolate the workers' struggle for protecting themselves against the wage-cuts. They helped the bourgeoisie to get cheaper services from the Governmental machinery and thus make extra profits at the cost of the people and the two million Central Government employees. All refusals of timely and adequate D.A. to the six million employees of the Central and State Governments constitute a direct aid to the bourgeoisie to pay less for the services (*viz.*, in Railways, P.&T. and production units of Government factories), and make greater profits. The argument that less pay means less budgetary taxes on the people is also false because despite less pay and wage-cuts, taxes on the people have not been any the less and the robbery of the people's money through Government departments by the shady elements of the bourgeoisie and the Government has increased, not diminished.

### **Bourgeois Theories**

When unable to deny any longer the fact that prices are rising and have defied control and when pressed by the demand for wage increase, the bourgeois economists and Government spokesmen, including Prime Minister Nehru, (who, in economic theory is always guided by his Finance Minister and bourgeois advisers) use this very price-rise as an argument to deny wage increase. They throw in the face of the worker the argument that wage increases lead to inflation and price-rises. So in order to stop rise in prices, stop wages increases or, in fact, cut wages.

When the debate on the demand of the Government employees for wage increase took place in Parliament in July 1957 and before and after, this theory of wage-price spiral was repeated by all Congress members and ministers and even some spokesmen of the left parties (such as the PSP, SP) while supporting the demand, admitted the wage-price spiral.

I pointed out then the falsity of this theory and showed how the trade union leaders of even America, England and Japan, all capitalist countries, do not subscribe to this theory. Even the well-known American bourgeois economist, and supporter of American capitalist system, J. K. Galbraith does not subscribe to

this theory. Yet bourgeois economists in India (with rare exceptions) and their supporters in the Governmental circles have been using the rise in prices itself as an argument to deny wage increases. And since they refuse to be convinced, naturally because of their class-interests, there is no other remedy for the worker except to laugh at their hypocritical selfish 'theories' and go into action to get their dues.

It is needless to deal here with all the other argument against wage increase, viz., needs of the Plan, national development and the need of sacrifices for it by the workers, and so on

### **Plan to Enrich Exploiters**

In a capitalist economy and a system dominated by Government belonging to or amenable to the bourgeoisie, all sacrifices demanded of the workers in the name of national development and national economy, principally enrich the rich exploiting classes and impoverish and oppress the exploited working class, peasantry and the middle classes. When there are no prospects of high profits in any sector, the bourgeoisie refuses to help or obstructs the growth of that sector of national economy and people's interests. You can see it in the field of housing, education, social services, peasant-owned land development and so on. Hence this talk of national development in the mouth of these gentlemen is only a mask for more profits and denial of the people's interests and share in the growing wealth of the country. Only when the people refuse to be suppressed but fight these parasitic classes, do they yield.

The AITUC, therefore, has adopted what it calls the two-pillar policy—to support national development and to defend the working people's interests. And, as such, it fully supported and participated in the present struggle and strike of the Government employees.

Thus it will be clear that the economic development of the last twelve years, since the Congress came to power, fully justifies the demands of the Government employees for higher wages and D.A. There was no exaggeration or haste in their demands because the demands were raised only when price-rises became



severe and only when they had suffered fall in their real wages for a long time.

### **Lessons of History**

A reference to past history will also answer the question, whether mere negotiations have any time moved the Government into granting any demand of the employees in the last twelve years. Negotiations lasting for months and even years have produced no results, until they were matched finally by notice of strike or actual strike. And when D.A. was given, it never restored the cut in full, except when prices fell fortuitously in 1954 and 1955. Except for these two years, the real wages of the employees have always continued to remain in deficit to the cost of living. The employees by this fall in wages have been continuously contributing crores of rupees every year since 1947 to the Government of India's exchequer. The first increase in wages was given in 1947, only after a series of strikes in 1946 in P. & T., Railways, etc., have convinced the Government of the necessity of yielding.

The second rise was given in 1949, after prices had spiralled again and a notice of strike had been served and first negotiations had failed. After the notice, an increase of Rs. 10 was given. Some unions, however, thought that the workers would not consider it adequate and mistakenly called for a strike on the railways in March 1949. But, it proved abortive and Government victimised about 3,000 workers.

The third increase of Rs. 5 came in 1951, again after serving a strike notice, when negotiations failed.

Then, for six years, there was no change. This was assisted by the fact that there was comparatively less sharp rise in prices and in fact a small fall in 1954 and 1955.

But soon prices rose again and the National Federation of P. & T. Employees submitted a charter of demands and organised a Day of Demands in 1956.

Was any attention paid to them? None—until they served a notice of strike from August 8, 1957.

Their most simple demand was to appoint a Second Pay Commission to once again review comprehensively the whole structure of wages and grades in the services and also such other

questions as TU rights, leave, housing, and so on.

The reply of the Government was an arrogant—NO. The resolution for a Second Pay Commission was moved in the Parliament by Com. K. K. Warrior of the Communist Party, and the debate took place on July 19, 1957. The fantastic arguments advanced by Prime Minister Nehru and Finance Minister T. T. Krishnamachari to deny the simple demand for a Pay Commission convinced the workers that the Government would not move unless they prepared for action.

When the strike date approached, then Government began negotiations again and showed willingness to grant a Commission, but no immediate wage increase.

Only when the negotiations resulted in a statement on the floor of the House that the Commission is being appointed, that it will report expeditiously and that an interim wage increase will be considered, was the strike withdrawn on August 7, 1957.

Thus once again only preparedness for and notice of strike alone moved Government.

### **Sheer Hypocrisy**

And yet, hypocritically enough, on all occasions, they would write in their communique the most falsifying statement that “they fully recognise the difficulties of workers on account of increase in prices” but they could not give increased D.A. for fear of budgetary deficits, public interest and forces of inflation. Yet, “after careful consideration of all factors involved”, some increase is being given. [See Government statements of January 1949 and June 1951—*Interim Report of Second Pay Commission, December 1957*]

*All these facts are recounted to show that workers have always showed patience, have always negotiated for months, have always shown accommodation and accepted less than their due, before taking to the drastic and last action of strike or notice of strike.*

It shows that while Government mouthed phrases of sympathy, it always refused to negotiate, then refused to yield in negotiations and held out threats of dismissals, ordinances banning strikes, etc. It shows finally that the just cause of the

workers wins when they cast away fear, unite and begin to act.

This lesson of twelve years' history is again confirmed in 1960. The present strike really began in July 1957. Then it was called off because the Government appointed the Pay Commission and gave an interim increase of Rs. 5.

The AITUC had played quite a big role in the events of those days. There were some who criticised us for calling off the notice of August 1957 strike. But the workers know that our advice was right. To have continued with the decision to strike, even after the Government had yielded the demand for the Pay Commission and interim wage increase would have been a folly and adventurism. The workers fully agreed with our advice though some congenital adventurists and idle strike-talkers were displeased.

### **They Refuse to Learn**

What about the aftermath and the present strike?

The Government gave the Pay Commission and the interim increase but refused to learn the lesson.

True to its character of bourgeois pigheadedness, when it comes to benefitting the workers, the Second Pay Commission and the Government announced an increase of Rs. 5 in D.A. in January 1958 but froze the sum of arrears from July 1957 into National Savings Certificates, as if the millions of employees had agitated for increase only to invest money with Government from their "prosperous" pay-packet and as if these certificates of the future would buy them food and cloth in the present, when high cost of living was running the families into deficits and starvation.

Again an agitation had to be carried out to defreeze this wage increase. Was all this irritation necessary?

Then again the Commission went to work, in merry-go-round way and not expeditiously as promised by Government. It reported in August 1959, and the Government communique came out in November 1959.

The Report gave a further increase of Rs. 5 only, though the cost of living was going up and no significant revision in the pay-scales was in sight. On the contrary, even for this increase

of Rs. 5, holidays were cut, half Saturdays were reduced, thus increasing the work-load to 13 months' work for 12 months' pay. Trade union rights were not liberalised and the services were left where they were in their standard of living.

### **Tripartite Convention Blown Up**

The most serious blow that the Commission gave was to refuse to accept the 15th Tripartite Convention on Minimum Wage, in which it was backed by the Government of India's Finance Ministry. The Commission did not even refrain from trying to juggle with nutrition standards of the workers with the help of pseudo-scientific statements of some doctors, one of them, a Finance Minister, who had long ago left his medicine and only quoted a Japanese example gathered in one of his slipshod visits to that country.

The next biggest harmful step that the Commission took was to revise the D.A. formula of the First Pay Commission. That body had provided for six-monthly revision of D.A., on an average rise of 20 points over a three-month period in the cost of living index (Base 1939=100) and an increase of D.A. of Rs. 5 per 20 points. Government had even notified the acceptance of that formula but went back on it as soon as prices shot up. The Second Pay Commission made the revision conditional upon the rise of ten points (Base 1949=100) persisting for a period of 12 months and even then the question whether to give additional D.A. or not was left to the sweet will of the Government.

The Government added fuel to the fire by very quick acceptance and implementation of the recommendations adversely affecting the employees' interests, such as cut in holidays, half-Saturday working, etc. At the same time, Government disagreed with the Commission and cut down even the small gain the workers would have got in making the new pay scales effective from July 1959 and made it effective from November 1959. Thus though there were hardly any very beneficial recommendation in the Report, Government refused to act on such small mercies as might have softened the shock of the losses inflicted.

What could the workers do in such conditions? Except to

agitate and call for negotiations again? They did so and asked Government to negotiate. But the Government refused.

Even then there was no move towards any strike action. The reason was that the federations of the various Government services had no co-ordinating consultation, no effective central organisation of all of them, as would effectively guide them.

## **AITUC Policy**

What was the attitude and role of the AITUC at this stage? Along with other central TU organisations, it condemned the Report as reactionary and disappointing. But, on its own, it could not give any call for action. We knew it for certain that if the AITUC proposed strike action, others would criticise us. All sorts of irrelevant issues such as India-China border trouble, the Third Plan, the role of Communist Party and such other matters would be used to side-track the main issue of rise in prices and fall in real wages and the necessity to act in a united way throughout the country to halt the policies of the Government which were increasingly becoming anti-working-class.

Hence the AITUC took steps through its friends in the various Federations to initiate a conference of all employees through the confederation of the organisations of Central Government employees, which included such big Federations as the P. & T. but not the Railways and Defence. The Confederation was not an effective day-to-day functioning body so far. In fact in the August 1957 strike proposal, only the P. & T. Federation had been active and no serious attempt was made to make the Confederation as a whole take the lead.

The prime necessity was to make the central body of all the Government employees' organisations take the lead in the matter and create a genuine trade union centre of all of the services. Each service and its Federation, functioning separately on its own problems, pay scales and service conditions had resulted in the six million workers of all the Governments of the country as a whole, not possessing a unified centre for problems which were common to all. The movement for the two Pay Commissions in the last twelve years and their recommendations were tending to rationalisation of the innumerable grades, scales and conditions

into a common pattern. The consciousness of the anarchy and disparties in the field had been growing both among the employees and the Government. But the Governmental heads were not interested in doing away with all the anarchy in their organisation. In fact, some of them thrived on it. But the failure came from the employees' organisations also, in the absence of a broad unity and a common centralised leadership, which would work more on the basis of TU problems and TU approach rather than any other considerations.

But this state of affairs had started receiving a corrective since the 1957 August crisis and the necessity of presenting a common front to the Second Pay Commission was being felt. The precondition for such a front was to recognise the necessity of trade union unity all round.

### **Organisation**

Despite the disruption caused by the INTUC, the Defence Federation remained a united body wherein adherents of various parties and TU centres worked. The All-India Railwaymen's Federation had to break away from its one-time fictitious unity with the INTUC, sponsored by Jaya Prakash Narayan since 1953. The third biggest force was the P. & T. Federation, which had grown into a solid united Federation and even the INTUC adherents had not found it advantageous to break away from it. There were other smaller service unions, like those of Accounts and Audit, Income Tax, Civil Aviation, etc.

All these organisations had been fighting their own battles in the field of service-grades, scales, classification, TU rights, negotiating machinery and its status, victimisation, etc., except the battle of basic pay-scales and dearness allowance, which belonged to the domain of all-India decisions of the Central Government. The Defence Federation had staged one day a country-wide India strike on June 30, 1953 for the benefits of the Kalyanwalla Committee. The P. & T. had demands, strikes in Delhi and Assam and 'go-slow'—that is work-according-to-rule, for certain partial demands. Various railway centres had strikes as at Kharagpur, Kalka, etc., for specific local demands. The Civil Aviation too had strikes. The Accounts and Audit had to struggle

against the high-handedness of its head and the victimisation of the Union Secretary.

Thus united actions in separate all-India Federations or in locals had been going on. But trade union unity of all of them in a Central Confederation was yet to come.

### **Problems of TU Unity**

In some federations, there were differences between the adherents of different political parties such as the Communists, the PSP and the SP or the RSP. The Railway Federation was most susceptible to these differences, so much so that the AITUC union on the Southern Railway was refused affiliation by the AIRF, whose General Secretary Com. Peter Alvares belonged to the HMS and the PSP. Attempts were made to affiliate united railway unions by force of vote to the HMS, though there was an understanding that, as far as possible united unions should not be appropriated by any one of the TU centre. Even then the adherents of the AITUC and Communist thinking continued in the united federations. In the Defence Federation, in one local election of a union, handbills were issued against a candidate by the PSP adherents, directly denouncing the rival candidate, who was a union secretary and an employed worker, as a Communist and a 'Chinese agent', thereby indirectly inviting his victimisation and dismissal. Yet the Defence Federation with such diverse leaders as S. M. Joshi of the HMS, K. G. Sriwastava of the AITUC and S. M. Banerjee, independent ex-employee, elected with Communist support to the Parliament, continued to remain united. While the PSP and Communists clashed in Kerala, they united in the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. While the HMS and PSP refused textile unity in Bombay, all other parties united and established the biggest textile union of Bombay, with S. M. Joshi as President and myself as General Secretary, with Vice-Presidents of the Republican Party, the Peasants and Workers Party and the Lal Nishan Party. Even while the memories of the overthrow of the Kerala Government were fresh, the cashewnut workers' unions of Kerala belonging to the AITUC, UTUC, and even INTUC united for a general strike for minimum wage and

the Kerala Government were fresh, the cashewnut workers' unions of Kerala belonging to the AITUC, UTUC, and even

waymen of Calcutta of all affiliations had conducted united strikes for wages and wage-boards.

Thus the stream of trade union unity was taking a zig-zag course. No one could predict where the PSP and Communists or the AITUC, HMS or UTUC would quarrel and where they would unite. That was because unity did not depend merely on party leaders and ideological or tactical differences. The masses down below had a say and not all top leaders were blind to the moods of the masses. Hence, in places, the top leaders and masses, both united. In places, only the masses united and acted dragging the leaders behind them. In places, the top leaders would agree and the middle-leadership would not. And so on.

## **New Features**

Working class and trade union unity in India is bound to take diverse forms and a zig-zag way and not conform to the set policies or formulae of any one party or organisation. That, many a time, confounds some leaders who refuse to understand the masses or some of the peculiarities of our country and the vast changes that are taking place among our workers and our peasants from whom the new working-class is being drawn in the development. The new working class, young in age, forced to leave the fields and go into the factories after independence, yet inexperienced in class-battles and the wily tricks of the bourgeoisie and its Governments, is different in consciousness from the old veteran worker of the British days, who had fought on all fronts, political and economic. The old tried worker is now less in numbers, in the new set up. Hence trade union unity has to begin anew, with new ways, new approaches. Once again the old leaders in the TU movements have to learn new language and express their class experience in new forms, suitable to the changed conditions. Even personal friendships and manners and talks count in this hard task of unity, where thousands of new cadres and leaders have come up in the movement, who yet cannot easily distinguish between national tasks and class duties or between class and class. Hence it is no surprise that TU and working class unity takes unexpected forms and zig-zag roads. The point is to see the essence of the whole thing. The oppres-



sion of rising prices and fall in wages, the callousness of the Government and the employers towards the workers and the people, the unbridled profiteering of the monopolists and Government's failure to control them was moving the masses into action, into unity and breaking down the subjective prejudices or ideological and political differences among the leadership and the masses of various parties and organisations. Even the attempt to use the India-China dispute to confuse and stall all action of the masses in defence of their conditions of living and work had lost its edge. That was plainly seen in the recent Government employees' general strike.

How could the two million working people of the Government services remain immune from this current of united action, when all their efforts to negotiate and get a better deal had failed?

The AITUC, as stated above, sensed this but refrained from giving the strike slogan. It moved its friends in the various Federations to call a delegate conference of all the federations and make the Central Confederation take definite steps.

### **Moves for United Action**

The Conference took some time to materialise. The key to it was in the hands of the Three Bigs—that is, the Railways, Defence and P. & T. But it did meet in April and took decisions to negotiate, failing which to strike, for immediate revision of the dearness allowance, the acceptance by Government of the Minimum Wage Convention and revision of all the grades and scales as outlined by the Commission and restoration of those gains which had been unjustly taken away by the Commission.

At this meeting, the adherents of the AITUC and Communists proposed *a one-day strike to begin with*, if Government failed to negotiate. The AITUC felt that the Government employees as a whole had no tradition of strike struggles, except in the separate industrial sectors. This was their first such action, and the first of its kind in the whole history of the TU movement. A one-day strike could be complete, more easy to bring about, when the central organisation had yet had no opportunity to build itself up. A one-day solid action would be easier particularly

for the railways, where the INTUC had more capacity for disruption than elsewhere. If the Government did not respond even after that, then an indefinite strike was inevitable and would be more widespread and united.

But the other leaders did not agree and so the AITUC adherents voted for their resolution which was adopted unanimously. That was in April.

What was the reaction of the Government to this. They took the resolution as a bluff. They decided to go tough, on the American style, ban the strike, isolate the workers or confuse them by shouting false cries of "nation-in-danger from the north", the same slogan with which the PSP and others used to attack us. It was now turned against them, to which they reacted properly and refused to fall a victim to it. The danger from Governmental policies was a greater danger to the people than the so-called danger from the north!

Prime Minister Nehru in his letter dated June 10, 1960 refused to meet the Joint Council of Action (JCA) representing the Federations of the Railways, the Defence, Post & Telegraph and other unions of the Confederation and which consisted of representatives of all shades of political and trade union trends. The result was that the Joint Council of Action had to decide on a strike and scheduled it for the midnight of July 11-12, 1960, if negotiations failed.

## **Mobilisation**

After this decision was taken by the Joint Council of Action, much of the mobilisation work was left to the spontaneous efforts of the local units of the various federations concerned. Naturally, the tempo developed according to the state of the leadership and the strength in each organisation. There were meetings and demonstrations in the major centres, such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Poona, etc. Ballots for the strike decision as required by the constitution of each Federation were taken. And actual strike notices were asked to be served by the Joint Council of Action in its meeting in Delhi on June 23, for the strike to begin on midnight of July 11-12.

As days passed, the Government saw that the workers were

serious and that there was a likelihood of the strike really taking place.

In the meanwhile many disruptive reports were appearing in the Press in order to divide the leadership of the JCA. Some said that the JCA may not stick to the decision because the Communists were reported not to be in favour of the strike. Some said, on the contrary, the Communists wanted the strike in order to hit the Congress, which had defeated them in Kerala and was inciting the people against them on the China issue. But the real unwillingness is from the PSP, they said, because of its policy of alliance with the Congress and opposition to Communists. Though the JCA had all party or TU representatives and all crucial decisions had been taken unanimously, the bourgeois press reported mainly the statements and meetings of S. M. Joshi, Nath Pai and Peter Alvares—all of the PSP creating the impression as if it alone mattered. That was quite natural in view of the official status these comrades had in the various Government employees' Federations in comparison with other leaders, except Guruswamy and Dalvi, who however was ill throughout. The AITUC publicity was hampered by the fact that I was taken seriously ill with threatened paralysis and was confined to bed in Poona from June 25, and debarred from all activities. All these tit-bits were used to sow suspicion about the final outcome and how things would shape.

### **Government's Attitude**

The Government got ready all its apparatus of repression and strike-breaking. But, at the same time, it revised its attitude of "no negotiations." The Cabinet appointed a "Strike Committee" of its own, both to negotiate with the JCA and to break the strike, if need be. The negotiations were entrusted to Labour Minister, G. L. Nanda.

This revision of Government attitude and the appointment of Shri Nanda for negotiations again raised hopes that a settlement would be coming or might be possible, as Nanda had the reputation of being sympathetic to the demands of the workers and held the opinion that the Tripartite Conventions must be accepted by Government also as employers in relation to their

own employees. Those who held high hopes forgot that Nanda had not the decisive voice in the Cabinet which was heavily loaded against the working class.

The negotiations took place from June 30 to July 2 and failed.

What did the negotiations lead to and why and on what point did they fail? Did the Government and the employees' leaders offer any proposals as could lead to a reasonable compromise? Who, in the end, is to blame for adamant attitude? We may look into this in brief.

The negotiations took place in two phases. The first one was from June 29 to July 2. The talks failed on July 2 and the Council of Action declared its adherence to the strike decision. There were demonstrations throughout the country on July 7. The vast rallies that were held in Calcutta, Bombay and other places showed the temper of the people.

### **Prime Minister's Demagogy**

The Government then arrayed their biggest guns against the workers. Prime Minister Nehru made a radio broadcast to the nation. It was the worst performance of his life, because in order to frighten the people and the workers, he used the worst demagogy and misrepresentation such as he had never done before.

In the first place he dubbed the strike as a political move as an "attack on our people and our country". He said that it was no ordinary industrial dispute. If this was not sheer misrepresentation—what else is?

Then he tried to frighten the people by painting a lurid picture of the imminent danger that the country is facing from outside. "There can never be any question of bargaining, when the country's future or even existence is at stake", he said. He had gone to Ladakh in the Himalayas, had a peaceful, non-eventful journey. And yet he says the country's future and even existence is at stake. If this is not demagogy—what else is? He advised the workers not to bargain when the existence of the country is at stake. Then why does the Government haggle over a pie here and a pie there, for gratuities and pensions, which after all none will get, when even our existence is not certain

Why not be generous with your purse which, after all, belongs to the people, when your existence itself is not certain? No wonder, the workers laughed when they heard such a ridiculous argument.

The third demagogic shot was his reference to the soldiers in the Himalayan frontier braving death on one side, while on the other, there was the picture of a general strike.

### **Facts Conveniently Forgotten**

But he forgot to tell the people that even this valiant fighter of our country was refused a fair wage for his family when their bread-earner was shivering in the cold Himalayas, that even in the case of the soldier, whom the Prime Minister contrasted with the worker preparing to go on strike, the Government of India and high officers and Finance Minister had refused to give an adequate wage, a better D.A. and pension. The price of his bravery was poverty for his family and a court-martial if he dared to open his mouth for more. The Prime Minister forgot that the General Strike was as much for the benefit for that brave sentinel's salary as for the others.

As for facing death for the country, the bravery is as much at the front as at the rear. The thousands of workers in the deep coal mines facing blasts and death, railway drivers on the track, steel men at the furnace, the telegraphmen on the wire, deep in the jungles of Assam, the textile men weaving cloth—are all facing dangers in their work, which feeds and maintains and defends the country as much as the soldier at the front. No front can fight without the man in the rear. Does not the Prime Minister know this? He does. And yet he was deliberately practising demagoguery in defence of his reactionary policy and in defence of all those millionaires, who fattened on the Budgets and Plans of the country, but opposed demands of the workers against wage-cuts.

Having exhausted all false arguments, the Prime Minister began to plead that, after all, Government was accepting to do all that the Pay Commission wanted them to do—so why a strike? Having sent at letter in his own hand, refusing to negotiate, he now asked for a policy of settlement by negotiation. And yet

only five days back, his Cabinet "Strike Committee" had refused to negotiate and settle on the vital demand of dearness allowance. Can misrepresentation go further than this?

Then he added: "We talk of peace in the world. It would be an irony of fate if we cannot keep peace in our own country and settle our points of difference in a civilised and peaceful manner."

Wonderful to hear. The workers soon got an example of this civilised and peaceful manner. There was firing on the railway workers at Dohad (Gujerat state) and five were killed. In two days of the strike, 16,000 workers were arrested and hundreds of them were handcuffed and made to walk in the streets on the way to the courts and police lock-ups. Even the Secretary-General of the National Federation of Post & Telegraph Employees was not spared this dose of Prime Minister Nehru's "civilised manners."

The workers refused to believe any more in Pandit Nehru's promises and fine words. They remembered well that it was Pandit Nehru, who now talked of peaceful negotiation and civilised manner but had refused to meet and negotiate with the JCA.

## **Strike Became Inevitable**

As soon as the negotiations with the Labour Minister had broken down and the strike became inevitable, all the political parties of the left, that is, the Communist Party, the Praja Socialist Party and such others issued statements giving their support to the workers. The Central TU organisations, the AITUC, HMS and the UTUC had a consultation in Calcutta and Nagpur and from there all of them issued statements declaring their support to the strike.

This united support of the left political parties and all central trade union organisations, as well independent trade federations raised the morale of the workers.

The battle was not going to be a light one. Everyone saw that. On the morrow after the Prime Minister's broadcast, the President of the Republic promulgated an Ordinance, banning the strike and threatening the dire punishment of dismissals, im-

prisonment to the employees and to all those who would support them or help them in any way. Bureaucratic officers, in whom the Government had full trust to execute the role of ruthless executioners of the popular movement were sent to various states, with overriding powers to do whatever they wanted to terrorise the workers and break the strike. Thousands of armed policemen were sent to the main cities, which were expected to be the hub of the strike. The whole of the monopoly capitalist press was let loose against the workers. Some threatened them, some asked them to be 'reasonable' and give up, some asked Government to be firm and unrelenting. Only a few papers supported the workers' stand and asked Government to desist from such terroristic and dictatorial methods. All civil liberties were at an end as the whole country was put under ban of public meetings and any activity as would be in support of the strike. The main centres and cities took the appearance of being "under occupation". Parliamentary democracy and people's liberties had become suspended. What now ruled and dominated was the control-room and its reliable bureaucratic dictators, the armed police, the ordinance and absolute power of naked force. The ultimate sanction and basis of Congress rule revealed itself in true form, to suppress the most simple demand of the two million employees for a rise in pay to match the rise in prices. To demand rise in pay and to strike for it was declared a virtual rebellion and was to be dealt with as such, while the criminal activities of the profiteering classes who were responsible for the rise in prices and the starvation of millions, were going unrestricted with the blessings of the gods of this Welfare State.

### **Campaign to Confuse**

As soon as the first negotiations had collapsed on July 2, due to the refusal of the Government to concede the main demand to link up D.A. with the rise in cost of living and the workers decided to act, the Governmental spokesmen began another campaign to confuse the public and the workers and at the same time preparing for terror. Inspired reports appeared that the Railway Board had accepted the Pay Commission's "main recommendations", in respect of railwaymen. The new

scales were communicated to all railway administrations and, it was announced, orders for implementation from November 1959 "will be issued shortly". Then the P. & T. bosses were supposed to be thinking of even better scales than those of the Commission.

In the same breath reports were appearing that the Government would now make no further concessions, as if they had made any before. (*Times of India*, July 4, 5 and 6 and other papers).

It is in this atmosphere that the Standing Committee of the Council of Action met in Delhi on July 9 and 10, to take final stock of the situation. At that meeting, some non-official intermediaries tried to negotiate on the basis of "new formulae" for settlement of the dispute. But these talks also did not lead to any settlement and the strike began on July 11 midnight.

### **Last Phase of Talks**

What was the position of both the parties when the second and final instalment or phase of negotiations broke down? Some people ask whether the differences were so material as to call for strike? Some people think that Government had conceded a lot and the strike could have been called off. That it was not, is attributed by some to the lack of courage on the part of the leaders to take such a drastic decision just on the eve of the strike. The leaders were afraid of being called betrayers or being disowned by workers. Otherwise, the concessions proposed by the intermediaries, speaking through that good and modest Congress leader, Shri Feroze Gandhi, (who, of course, was doing it, with the consent of Minister Pant and Nanda) were enough to warrant a "bold decision" to settle and call off. Some said that the PSP leadership, of course, not Asoka Mehta or N. G. Goray, but the leadership of S. M. Joshi, Nath Pai, was wanting to bring their party in the forefront in the TU movement and "capture leadership" of the working class, as the Communists were lagging behind and had no heart in the strike nor a place in the leadership.

Such barrage in the bourgeois press was obviously meant to disrupt the unity that had been evolved behind the strike.



What then were the actual points, on which talks broke down finally?

The crucial point, as already pointed out before, was dearness allowance. Will the Government accept the obligation to give increased D.A. to meet the rise in the cost of living? Secondly, would it accept the *principle* of minimum wage, which had been passed by the 15th Tripartite Conference and to which the Government was a party but which had been repudiated by the Finance Ministry and the Pay Commission? All quarrel finally hinged on these two questions and mainly on the first.

For thirteen years this question had been before the Government. They had first accepted the obligation to give automatic D.A. increase according to the recommendations of the First Pay Commission. But soon they had gone back on it. Then for each spurt of rise in prices, the employees had to threaten strike and then Government would only give an *ad hoc* increase in D.A. They persistently refused to establish the principle and practice of automatic rise, as is done in many industries. The Second Pay Commission had proved most reactionary, cancelled the recommendation of the First Pay Commission and refused to bind down Government to any obligation of paying D.A. when prices rose.

Yes, they said that if prices remained 10 points above 115 index for a period of 12 months, Government may consider whether, when and how much D.A. could be given. That is no promise to necessarily give D.A. If Government were to consider whether to give, they would always refuse to give, if left to themselves. The question of "how much" would not arise at all.

Then the most deceptive element was the provision for persistent rise of ten points average for a whole period of twelve months.

## Indices Manipulated

It has been the experience of the trade unions, proved factually in certain tribunals, that Governmental agencies concerned with collection of data on prices and computation of the indices, in certain case, cook the figures and juggle with them, in order to keep the indices low, so that the factory owners may not be

required to pay higher D.A. There was a strike in Kanpur one for this very reason. A Tribunal had found, in the big textile strike in Bombay in 1940 that the index made in Bombay was short by several points than the actual rise in prices. And only recently, on the complaint of the Ahmedabad millowner that they had to pay high D.A. due to the index there showing a high increase, the Government decided to scrutinise the index. One can easily guess what such a scrutiny on the complaint of such a body as the Ahmedabad millowners would lead to. Then, perhaps, in order not to allow the people to be shocked by the steep rise of prices in the consumer price index figures and to soften their effect, Government changed, as price shot up, the base years for comparison. The 1939 base was shifted to 1944. Then it was shifted again to 1949 and once more to 1952. The meaning would be plain when you see that the ten points of the Second Commission based on 1949 meant 36 points of the First Commission based on 1939.

Hence the provision that the index must show a rise of 10 points for a whole year was a highly suspicious one and workers had no faith that the Government would ever allow the index to work that way, once they and their irresponsible and capitalist budgeting was put under the obligation to pay D.A. according to a set formula and linked up to the index.

### **Government's Dogged Stand**

The Government had no answer to these objections. They stuck most doggedly to the Pay Commission's formula—that it was for the Government to consider whether to give D.A. at all and how much to give and when to give, because even the rise of ten points for a whole year did not lay down an obligation to give D.A. and at the end of that period.

Another most astounding fact is that nowhere in the Commission's Report have they given the per point value of D.A. that they might recommend. The First Pay Commission had put it as Rs. 5 for 20 points. The Second Commission in its profound wisdom and care for the welfare of the State had remained completely silent on this question.

In the final phase of the negotiations, what was the position

of the Government or the mediators on this crucial question?

Government would agree to revise D.A. when the index would remain 10 points above 115 for a year. That means for some months at least the index must be *over* 10 points or so in order to give an *average* of ten points for a year. This would be a difficult position, with the present powers of the Government and the capitalist market to manipulate prices, whenever they chose to do so. However, one could say that Government accepted the obligation to revise. This was an advance on the old position of the Commission which allowed them the freedom not to revise at all.

The second point on which an advance was made was that the D.A. would be such as to neutralise 50 per cent of the rise in the cost of living.

The third point on which there was an advance was that in case of the employees, not agreeing with the quantum given, they could go to arbitration.

The fourth point on which there was an advance was that the compulsory provident fund would be made optional.

The points as they were put were certainly tempting if you look at the whole array of them.

## **No Guarantees**

But if you put the crucial question, as to what benefit in D.A. would come immediately to the employees who had already lost much of the two increases of Rs. 5 given by the Commission due to the rise in prices since their Report, the answer was a big **NO**. All the above points brought no certain increase to the worker in any near future, except on his arrears on the compulsory deductions to the provident fund. But as for the hope of a D.A., there was none. Ten points for 12 months barred it.

On minimum wage, Government might accept the principle of the Tripartite Convention but not by paying anything more now or in the near future. The acceptance of the principle was an advance but gave no benefit now. Real wages stood lower than what the worker was getting in 1947.

Thus at the end of the proposals, the employee was left without any guarantee of rise in D.A. and with a cut in his wages

by the soaring prices.

The workers' proposals were simple. On point to point rise in the cost of living index, full neutralisation in D.A. was the original demand.

In the negotiations, S. M. Joshi at first agreed to revision even at 10 points provided the revision was made every three months and not after 12 months as suggested by the Commission. This was not acceptable to the Government.

Subsequently, the Joint Council of Action proposed revision of D.A. every six months on a rise of five points (Base 1949 = 100).

Finally, on July 11, the Joint Council of Action offered to agree to yearly revision of D.A. provided the revision was made on rise of seven points (1949 Base) in the cost of living index.

All this was to ensure that the employees get a formula giving them reasonable assurance that whenever prices rise to a certain limit which becomes unbearable to the low-paid worker, he is assured of compensation by rise in D.A. and the strike threat is avoided every now and then.

## **The Crucial Question**

It may appear to some that while the First Pay Commission recommended revision every six months on a three-month average rise in prices, the Commission awarded compensation of only Rs. 5 for a rise of 20 points. While this might look less liberal when compared with the recommendations of the Second Pay Commission providing for revision at a 10-point rise, it must be borne in mind that an average rise of 10 points in the index 1949 = 100 represents an increase of 36 points on the index with base 1939 = 100. Hence, the Second Pay Commission's value of revision, though not stated anywhere explicitly, is more retrograde. That is why the negotiators insisted on changing either the point or the period of rise in prices.

But on this one crucial question, Government would not budge. They would talk and adjust about all other things except the crucial question of the cash D.A.

The Joint Council of Action and the Standing Committee did not agree to compromise on the seven points and six months

They would have as a last resort accepted seven points even for 12 months' average or ten points for six months' average. They had to reject Government's last formula, as it meant agreeing to no D.A. in the foreseeable future. It was not merely a fight for three points as some people would like to say. It was a fight for the question—D.A. or no D.A. and that meant the difference between ten and seven points or six and twelve months. The worker wanted to get rid, once for all if possible, of this perpetual nightmare of daily rising prices and falling wages. Hence there was no way out but to adhere to the decision to strike, which the Joint Council of Action did.

And it has to be specially noted that this decision was unanimously taken, all party or TU representatives agreeing to it.

A question has been asked whether things could not have taken a different course in the talks on July 10 and 11, with the new offers.

I do not know all the details of the talks, but only broad points. I had some talks with S. M. Joshi and R. K. Khadilkar, at my place in Poona after the failure of July 2. But because the lack of personal touch with developments did not allow me "to smell" the atmosphere on July 10, I cannot say that the Council of Action was not right in its assessment.

Perhaps, if the Prime Minister had not refused to negotiate earlier, as he did, and if the positions that arose on July 10 negotiations of the mediators had been there in the talks with Shri Nanda on June 29, when there were still twelve days to think and consult, things might have developed differently. It is also a moot question, whether, if the negotiations and strike crisis had taken place during the sessions of the Parliament, which was only a month ahead, events would have taken a better shape. But all this now is for history to judge. To think of all this on July 11 was out of the question.

I need not recount here the story of the heroic struggle that began at midnight of July 11.

The press and the radio had blared forth the dire punishments that would be the lot not only of the strikers but even of those who helped them in any way. Clause 5 of the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance, 1960 solemnly told all the people to beware of the following:

“Any person who instigates or incites other persons to take part in, or otherwise acts in furtherance of a strike which is illegal under this Ordinance shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to one year, or with fine, which may extend to one thousand rupees or both.”

But neither the Draconian Ordinance of the Government nor the broadcasts of Prime Minister Nehru could hold back the strike. At midnight of July 11, thousands of workers in the Posts and Telegraphs walked out of their offices. Many main stations on the trunk telephone line were cut off. Railway trains in the main cities of Calcutta and Bombay refused to move. Civil aviation men walked out of the airports and some services were run only with military help. The Ordnance factories of the defence department went on strike, except in Kanpur, where a temporary confusion had held back the workers. The strike was most intense in Calcutta and Bombay—the two great centres of the fighting working class movement, while all other major cities lent their hand in the fight, as far as their organisation and consciousness could go.

### **Vanguards**

In the vanguard of the action were the Post and Telegraph workers. Theirs was the most complete action and the most effective one. The next on the roll call could be mentioned the civil aviation. The third in the lines of communication stood the vast mass of the railway workers. But here the action was not so complete nor so lasting as that of the P. & T. The railway workshops went into action throughout the country. The Western Railway starting from Bombay and the Eastern and South Eastern from Calcutta closed down traffic altogether. The thing that surprised many was that the Western Railway showed a very militant spirit in the areas of Gujerat where the INTUC which was opposing the strike most vehemently, is supposed to possess its spiritual home. Among the concentrated hub of middle-class workers, the All-India Audit & Accounts in many centres carried out a complete strike. And the Income-Tax people also joined in.

As soon as it was seen that the strike had materialised, th

Government and their supporters, the police forces and Home Guards let loose terror on the striking workers. Thousands of policemen attacked workers' meetings where they would assemble to gather news or render aid to each other. Special target of attack were the Post & Telegraph people. Police broke into their houses, arrested them, put on iron handcuffs and marched them to the police stations and magistrate courts in many places. There they were asked either to go to work or to go to prison. There were towns and places, where the whole complement of postal workers running into hundreds were convicted *en masse* and sent to jail. Whole offices and railway stations were surrounded and occupied by police and Home Guards to force the workers to run trains, start the workshops or open the offices. One such attempt at the Dohad workshop on the Western Railway was resisted by the workers. The police opened fire and killed five workers and wounded several. The amount of terror and police force showed that the strike had succeeded, that Government had got the reply to its arrogance and misrepresentations.

### **A Whole String of Lies**

The Government radio stations began telling a whole string of lies as to how people were working and how the strike had failed. This propagandist machine fed from people's taxes and licence-money was radioing a pack of lies every few hours that the strike had failed. And yet on July 12, you could neither get a phone call put through nor travel to another town, from Bombay or Calcutta and several other places.

Along with terror and lies, many strike-breaking agencies had also come into the field fed by Government money and police protection. In the forefront were the Congress organisations and their agents in the TU movement, the INTUC. There were many so-called social service workers, who had offered their services to do the work of the postal service. The Bharat Sevak Samaj turned out for strike-breaking activities. The All-India Women's Conference, whose face is never seen when thousands of unemployed women in mines, textiles and offices roam in search of work and bread, sent its fashion dolls to do strike-breaking work. But in the strong centres of TU struggles, all this

proved of no avail.

At the same time, one must not fail to note that in several centres, disruption and terror had its effect and the strike did not materialise to any great extent. The vast terror machine also hampered the spread of the strike to newer areas or larger numbers as days passed by. From accounts so far available it appears that the strike was at its best for three days, culminating in the sympathetic general strike of July 14, proclaimed by all the central TU organisations by common consent. It struck to its place for two more days, when the leaders of the Joint Council of Action who were not so far arrested met and called off the strike on the night of July 16. Work was fully resumed on Monday, July 18, some sections such as Post & Telegraph reporting for work on July 17 itself.

### **Fight for All**

During these five glorious days of the heroic struggle, the whole of the working people of India, including the middle-class intelligentsia sympathised with the strike though under the Congress Government, the services are not very popular in relations with the general public. But when it came to the question of the strike, all the people saw one thing and that is that the Government employees were fighting against the soaring prices and demanding a curb on these prices and profiteers, and wages to meet the rising costs of living. In this one thing, the people saw the essence of the great struggle—that the *striker was fighting the common battle of all the people in India, who were harassed by the rising prices and the loot of the people by the Government and the capitalist market.* That was the common bond and understanding between the strikers and the public, that made them sympathetic with the servicemen on strike. None felt angry or displeased because his letter had not come or his travel was cancelled. Even such people as had no anti-Government or anti-Congress bias felt that the Government did deserve to be told the plain truth in a most plain and effective way—even if it was the way of the strike—that they were mis-managing the country's economy.

That the strike was in defence, not only of the Government



servants' wages and working conditions, but was in defence of the whole working class; was grasped by the workers and trade union leaders from the very first day. And that is why they took their honourable share of the arrests and terror let loose by the Government. In the total arrests of 16,000, while the strikers were about twelve thousand, four thousand were other workers, union leaders and citizens. This infuriated the captains of terror more than any thing else. In their mad fury, they made the Secretary-General of the National Federation of P.&T. Employees, Com. P. S. R. Anjaneyulu, walk in handcuffs through the streets. Many of the fine organisers and leaders like B. W. Vaidya of Bombay P. & T., E. X. Joseph, the dogged defender of the Audit & Accounts staff, Om Prakash Gupta, the General Secretary of the All-India Telegraph Engineering Employees' Union, Jagdish Ajmera, Secretary of the Western Railway Employees' Union and hundreds of other active leaders were sent to jail. Their list is too long to be mentioned here.

## **Solidarity**

But what is of still greater importance is the solidarity shown by the other sections of the TU movement and political leaders of the working-class and others and the indignities they had to undergo.

The President of the All-India Trade Union Congress, Com. S. S. Mirajkar broke the ban on public meeting and was arrested and sent to the Worli Prison in Bombay City. This jail is on the sea-shore, at a few yards distance from the palaces of the bourgeoisie lining up the shore. As if to prevent these offenders against bourgeois rule from seeing and smelling the riches of the bourgeoisie and the waters of the sea, reserved for their recreation, the jail is fenced round with live and heavily charged electric wires. When you walk from one yard to another or in and out of the jail, you can feel the fumes of the hot wires. Between the living yards and the live wires there is no barrier to prevent an unwary prisoner from nearing them and touching them. A simple unguarded touch is enough to kill the prisoner. The President of the AITUC was lodged in this jail. After him followed a student prisoner, who had been hauled up by the police

on suspicion that he was giving strike slogans on the street. The boy's parents had secured orders for his release on bail. But before the orders could reach the jail, he was found dead on the live electric fencing. No one knows how he got into it. His release orders came after his death. Such is our "socialist democracy" of prison houses.

When questioned in the Legislature of the Maharashtra State, the Chief Minister expressed regret at the death and made the astounding statement that till the incident of the death of the student (by name Ramesh Pandit), "he (the Chief Minister) was not aware of the existence of jail fencing of that kind in the State." He said that there would be no jail any longer with live-wire fencing. And yet this jail had been in existence for years and had several accidents before.

### **Arrests**

Among other notable arrests were those of Indrajit Gupta, one of the Secretaries of the AITUC, M. Elias, General Secretary, National Federation of Metal & Engineering Workers, and Prabhat Kar of the All-India Bank Employees Association—all three Communist members of Parliament. V. D. Deshpande leader of the Communist group in the Maharashtra Legislature and Vice-President of the Maharashtra Committee of the AITUC broke the ban on meetings and was arrested. The curb on democratic liberties roused the ire of public leaders, who had nothing to do with trade unions as such. And that led even Shri P. K. Atre, famous writer and journalist of Maharashtra to the prison, Communist leaders and trade unionists, like M. Kayanasundaram, M. R. Venkataraman and A.S.K. Iyengar, leader of the Madras Port & Dock Workers were also put into prison. Samuel Augustine of the Defence Federation, an ex-worker of the Naval Dockyard in Bombay and S. M. Banerjee, M.P., Kanpur found themselves in prison. 122 persons, who were not workers, were arrested in Jubbulpore.

Other political parties and TU organisations also had to be their share of solidarity. Deven Sen, President, and Bagara Tulpule, General Secretary of the HMS and Jatin Chakravarti Secretary of the UTUC went to jail. The arrest of George F

nandez of Bombay, a well-known leader of the Socialist Party and incidents connected therewith created quite a furor. S. M. Joshi and Nath Pai had been sent to prison on the eve of the strike when they reached Bombay after Delhi negotiations. Peter Alvares of the AIRF followed soon.

Hundreds of leading workers from every party and political trends that sided with the workers fell victims to the wrath of the Government.

I am mentioning these few names to show how the whole of the TU movement unitedly joined with the strikers in defence of the strike; how Communists, Praja Socialists, Socialists, independent democrats and others, left aside their differences and joined the great battle of the working people and Government employees, considering it a common cause of all the people in India. What the Government had failed to understand was just this side of the great struggle.

### **The Impact**

Questions have been raised whether the strike could be considered a success. Success in what way? Some people say that the strike was not so widespread and complete as was expected and that in reality it lasted only three days, lingered for the next two days and had it not been for the wise decision to call it off unconditionally even, it would have fizzled. To such a question the reply can be that looking at the terror that the Government let loose and the barrage of the hostile press and radio, the firing, arrests and beatings, the strike was quite widespread and big and even five days of such a strike is a big success. Strikes of such a nature, embracing the whole of the State services, against whom all the might of the bourgeois State, its prisons, police, judiciary, hiring press and radio are let loose, cannot be expected to last long.

There are some glib talkers and men of heroic words and adventurist sectarians, who think that the call off was a betrayal and that the strike should have been allowed to go to the bitter end, that is, to fizzle out. These gentlemen do not know or forget that in our trade union history, there have been strikes which have lasted months and months. Their leaders have allowed

them to fizzle out and have never called it off. It was a point of honour to them, not to call off—until the “enemy” himself yielded. All that I know of such tactics is that they demoralised the workers, broke their spirit and organisation, victimised hundreds and thousands, beheading the movement for a long time to come. Only the leaders remained heroically undefeated, and the “poor, weak workers” went back to work in humiliation regretting that the leaders had not told them to do so.

No. Such tactics are no good to the movement. The workers expect their leaders to lead them in proper retreat, when retreat becomes inevitable and not leave them to the mercies of the enemy and all the humiliation of it. Even unconditional calling off is no defeat in many situations. It was so in this case. It was a correct and wise decision to call off after the Five Glorious Days of battle. It was not a defeat and running away but a conscious organised orderly conclusion of a great struggle, the first of its kind in the whole TU movement. Only adventurist blindness and utter ignorance of the mind of the working class can fail to see the correctness of the steps taken, whether in launching the strike or in calling it off. I know of reformists who call it a mistake and failure, because it was launched and sectarians, who call it a mistake and failure because it was called off and not allowed to fizzle out. How both these opposites come to the same conclusion and help in disrupting the unity that has been achieved and maligning the grandeur that was in the strike of the millions!

### **Were there no Shortcomings?**

Some might ask then whether there were no shortcomings, no mistakes in the struggle, in the matter of demands, in the matter of negotiations, in the timing of the struggle, its conduct and its end.

If one were to speak about the struggle as a whole, I will say that it was all correct as a whole. That does not mean to say that there were no shortcomings.

The first shortcoming was the lack of proper organisation centralised direction of the movement and effective co-ordination at the bottom.

Neither from the date the decision for strike was taken in April nor when it was near at hand, did any united centralised leadership or organisational machinery was brought into existence. But this lack is not due to the immediate events or the Council of Action and the leadership that came into existence immediately prior to the strike. This lack followed inherently from the long historical development of each of the Central Federations that constituted the Confederation and later in the Joint Council of Action. It is in fact a strange position that while the Confederation claimed to represent the Government employees' organisations, the two biggest federations, namely the Railwaymen's (AIRF) and the Defence Workers (AIDEF) were not in the fold of the Confederation. Moreover these two Federations and particularly the AIRF had failed to evolve efficient day-to-day united working in their far-flung and vast areas of functioning and suffered from political differences pulling or hampering work in different directions. These lags surely could not be overcome in a month or two just because a great struggle had suddenly confronted them.

### **Rank and File Initiative**

In spite of this, what is more important, is not this lack of organisation inherited from the past but swift achievement of unity that was expressed by the organisation of the JCA, and the virtual unanimity with which all TU centres and units of the Government employees' different federations responded to the call of the General Strike. Therefore, to blame the immediate leadership of the JCA for lack of organisation would not be just, though that the lack existed and affected the events is also true. But the dominant note of the struggle was the spirit of unity that came forth and the tremendous initiative of action that the rank and file showed in all spheres.

Another shortcoming that is pointed out is that the centres of the political parties, who have their representatives in the trade union field did not mobilise their forces in full to back the strike, though all of them issued statements in support of the demands of the Government employees and the strike. This criticism may be true in parts. But that, I think, did not arise

from any unwillingness to lead, but from the organisational state or structure of these parties. Most of them have different fronts like trade union, kisan, youth, women, etc. At present each of these fronts in many parties function in their own sphere quite effectively and according to the line of each party. Sometimes even rigid compartments exist between the "pure" political centres and the mass front centres. All mass fronts and the "pure political centre" rarely go into action together in a co-ordinated way. Either the mass front goes and acts on its own though within the framework of accepted policies or the political centre tries to pull the front this way or that without being intimately connected with the mass movement and organisation. And it takes some time to establish a proper rhythm of thinking and behaviour, among all fronts and centres. Some such thing did happen in this strike.

### **United Front—The Difference**

Another reason for the lag is that just as the various political trends in the different trade union centres meet and decide on common action, (as, for example, the AITUC, HMS, UTUC groups met, discussed and decided or as the groups in the JCA and the Confederation did) it does not happen and has not happened on the same important questions with regard to the political parties. S. M. Joshi and Dange can meet for common action and decisions. But it would be unthinkable, in the present state of affairs for Asoka Mehta and Ajoy Ghosh to meet for the same common end. That was seen in the days of the Bank employees crisis in 1954 and the P. & T. Pay Commission Demand crisis in 1957. The united front of political parties as such is a long way off than the united front of trade union centres and groups of those parties. The latter is forced by the workers in action. For the former, such opportunities in the "pure political" field do not arise often nor do they work out the way people may desire.

However, this subject is being discussed not by those who participated in the great strike action. But, for our purposes we need not pursue it in greater detail, as it is best left to each such political party concerned. One thing is certain that the

lag was not of much importance in the conduct or the fate of the strike. A greater co-ordination might have helped in making the action more widespread; that is all.

### **Jail-goers and Critics**

There has been a question or criticism as to whether it was right for the leaders to walk into jail as some of them did, or whether they should not have managed to remain behind to give lead.

To my mind, this strike was of such a kind that once it was launched, not much of leadership was required to remain behind to guide it. Because it was certain that there would be no negotiations by Government once the strike took place. And, secondly, because the action was not calculated to last very long, by the very nature of the forces involved. Because, in a sense, it was true that it was no industrial dispute in the ordinary sense of the term. It was industrial in the matter of demands, in the matter of the action proposed, in the matter of the organisations concerned. It was industrial as a matter between employer and employee concerning purely economic demands. But the fact that the employer was the State and the dispute affected the means of communication and the administrative services, the Government was bound to pour all its might against it. The whole affair, though it was industrial but just because it affected the whole machinery of the Government, it was bound to be swift and short-lived. If it is not to be short-lived, then, even while being industrial in its origin, it has to develop into a gigantic struggle, not limited only to the strikers and their unions but spread over the whole working class and people. This strike surely had no such perspective at any stage.

Therefore, any leadership remaining behind could have done very little. If they had to remain behind they would have had to go underground and an underground in such affairs cannot negotiate nor settle, even if it has the means to escape the long hand of the police. Hence I feel that the leaders going to jail did not affect the course of events one way or the other.

On the contrary, this was a strike in which the battle of the

employees was the common battle of all the people, in so far as it was a fight against the rise in prices. There was also the attack on democratic liberties of the people. There was the police terror and firing against the workers. The Government employees not used to strikes were coming out in action for the first time in Swaraj, with lakhs of them having strange illusions about the system that rules them and whose employees they are. Last year, in many States, several political parties also had launched peaceful satyagraha against high prices and food shortages. Under such conditions it was extremely necessary for all conscious sections of the people and all parties and organisations to line up with the workers in their arrests, go with them to the prison and establish brotherly solidarity with them. In India, satyagraha and imprisonment are the traditional forms of solidarity and peaceful democratic action of the masses.

In fact, it is my feeling that all legislators of all parties of the left should have done satyagraha, against the Ordinance of the Government and the banning of meetings, etc. It is to the glory of the trade union leaders, MLAs and MPs, who had taken the honour of arrest and to go and live with the thousands of the arrested employees. Thousands of them were just simple clerks, and class IV workers who had never before seen the jail or braved a lathi-charge. All of them have now their virgin illusions about the Government and the welfare state shattered. Their minds are clearer, their nerves are better. To help that process, satyagraha by all prominent leaders, top or middle, was necessary. Good that some did it, and bad that some, who should have, did not. Even then the gains in this field have not been altogether negligible and the critics of the jail-goers or law breakers in Bombay or elsewhere are not on correct grounds.

### **A Success—Even in Numbers**

The question whether the strike was a success from the point of numbers need not detain us long. While the Governmental agencies bellowed out reports that the strike had failed, the people and the newspapers had sensed that the strike was not a failure even in the number of workers participating. The most conservative estimate puts it at 15 to 25 per cent of the



2.2 million employees going on strike, though in some areas, it was complete on the first two days.

That means that the conservatives admit that three to five lakhs went on strike. The *Times of India* (July 14) said that "fifty per cent have stayed away from work." The *Statesman*, New Delhi, headlined on July 13 that "Strike Tempo Increases."

Even half-a-million of Government employees on strike even if it were for a day or two is not a small event, despite the campaign of terror let loose against them. That is why Governmental leaders foamed with anger and spat fire against the strikers, the trade unions, political parties and leaders. If it had really failed, why all this anger?

### **What are the Gains?**

Then comes the last question what, after all, have the employees gained? They called off unconditionally and their major demand of D.A. has failed. From the point of view of demands, was it not a failure?

Herein too the thing must be judged in its totality. Then it will be found that the strike has gained a lot even in the matter of demands, including on the question of D.A. and prices.

The Government has been given such a jolt by the strike, that all those matters, with which the Government were playing at leisure have now been decided.

The Second Pay Commission's recommendations which were adversely affecting the employees, such as on holidays, were already implemented. But the crucial question of grades and adjustment of pay and the question of the lakhs of temporary men, two of the most vital questions were going round and round in the files of the Ministers and departmental heads. No one was prepared to take decisions quickly as they all affected the lower down masses of workers. This question has been hanging fire, not only since the Second Pay Commission's Report but even from the First Commission, which had recommended that Governmental administration suffered from a total anarchy of grades and rates. The Commission had recommended only 156 grades but the Government, in fact, made them into 517 grades. But

in those days, one could plead the excuse that they were the legacies of the War days and that the country was still unsettled. Since then, nearly twelve years have elapsed and the anarchy of grades and rates, the number of temporary workers, with an always uncertain future, increased instead of decreasing. And the Second Pay Commission in 1959 found that out of 17,73,570 employees in June 1957, 11,77,279 were permanent and 5,96,291 were temporary; that is, 34.1 per cent were uncertain of their future. Another thing to note was that some of them were "temporary" in spite of being seven to ten years in service—that is, since the founding of the Republic and the adoption of the democratic Constitution till today, they have been working with the Government but are still temporary! Of 3,93,857 temporary employees checked by the Commission, 2,36,283 had worked over three years in Government that is since the 2nd Five Year Plan began and yet they had no permanent place in the Plan. Plans till 1980 are being made but, for these unfortunates, their bread is temporary!

### **Breaking the Impregnable**

Another glaring evil was that each Ministry and department followed its own ideas of labour-management relations and even flouted State Laws and Tripartite Conventions. For these high brows, the Labour Ministry was a nuisance if it spoke for the workers; the trade unions were treasonable if they talked of rights.

Just on the eve of the strike, a spate of communique suddenly flooded the press, that this Ministry and that had ordered new scales and rates, had decided to look into the grievance machinery and all were now repentant of their past failures. All of them had the Report for a whole year before them and nothing had been done in revising the scales. The bureaucratic machine is so top heavy that nothing good for the workers penetrates its thick skulls and fossilised minds, until the worker strike.

Lakhs of rupees have been spent in inviting foreign experts to teach the Congress Ministers how to rationalise administration. One Mr. Appleby has been giving lessons often enough to make even a dunce do things, if the teacher knew anything.

worthwhile. Administrative Staff Colleges are working and teaching months and years.

Yet the simple problem of grades and rates of the temporary employees and the application of recommendations of the Pay Commission would not get resolved for years.

But within ten days of the strike, the immobile, impregnable (in the matter of workers' benefits only) moved and people found that all adjustments of grades, scales and pay rates had been done.

If this is not the achievement of the strike, whose is it? Of the strike-breakers, callous ministers and dull bureaucrats? On August 2, the Government declared its decisions in the Parliament. Rs. 44 crores more for the employees by way of new grades and rates. Ten crores alone for the railwaymen, six crores for the Army and so on. Who brought these crores out of the frozen mouths of the Government? Why were they frozen before the strike? This stream of real gains flowed only when the heat of the great strike worked.

### **For the Soldier too!**

Even that soldier, whom the Prime Minister admired for standing in snow and storm, facing death in contrast to those who were striking had been refused his adequate pay and dearness allowance, on the excuse that he got free rations while on his duty. These men of the rich bourgeoisie forgot to see that the soldier's family in the village does not live on the rations of their bread-winner, thousands of miles away in his barracks or his trench. Now they say that the Raghuramiah Committee of the Defence Ministry had reconsidered the question and had revised the soldier's pay and scale of D.A. also. Instead of the former Rs. 30 basic and Rs. 22.50 D.A., making Rs. 52.50 in all, he would now get Rs. 66 in all. This increase of Rs. 13.50 for the soldier—whose gain is it, if not of the strike?

The strike of the Government employees was not only for themselves but for the soldier too and the people. Let the strike-breakers of the INTUC and the Congress learn this and be ashamed of their sins against the people and their services to the bourgeoisie.

## State Government Employees Benefitted

Among the State Governments which have so far refused to give a pay increase to their employees in spite of the Central Government promising to give them subsidy is Uttar Pradesh—the biggest State in the Indian Union. Was it merely a coincidence that the Government of Uttar Pradesh have now announced (*Times of India*, July 25, 1960) a pay increase of Rs. 5.50 with effect from April 1, 1960 for its employees just after the strike was over? These employees, in spite of their demands and agitation, did not get any wage increase since 1957. Is this not a gain flowing from the strike?

The strike has brought forth both moral and material gains to the Government employees in all fields: even the officers in the upper rung who had no problem of grades and wages to solve, will now find a new atmosphere. Though some of them have misbehaved towards the strikers, yet many of them in their heart of hearts surely had sympathy and admiration for those who fought. The Government services, high and low, can no longer be that old grave of the dead files and high-browed insolence. If the system is to go ahead for the country and its people.

There is the great problem of the victimised workers. One does not yet know how many will have to bear the wrath and vengeance of the Congress leadership and how many will finally lose their service and bread. As I am writing, the picture is not yet clear. Those imprisoned are being released and many have gone back to work. If the Government were wise and does not fall into the line of the total diehards in its ranks, it should not be vindictive to the strikers and all should be taken back to work. It should also quickly dispose of all the remaining problems and also grant the demand for D.A. by revising the formula of the Pay Commission. The proposal to disrecognise the union should also be given up, because that is no solution to the problems of the employees or the Government. For four years, the unions have been trying to change Government policies in the matter of wages and D.A. If they legitimately acted on their rights and struck, disrecognition is no key to the future.

The most outstanding contribution of the strike was that it

concentrated the attention of the whole country on the serious problem of prices and the failure of the Government to resolve it. In this, the strike fought the battle of all the people in the country.

It is now suddenly realised that cloth prices have risen 30 per cent in recent days and that this price rise has nothing to do either with wages or with anything else. They are purely a loot that is being garnered by the big monopolists in textiles. Even the merchants and millowners have now begun to talk of taking measures to reduce prices. The strike has made them at least to admit their sins and talk. Government have begun to make new resolves to control prices. Of course, all this will not lead anywhere, until the banks are nationalised and the big concentrated industries taken over by the State. Till then the problem of prices will not be resolved.

### **Small Cuba and Big India**

The Congress Government will not dare to hit the monopolists so drastically. A small Cuban Government can take over sugar plantations and oil refineries of the giant imperialism of America, a Nasser can seize the Suez Canal, but the Congress Government of this country of four hundred millions cannot even force the Bombay Refineries to reduce prices or process for the Government, their imports of Soviet oil. They cannot kick out the Germans, for spoiling the Rourkela Steel Plant or the tea planters, the jute and textile monopolists, the sugar combines for playing with the markets and prices. They are firm and strong against the poor workers but lowly and humble before the monopoly. To hide the utterly harmful character of such a proposal, it is said that the workers will be protected by a right to arbitration.

A proposal is being mooted that new laws be passed to ban strikes in essential services, such as railways, P & T, etc. In order to protect the joint and State monopolies, the sugar combines for playing with the markets and prices. They are firm and strong against the poor workers but lowly and humble before the monopoly. In no country arbitration has been a protection to workers against the attacks of capitalist employers or the capitalist State. It is only when the right to strike exists that arbitration can be of

some use, and that too not in times of acute crisis but comparatively normal times.

It is strange to note that some trade union leaders seem to play with this idea. Jaya Prakash Narayan who deserted the trade unions long ago has supported this proposal and some of his friends are also reported to be doing the same. I hope all trade union centres and the whole trade union movement will oppose this move uncompromisingly. This ban mooted today in the name of essential services, will soon engulf all the workers in all industries, because every activity in the industrial field is essential for the life of the people. If the trade unions lose this precious fundamental right of the working class, reactionary capital will run riot still more with the economy of the country and unbridled bureaucrats will be a bane to the life of the Government employees.

### **The Immediate Tasks**

The strike of the Government employees brought the problem of prices to the fore and they have suffered for it. It is therefore the duty of the people to support and protect the victimised workers. Those millions of Government employees who have gained must stand by the victimised and support them. The victimised are the casualties of the struggle and must be the first charge on the people, the trade unions and all. Their questions must be fought in the legislatures, relief must be organised for them and everything done to get them their bread. That is the first task.

The second task is not to fritter away the gains of the struggle in futile controversies and accusations as to who did what, except for a friendly and healthy appraisal of things for future guidance.

The third task is to build a stronger unity of the federations of Government employees and help them to create an efficient day-to-day functioning centre.

The fourth is to build greater homogeneity among all the service organisations and overcome the old exclusiveness and separateness of functioning. A common centre of all for common problems, while keeping the different federations for their own

special trade and individual service problems. This lag of the pre-strike days should be overcome.

The fifth task should be to build that unity of all trade union centres and political trends that came about, even though temporarily or half-heartedly during the strike. Even those who formerly rejected any united work are thinking on the lines of unity.

The sixth task is the same old one—that political differences are not allowed to interfere with trade union unity. Both the adherents of the ICFTU in the HMS and of the WFTU in the AITUC agreed on common action in this strike, though the INTUC adherent of the ICFTU took to strike-breaking for political reasons.

The seventh and final task is to combat the slander that the strikers or workers are against the country's development, its planned economy or prosperity.

In spite of all that the Government has done against the workers, in spite of all the firings, terror and ordinances, it has still not taken the road of Fascism or total reaction as some might like to say. No doubt it is working in the service of Indian capitalism and thus hits the popular interests, hates trade unionists who fight for the workers. But the working class and the people can change its direction by their action.

All glory to the valiant strikers and all success to them in their future and their unity.