

## Unit 4

The working class (or labouring class) comprises those engaged in waged or salaried labour, especially in manual-labour occupations and industrial work. [1][2] Working-class occupations (see also “Designation of workers by collar color”) include blue-collar jobs, some white-collar jobs, and most pink-collar jobs. Members of the working class rely exclusively upon earnings from wage labour; thus, according to more inclusive definitions, the category can include almost all of the working population of industrialized economies, as well as those employed in the urban areas (cities, towns, villages) of non industrialized economies or in the rural workforce.

As with many terms describing social class, working class is defined and used in many different ways. The most general definition, used by many socialists, is that the working class includes all those who have (more or less, they do not own e.g a factory) nothing to sell but their labour. These people used to be referred to as the proletariat, but that definition has gone out of fashion. In that sense, the working class today includes both white and blue-collar workers, manual and mental workers of all types, excluding only individuals who derive their livelihood from business ownership and the labour of others. [3] [verification needed]

When used non-academically in the United States, however, it often refers to a section of society dependent on physical labour, especially when compensated with an hourly wage (for certain types of science, as well as journalistic or political analysis). For example, the working class is loosely defined as those without college degrees.[4] Working class occupations are then categorized into four groups: unskilled labourers, artisans, outworkers, and factory workers.

A common alternative, sometimes used in sociology, citation needed is to define class by income levels. [6] When this approach is used, the working class can be contrasted with a so-called middle class on the basis of differential terms of access to economic resources, education, cultural interests, and other goods and services. The cut-off between working class and middle class here might mean the line where a population has discretionary income, rather than finances for basic needs and essentials (for example, on fashion versus merely nutrition and shelter).

Some researchers have suggested that working class status should be defined subjectively as self identification with the working-class group. This subjective approach allows people, rather than researchers, to define their own “subjective” and “perceived” social class.

The setting up of textile and clothing mills around the port cities of Bombay (now Mumbai), Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai) and Surat in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the beginnings of the industrial workforce in India. Several incidents of strikes and protests by workers have been recorded during this time. The credit for the first association of Indian workers is generally given to the Bombay Mill-Hands Association founded by N.M. Lokhande in 1890. This was in the period just after the passing of the ‘First’ Factories Act in 1881 by the British Government of the time. The following years saw the formation of several labour associations and unions. The first clearly registered trade-union is

considered to be the Madras Labour Union founded by B.P. Wadia in 1918, while the first trade union federation to be set up was the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920.

Following the rapid growth of unions around the time of the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the setting up of the ILO – industrial conflict began to increase and over 1,000 strikes were recorded between 1920 and 1924. The waves of strikes boiled over with the arrest of prominent leaders and trade unionists in the infamous ‘Cawnpore Conspiracy case’ in 1924 with the union leaders being arrested and accused of attempting a Communist revolution to try and overthrow ruling British government. Subsequently, the Trade Union Act (1926) was passed which created the rules for the regulation and closer monitoring of Trade Unions. In the first year of the law’s operation, 28 unions registered and submitted returns with a total membership 100,619.[4] The number of unions grew rapidly after

That and by the time of Independence of India in 1947, there were 2,766 unions registered which had a combined membership of over 1.66 million. This resulted in a wide influence of unions and workers’ organisations and led to significantly favourable social legislation being enacted in the first decade of Independence. Several important labour laws were passed during this time.

Following its Independence in 1947 and the formation of the Republic in 1950, India largely followed a Socialist economic approach encourage public sector employment and pro-worker Legislations. The trade-union movement reflected main political divisions of the time and was divide mainly along Socialist and Communist lines. The subsequent decades saw significant expansion in trade union membership with the number of activ unions reaching its peak in the mid-1970s and mi 1980s. While the 1970s in India was a period characterised by political instability, the 1980s wa characterised by the beginnings of a distinct turn towards more market-friendly policies, support fo industrialists and an implicit opposition to worker Two key events during this period were the 1974 railway strike in India and the Great Bombay textil strike of 1982, the latter of which subsequently le to a long and complicated stalemate.

The period following the Economic liberalisation in 1991 was characterised by declining government intervention in the economy, a decline in the creation of public sector employment and encouragement for the private sector. Efforts for unionisation in the private sectors were often met with opposition and the wider general withdrawal of State support for workers further undermined their bargaining power. These policies led to a stagnation in the number of unionised formal sector workers.

A gradual shift in focus about the importance of the Informal sector and Informal employment in the formal sector’ from the late 1990s onwards meant that trade unions also began to focus on these workers. This has led to greater enrolment of these workers and subsequently led to increases in union membership. The Central Trade Union Organisations (CTU’s) increased their combined membership from 13.21 million in 1989 to 24.85 million in 2002. Almost all the CTUOs now have at least 20 percent of their official members coming from the informal sector.

1974 railway strike in India was a major strike by the workers of Indian Railways in 1974. The strike lasted from 8 to 27 May 1974.<sup>1</sup> The 20 day strike by 1.7 million (17 lakh) workers is the largest recorded Industrial action in the world.

The strike was held to demand an eight-hour working day for locomotive staff by All India Railway Mens federation and a raise in pay scale, which had remained stagnant over many years, in spite of the fact that pay scales of other government owned entities had risen over the years.<sup>[6]</sup> Furthermore, since British times the Railways termed the work of the locomotive staff as “continuous”, implying that workers would have to remain at work as long as the train ran on its trip, often for several days at a stretch. The independence of India did not change this. The eight hour work day had not been implemented in Indian railways by the Railway Board, a quasi government bureaucracy despite having become a free country in 1947, this had led to dissatisfaction among labour, especially locomotive Pilots.<sup>[7]</sup> Traditional railway union leaders too were starting to get distant from worker demands and closer instead to politicians, thus leading to further discord.

The spread of diesel engines and the consequent intensification of work in the Indian Railways since the 1960s resulted in continuous working hours being extended by days, creating much resentment among the workers. 19) The Railways, although government-owned, remained an organization in which the accepted worldwide standard of an eight hour working day was violated with impunity.<sup>[10]</sup> When the crafts unions raised the issue, they demanded a 12-hour working day for loco running staff. This led to railway strikes by rail workers across the country in 1967, 1968, 1970 and 1973, finally leading to the 1974 strike which was participated in by 70% of the permanent work force of railways. This was not the first railways strike in India, the earliest having occurred in British India in 1862 in Howrah, and a number of strikes having occurred in the private railway companies that operated in British India, most of them becoming part of the Indian freedom struggle. 4)<sup>[5]</sup>

As President of the All India Railwaymen’s Federation, George Fernandes led the strike.

Textile mills contributed much to the numerical strength of the factory labourers in Tamilnadu. Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli were the important centres of the textile industry. A good beginning towards an organized labour movement was made among the textile mill workers in Madras city. It was on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1918 that the Madras labour union was formed by B.P. Wadia, Thiru.Vi.Ka, and others. The Justices and the swarajists showed little interest in the organisation of labourers. As an organisation, the Indian National Congress began to evince continuous and consistent interest in the labour movement from 1919. So the workers in the textile mills in Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Tirunelveli were guided by Congress activists like Shiva Rao, N.S. Ramaswami Iyengar and S.R. Varadarajulu Naidu.

From 1920-1947, the Communist party had conducted many struggles and protests for the welfare of the mill workers. Some other important events during the period were Coimbatore Pankaja mill-gun firing, the Stanes mill tragedy, Chinnampalayam massacre etc.

The Coimbatore mill strikes came to an end on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September 1927. All the workers in the various mills returned to work with the exception of 15 men whom the management of the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving mills declined to take back for disciplinary reasons<sup>7</sup>.

The history of the textile industry during this period 1939-45 is a history of profit making by the mills. In these years of limited supply and huge demand the Mills made very high profits. Working in night shift in the textile mills was introduced for the first time in Madras by 1940. During the war period, machinery could not be imported so the mills had to work in shifts. The 1946-47 statistics revealed that out of 55 Mills in Madras Presidency, 33 had 2 shifts of 8 hours of each, 6 mills had 3 shifts and 9 Mills worked on single shift. Only 7 Mills worked for 20 hours i.e., 2 ½ shifts. This was the only way to increase production to meet the war demand. During the war period, the production of cloth and yarn increased.

There was a set back in production during the year 1942 owing to the Quit India movement. To channelise the production and distribution of cloth and yarn at the home front a control order was passed in June 1943 fixing up quotas for regional sales by the mill sector to ensure a steady flow of yarn to the handloom sector. The Madras Textile Commissioner on the 12 August 1944 launched a "District Quota Scheme". This scheme was started in order to ensure steady and sure supplies of yarn to handloom weavers in each district. From the annual reports of the South Indian Mill Owners Association, we infer that co-operation existed between the textile control department and the mills.

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Most of the strikes in the textile Mills of Coimbatore took place between 1927 to 1945. Mostly strikes originates in the four important mills of Coimbatore namely Lakshmi mills, Kaleeswarar mills, Somasundara mills, and the Coimbatore Spinning and weaving mills. In 1937, a strike among textile workers started in Coimbatore. The Lakshmi mills labourers had taken the initiative to strike first. This was followed by strikes in the Kaleeswarar, Somasundara and Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving mill. These strikes came to an end with the intervention of the Government and appointment of a court of enquiry under sec 3 of the trade Disparities Act. The enquiry commission recommended a wage rise and settled the disputes. However, it has been common knowledge that the 'general strike has always led to the betterment of the conditions of the workers.