

Outside Leadership of Trade Unions

A Bombay Survey

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A tentative survey of the composition of trade union leadership in Bombay highlights the fact of its dominance by outsiders, a feature that has both its advantages and disadvantages.

A large majority of these outsiders are wholtime trade union workers who have sacrificed much for the development of the trade union movement. Even so, unions need to realise that undue dependence on anyone not belonging to the ranks of industrial workers must necessarily affect the capacity of workers to organise themselves.

The outside leadership, in spite of its advantages, has brought with it the defects of political unionism and has had a damping effect on the rise of internal leadership.

A SERIOUS drawback of the Indian trade union movement is that its leadership is drawn mainly from outsiders, i.e., from those who are not actual workers in industry. The peculiar circumstances, in which the movement originated and developed, partly explains the predominance of outsiders in the labour movement. The immediate post-war period (1918-20) saw the emergence of Indian trade unionism. This period was preceded by the Russian Revolution (1917) and succeeded by the Swaraj Movement (1920-24); the former provided to the infant trade union movement an inspiration and a goal, whereas the latter supplied young and enthusiastic leaders, who proposed to exploit the workers' organisations in their political struggle for freedom.

Marked Division

During the first ten years, the trade union movement went into the hands of Communists, who looked upon trade unions as 'schools of Communism' or centres for organising the working classes and for training them in class consciousness and class solidarity. The moderate leaders, who differed from this concept, went out of the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1929, but not out of political unionism. During the fourth decade of this century, the movement experienced serious splits and weak unity moves — all on political considerations. At the end of the decade (1938-40), some superficial unity was achieved, but it was broken immediately afterwards (in 1941) when Royists formed their own Indian Federation of Labour on the issue of trade union support to war.

After Independence, the division of trade unions on political lines became more marked. The Indian

National Congress took the initiative in 1947 when it brought into existence its labour wing — the Indian National Trade Union Congress. Next year, the Socialists followed suit with the formation of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. To make this an annual feature, the splinter radical groups established their own federation in the United Trade Union Congress in 1949. Even the Akhil Bharatiya Jan Sangh made an attempt in 1955 to have a national federation of labour on its own. Meanwhile, the All-India Trade Union Congress went completely under Communist control.

The division of trade unions on political lines has led to a vicious circle of such defects as rivalry and multiplicity of trade unions, low membership and unsound finances, neglect of legitimate trade union activities, heavy reliance on the State-controlled industrial relations machinery and inevitable dominance of outsiders. The strength and weakness of our trade unions alike lie in their pre-occupation with politics. Often their policies are dictated by political considerations and not by industrial or economic issues. Strikes are waged with political motives, though for the sake of some convenient appearances economic demands are put forth. Trade union leadership is mainly with outsiders, who owe their allegiance more to their political bosses than to their own trade union members.

The eminence attained by outsiders in our labour movement can be attributed to various factors. The necessity of participation in the nation's struggle for political freedom has been already mentioned. The assistance of outsiders sometimes becomes necessary, especially when there is a fear that employees engaged in trade union activities

would be victimised; in fact, some of our trade unionists are victimised workers. Outsiders are also useful in attending to the technical work of trade unions, particularly in matters of law and dispute. The unsound financial position of our trade unions makes it difficult for them to engage full-time, paid executives, whose work is therefore done by outsiders in an honorary capacity. The development of Indian trade unionism owes a great deal to selfless outsiders, who spent their time and money on organizing the workers. Their influence in political and social circles helped many unions to secure their members' demands.

Interesting Aspects

To study the various aspects of outside leadership of trade unions in Bombay, personal details of 45 trade unionists were collected.* No scientific sampling was attempted in the selection of these trade union leaders, though the broader study of Bombay trade unions was based on a stratified (according to membership) random sample of registered trade unions. Nevertheless, the

These details were obtained by three of my students (Messrs F B Kenkare, C M Mariwala and P I Mathew) while collecting data, for their research project on 'A Study of Trade Unions in the City of Bombay'. The thesis, submitted as a part-requirement of the Diploma in Social Service Administration of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, is available in the library of the Institute. I am indebted to these three students for the use of their material; I must, however, take the responsibility for interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn from them.

—S D P

material collected reveals many interesting aspects, throwing valuable light on our trade union leadership.

Of the 45 leaders covered, 12 are in the AITUC, 15 in the INTUC and 18 in the HMS. Naturally, their political leanings are respectively towards Communist, Nationalist (Congress) and Socialist parties. One of the leaders, who recently went over from the HMS to the INTUC, appears still to be a Praja Socialist, whereas in the HMS itself, two leaders seem to be politically independent, two belong to the Socialist Party and the remaining fourteen claim to be Praja Socialists.

Language and Caste

A majority of Bombay workers have Marathi as their mother-tongue and hence it is not surprising that 73 per cent of the leaders are Marathi-speaking. (Table I).

Most of the trade unionists in Bombay can speak Marathi, Hindi, and English fluently. The first is the language of a large mass of workers; the second is convenient for addressing any type of gathering or dealing with fellow trade unionists; while the third is necessary for trade union work in labour courts and in the office of the Registrar of Trade Unions.

The leadership is predominantly in the hands of Brahmins, who constitute 60 per cent of the total, whereas trade union membership, actual and potential, comprises largely non-Brahmins. (Table II).

Language and caste have at present little influence in the trade union movement. In the recent municipal strike, the call given by the Republican trade union to back out of the strike was not followed by the strikers though a majority of them are political followers of the Republican Party; instead, they preferred to follow a Christian trade unionist, hailing from Mangalore.

Though a large number of trade union leaders are Maharashtrians and Gujaratis, many of them have migrated to Bombay for various reasons, economic, educational and political. Two of the INTUC leaders were trained in the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, whereas a third had his training at Séwagram. Most others had trade union training by actual experience in running unions.

'Empire-building' Tendency

The tendency towards 'empire-building' in the trade union field is somewhat evident in Bombay, as can be seen from the figures in Table III.

One INTUC leader is President of 17 unions and General Secretary of two more unions, whereas an AITUC leader (lawyer by profession) is an office-bearer of 20 unions. A large number of members are office-bearers of unions, numbering between three and five. Many trade unionists are also actively associated with the State and national federations. The all-India headquarters of the AITUC and HMS are in Bombay, and hence some of their all-India leaders reside in Bombay city. Among the 12 AITUC leaders, 5 are members of the State Working Committee (including the General Secretary), two are national working committee members and two are General Council members of the AITUC. Similarly, of the 15 INTUC leaders, four are office-bearers (including the Secretary, a Vice-President and Treasurer) of the State federation, whereas eleven are members of the national General Council (including an ex-President of the INTUC). Of the 18 HMS leaders, eleven are

executive members of the State federation, while three are executive members of the national HMS (including the General Secretary and the Treasurer).

Because of the political rivalry and multiplicity of trade unions, there has been overlapping in the trade union activities of the three federation leaders. For example, all the three federations have their unions in cotton textiles, engineering industries, docks, transport and the B E S T. However, the AITUC is strong in metal and hotel industries, the INTUC in cotton textiles and the HMS in the municipality and engineering, silk, automobile, printing press and chemical industries. Their strength is derived mainly from individual leaders, and there have been instances of leaders changing the affiliation of their unions with a change in their own political affiliations. For example, when the General Secretary of a union went over to the Communist Party from the P S P, his union changed its affiliation from the HMS to the AITUC.

Political Pre-occupation

The pre-occupation of Bombay trade union leaders with politics is illustrated by the seats won by them in the Bombay Municipal Corpora-

Table I

Number of leaders whose mother-tongue is :

Federations	Marathi	Gujarati	Konkani	Urdu	Other languages	Total
A I T U C	10	—	—	—	2	12
I N T U C	10	4	—	1	—	15
H M S	13	2	3	—	—	18

Table II

Number of leaders according to community

Federations	Brahmins	Kayasthas	Marathas	Banias	Muslims	Christians	Total
A I T U C	7	3	2	—	—	—	12
I N T U C	10	—	2	2	1	—	15
H M S	11	2	2	1	—	2	18

Table III

Trade union leaders connected with

Federations	one union	2-5 unions	6-10 unions	11-15 unions	Over 15 unions
A I T U C	1	7	3	—	1
I N T U C	6	5	3	—	1
H M S	—	13	3	2	—

tion, Bombay Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha. The General Secretary and President of the AITUC are both veteran trade unionists of Bombay and are at present respectively in the Lok Sabha and in the Mayoral Chair. Three of the office-bearers of the Mill Mazdoor Union (AITUC) are in the State Assembly, while one is in the Corporation. The Tanksal Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) also has its representative in the State Assembly. In addition, the Dyes and Chemical Workers' Union (AITUC), Engineering Workers' Union (AITUC), BEST Workers' Unity Front (AITUC), Chemical Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Bombay Port Trust Employees' Union (HMS), Mill Mazdoor Sabha (Silk) (HMS) and Engineering Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) have their representatives in the Bombay Municipal Corporation. The INTUC could not achieve similar success, because the elections were fought on the Samyukta Maharashtra issue.

Age and Education

The leadership appears to be in the hands of middle-aged persons; nearly 50 per cent of the trade unionists are in the age-group of 31-40. (Table IV).

The leadership of the HMS appears too young, compared with that of the other two federations. The age of the youngest trade unionist is 27, while at the other end there are two INTUC leaders, both of whom are 60 years old.

Outside leadership makes its influence felt because of education. Of the 45 leaders, only two appear to be non-matriculates, while as many as 30 (i.e., 66.6 per cent) are graduates. (Table V).

Some of the leaders have had brilliant academic careers. For example, among the INTUC leaders, one has a first-class science degree, another is a solicitor while a third is a barrister. One HMS leader stood first-class first in the engineering degree examination. Because of the reliance of trade unions on the State-controlled legal machinery, lawyers have an important place in them: of the 45 leaders, 8 are full-fledged lawyers (two in the AITUC, five in the INTUC and one in the HMS). Other trade unionists also are well versed in labour laws though they do not have any law degree.

Table IV

	Number of trade unionists whose age is between						
	25-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	41-45 years	46-50 years	51-55 years	56-60 years
Federation							
A I T U C	1	2	5	—	3	1	—
I N T U C	1	5	2	2	2	1	2
H M S	4	8	2	3	—	1	—

Table V

	Educational qualifications of trade union leaders				
	Non-matric	Matric	Inter	Graduates	Double Graduates
Federation					
A I T U C	2	2	1	5	2
I N T U C	—	2	2	6	5
H M S	—	6	—	11*	1

* One is a doctor (M B B S) and another an engineer (B E).

It is somewhat interesting to enquire how these trade union leaders maintain themselves. Our trade unions are financially weak: on an average, a registered trade union earns Rs 154 and spends Rs 134 a month, and hence it is difficult for a union to engage even a single full-time paid executive. However, it was found that 38 out of the 45 trade unionists (10 from AITUC, 11 from INTUC and 17 from HMS), i.e., as many as 85 per cent of the total, are paid from trade union funds. The amount paid varies from Rs 50 to Rs 350 a month though the standard monthly remuneration appears to be Rs 250 for INTUC leaders and Rs 150 for AITUC and HMS leaders.

As has been stated earlier, three leaders (two of the AITUC and one of the HMS) are members of the State Legislative Assembly while six leaders (three each of the AITUC and HMS) are Municipal Councillors. These leaders get allowances, which supplement their income. A few leaders are maintained by their political parties because primarily they are political workers. Lawyer trade unionists maintain themselves by legal practice, which brings in incomes ranging from Rs 400 to Rs 800 a month. In six cases (one AITUC and five HMS), wives of the leaders are earning members, and they lessen the financial worries of their husbands.

The tentative survey, though lacking a scientific basis, brings out certain salient features of our trade union leadership. There are some

bright features about the outside leadership of Bombay's trade unions. Most of these leaders are brilliant young men, devoted to the trade union movement. In choosing a trade union career, they have shown preference for an unstable and uneasy life, full of financial difficulties and physical hardships. With their education, enthusiasm and zeal, they could have obtained secure jobs, with better monetary prospects.

The Second Plan makes a distinction between outsiders who are whole-time trade union workers and those who look upon union work only as a part of their activities. Fortunately, a large majority of our trade union leaders belong to the former category of devoted workers, who have sacrificed their material well-being for the development of the trade union movement. Even so, as the Second Plan suggests, unions need to realise that undue dependence on anyone not belonging to the ranks of industrial workers must necessarily affect the capacity of workers to organise themselves. The outside leadership, in spite of its advantages, has brought with it the defects of political unionism and has had a damping effect on the rise of internal leadership. Indian trade unions now need a cadre of whole-time career trade unionists, who will be entirely paid by the unions and who will consequently be responsible only to the trade unions and not to any political party, which wants to exploit the unions for non-industrial activities.

power for the little man

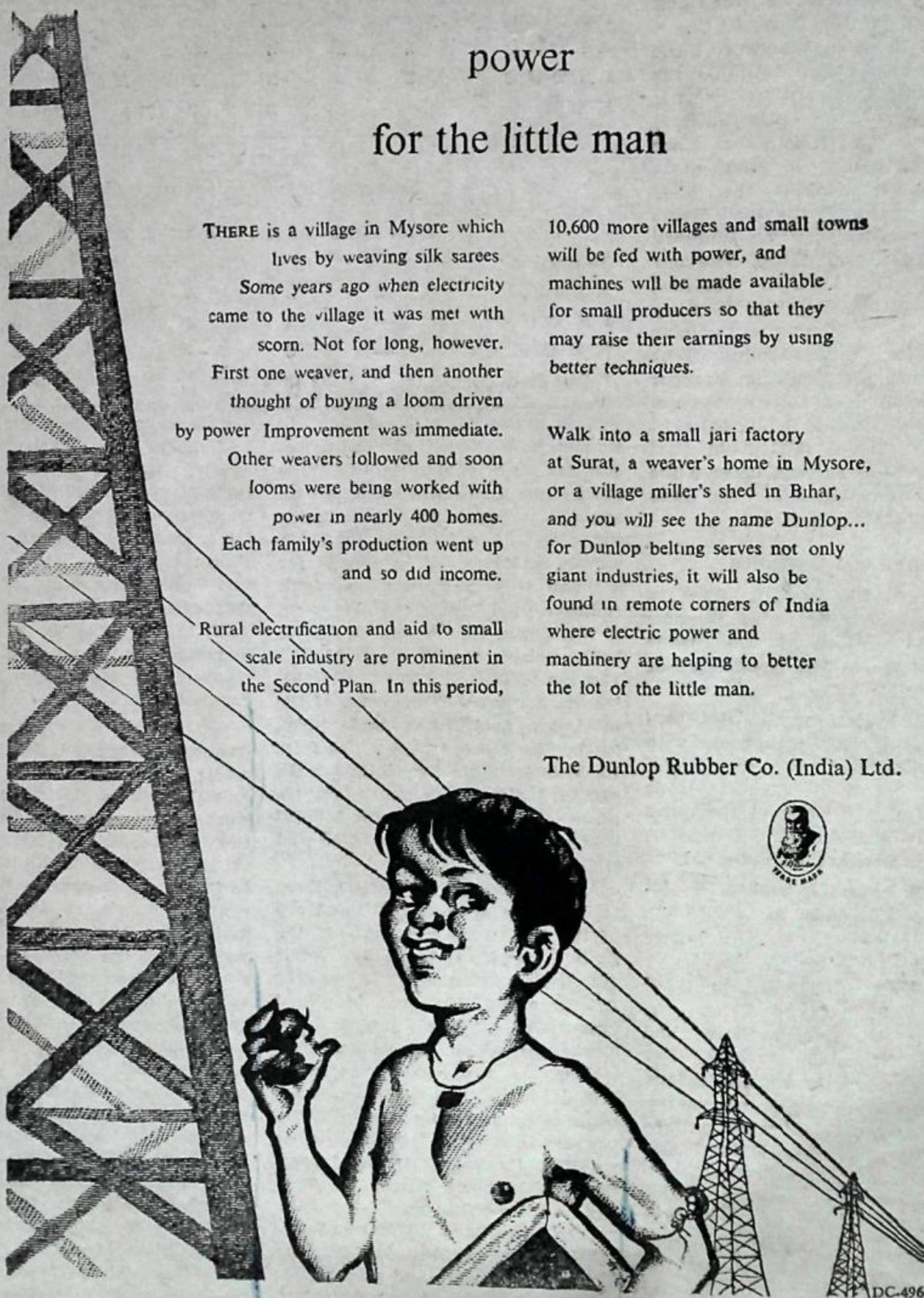
THERE is a village in Mysore which lives by weaving silk sarees. Some years ago when electricity came to the village it was met with scorn. Not for long, however. First one weaver, and then another thought of buying a loom driven by power. Improvement was immediate. Other weavers followed and soon looms were being worked with power in nearly 400 homes. Each family's production went up and so did income.

Rural electrification and aid to small scale industry are prominent in the Second Plan. In this period,

10,600 more villages and small towns will be fed with power, and machines will be made available for small producers so that they may raise their earnings by using better techniques.

Walk into a small jari factory at Surat, a weaver's home in Mysore, or a village miller's shed in Bihar, and you will see the name Dunlop... for Dunlop belting serves not only giant industries, it will also be found in remote corners of India where electric power and machinery are helping to better the lot of the little man.

The Dunlop Rubber Co. (India) Ltd.



DC-496

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MR. PATIL'S CALL Non-Political Trade Unionism

By A Staff Reporter

The first meeting of the past students of the Institute for Labour Welfare Workers, Government of Bombay, was inaugurated by Mr. S. K. Patil, Union Minister for Transport and Communications, in Bombay on Sunday. In his inaugural address, Mr. Patil stressed the importance of building up a non-political trade union movement.

Mr. V. B. Kamath, Principal of the Institute, earlier welcomed the Minister. Mr. D. R. Pradhan, Secretary to the Labour Department, proposed a vote of thanks.

The meeting elected its office-bearers. The Union Labour Minister, Mr. G. L. Nanda, was elected founder-patron and Mr. Shantilal Shah, Labour Minister of Bombay, chief patron.

Democratic Trade Unions Needed

"POLITICS MUST BE KEPT OUT"

By A Staff Reporter

Mr. M. R. Masani, M.P., said in Bombay on Monday night that the basic malady from which industrial relations in India suffered was the absence of stable, representative and democratic trade unions in a large majority of industries.

Mr. Masani, who was addressing a dinner meeting of the Lions Club of Bombay (North), also emphasised the need for progressive personnel management.

Satisfactory management-union relations are no substitute for good management. "Whereas in India today the basis for good industrial relations is lacking by reason of the absence of representative and democratic trade unions in a large number of factories, the need for progressive personnel management is even more urgent," he said.

INADEQUATE RESOURCES

Outlining the development of management and trade unions in recent years, Mr. Masani said that in 1953-54 out of seven million industrial employees, there were just around two million members of trade unions belonging to all the four trade union federations put together. This number was shared by no less than 3,295 unions with "an absurdly low average of 641 members per union." And even these did not pay their dues regularly with the result that the average annual income of a union was around Rs. 1,845, "a sum inadequate even for the maintenance of one full-time officer."

Mr. Masani deplored the excessive political domination of trade unions. Unfortunately, this tendency was encouraged when office-bearers and no less than half the members of the executive committee of a trade union were permitted to be outsiders.

ENCOURAGEMENT URGED

In so far as the management was concerned, Mr. Masani said enlightened enterprises should recognise and encourage stable, representative and democratic trade unions.

Mr. Masani thought that only democratic unions were worthy of such encouragement. He said the increasing association of workers with management was a sound policy, but any attempt to legislate on the point would defeat the objective.

Concluding, Mr. Masani said that in any case the primary duty of the management to provide leadership to its employees through efficient and fair management and progressive supervision could not be overlooked. "There are many ways of communicating with one's employees other than through trade unions and the fullest use of such channels would prove rewarding," he added.

Mr. J. V. Bhagat presided over the meeting. Mr. G. N. Somani proposed a vote of thanks.