WORKING CLASS OF INDIA

HISTORY OF EMERGENCE AND MOVEMENT 1830-2010

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To

THE SUFFERING BUT FIGHTING
MILLIONS OF INDIA
PREFACE

Third Revised and Enlarged Edition

It is a matter of satisfaction for any Author when a third and thoroughly revised and enlarged version of a book like this is published.

The earlier edition which dealt with upto 1995. And this edition not only has been revised and enlarged covering the policies and activities of the Indian Working Class upto 2010, particularly dealing in details the new problems and the activities of the Working Class in the most difficult phase of neo-liberal globalization. This revised edition also encompasses additional facts of early phase of Trade Union Movement of Kerala and more details of the working condition of the huge number of coal workers of a core industry of the country at its germinating stage.

The activities of the Indian Working Class in the neo-liberal phase of the World economy and the World Economic crisis set off by the Wall Street crash of 2008, along with the perspective of India Govt's anti-labour attitude and policies and the counter-acting measures by the working class have been dealt with in adequate details.

The author hopes this third enlarged edition will also be useful and interesting for the research scholars and trade union activists and the general readers.

The author is grateful to the Management and other staff of the Prajashakti Book House, Hyderabad for undertaking the onerous work of publication of the large volume and bringing it out in the quickest possible time.

While preparing this volume, the author received unstinted help and assistance from many comrades and particularly the scholarly expert who undertook the preparation of the INDEX of the book in details in a very short time. The author is grateful to all of them.

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A Few Words For the Revised and Enlarged Second Edition

The appreciation, the book has received after its first publication, is surely gratifying to the author.

Since its first publication in 1977, there has been substantial changes in the Working-Class movement both at the International arena as well as in India.

The world economic situation has changed, so also the nature and form of the Working-Class movement. The ongoing scientific and technological revolution has further changed the scenario including the structure of the Working Class.

This is a revised and enlarged edition which takes into account all these changes. The book has been made up to date dealing with most of the relevant problems.

If this revised and enlarged edition receives greater appreciation, it will really be rewarding to the author.

January 1, 1997

SUKOMAL SEN
Preface to the First Edition

To write on the emergence and movement of the Indian working class has been a great deal more difficult than I had expected as the subject is not merely a history in the conventional sense.

The working class of India, as of everywhere else, emerged as concomitant circumstances of the capitalist society, but in the course of history the growth of the working-class movement as an economic and political force has presented itself as the antidote to the same very capitalist order. This book is therefore, I venture to say, simply not a history of the trade union movement of India in the hide-bound traditional manner, rather in a wider national and international context it has been sought to thoroughly deal with in this book the interaction of politics and economics in the struggle of the working class of India, the class which by flow has grown not only in number but also in its political importance.

The emergence of the Indian working class took place at a period when India fell under the absolute domination of a colonial rule. The emergence had therefore its own problems and peculiarities as are not generally found in the growth of the working class of a metropolitan country. And since the birth, the working class of India had to confront two basic antagonistic forces—an imperialist political rule and economic exploitation both by the native and foreign capitalist classes. Consequently, the trade union movement of India became intertwined with the political movement for national liberation and thus an attempt has been made in this book to place the working men's struggle in the right perspective of the people's political struggle for emancipation of the country from the yoke of British imperialism, while trying at the same time to separate the threads and trends of such intertwining of the two struggles.

The dynamics of this intertwining continued till the achievement of political independence in August 1947 and since then a new phase with a higher perspective began in the course of the working-class struggle of India. The main trends of this phase have been dealt with in a broad outline covering the period from 1947 to 1970.
This work thus sets out to sum up the social and economic processes providing the background of the birth of the Indian working class and its subsequent onward march giving a comprehensive outline and synthesis of available knowledge; above all it is intended to be a balanced account in which equal importance is given to the documentary evidences and their interpretation as well. Some of the interpretations of facts and events may, however, appear as outright departure from the flippantly easy and conventional notions and in certain cases those may even appear as definately iconoclastic, yet without pretension to authority, I would humbly submit that while making conclusions and interpretations I have tried utmost not to veer away to the slightest degree from the documented facts.

While preparing this study I tried to depend mostly on primary sources, but in certain cases I selectively drew from the secondary sources as well.

I am specially indebted to the staff of the National Archives at New Delhi; National Library, West Bengal Government Archives and Bangiya Sahitya Parishad at Calcutta and to a number of friends and organizations for their best co-operation in collecting necessary information and material. I also express my gratitude to a few more friends who have generously assisted me in typing the manuscript and in various other ways in the matter of publication of this book.

As a worker in the Indian trade union movement, I will consider my attempt fruitful, if this book is received with a certain measure of approbation by those who will take interest in reading it.

May 1, 1977

SUKOMAL SEN

Calcutta
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International Background

Modern working-class movement is a product of Industrial Revolution. When Industrial Revolution with its centre in England was soon spreading into the continent, India fell under colonial rule. So instead of witnessing an Industrial Revolution on her own soil, India served as a colonial appendage of metropolitan England, quickening the process of Industrial Revolution in the master-country and at the same time suffering a forced disintegration of her own traditional economic order. Development of capitalism in India was therefore a very tortuous and much belated process. Indian working-class movement too consequently developed at a much later stage. The investigation into the Indian working-class movement therefore fairly warrants a brief look into the genesis of the working-class movement in Europe, its main trends and its organizational and ideological evolution.

Development of capitalism, so to say, a change-over from the old feudal economic order to the modern capitalist economy was a long drawn-out process starting from the mid sixteenth century. In the course of this evolution spreading over a period of about two hundred years right from the mid sixteenth to the last third of the eighteenth century, the characteristic form of capitalist production was manufacture. In the era before manufacture also, the workers depended on selling their labour-power, but they still had the real chance of eventually becoming independent. But manufacture involved extensive division of labour between many workers concentrated under one roof. The social division of labour and specialization of functions led to the down-grading and subordination of the individual who became a completely isolated component, cut off from the process of production as a whole and subjected to rigorous discipline. All that the worker required was a highly specialized dexterity losing his general skill as a craftsman and his ability
working class of india

for independent work. The products of seasoned craftsmanship in the era before manufacture transformed itself into the products of, 'collective labour' of a few skilled and many unskilled workers in the era of manufacture. The Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century only carried this process to its logical conclusion. It was a transition from manual labour in craftsmanship and manufactory to the use of machinery in large-scale industry. However, it was characterized not only by the invention and introduction of machinery, but also by the appearance of new basic classes—the bourgeoisie who owned the factories and the means of production and exploited the workers, and the proletariat, i.e. the wage-labourers who did not possess the means of production.

Amongst the European countries, England was the first to witness this Industrial Revolution. The reasons are, in the main, two-fold. Firstly, it is in England where the capitalist class could lead the first successful struggle against feudalism and had been able to free itself from its shackles. Secondly, the wealth exploited from India and other colonies by the British colonialists formed a substantial part of the capital that was necessary for building capitalist industry in England. After the battle of Plassey in 1757, England was, in fact, flooded with India’s enormous wealth.

In Britain, the forceful struggle between the old society and the new reached its culmination in the Revolution of 1640. The immediate cause of outbreak of the civil war between the King and the Parliament was an attempt to impose taxes. In this struggle, the Parliamentary cause had whole-hearted support from the capitalists connected with industry. But the basic cause that did underlie this struggle was who should hold State-power, the rising capitalist class or the old feudal ruling class and those who mustered around the King. The former eventually came out victorious and succeeded in getting into the State-power.

Right at this moment, scientific inventions one after another heralded the Industrial Revolution. Machinery first appeared in the cotton industry. Thus beginning with the invention of Hargreaves’ spinning-jenny in 1765, it advanced through James Watt's steam-engine, Richard Arkwright and Samuel Crompton's device of textile machinery, Eli Whitney's cotton-gin, Fulton's steamboat and some such technical devices. These revolutionary inventions were followed by a very rapid growth and expansion of the coal, iron, and textile industries, as well as the railroads and laid the technical basis of Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution had therefore two aspects—the technical, i.e., the invention and introduction of machinery, and the social, i.e., the passing away of the old feudal order and the formation of new basic social classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the newly emerging capitalist economic order.
But in this continuously expanding revolution with the machine as the starting-point, the human organ was superseded by mechanical organization, independent of the limitations of human power. This totally transformed the whole production process. At the beginning of this process, in manufacture the organization of social labour was purely subjective in the sense that it required a combination of different operations, but the new modern industry had in machinery a purely objective productive organism which converted the labour into a mere appendage of an already existing material condition of production.

The consequences were disastrous. As concomitant circumstances of capitalism, the workers had to plod through an inhuman material condition. Doing away with the necessity to have either particular physical strength or hard-won practical skill to do most of work in the new productive process, brought with it a drastic increase in female and child labour. This phenomenon indicated a calamitous effect on the physical and mental well-being of the common masses. The triumph of the machine over the man became synonymous with the insatiable greed of the capitalists for maximum profits and led to the lengthening of the working day and intensification of labour simultaneous with miserably low wages.

Although Trade Unionism as a national movement was a product of Industrial Revolution and in England Trade Unions began to take form as early as 1752, long before this, combination of the employed persons had become a familiar feature of the English life. But in the early period of manufacture, despite the conflicting interest between the workers and the capitalists, the workers tolerated this system. This was particularly true of the peasants, who deprived of their existence on the land by powerful landlords' found in the new industries an alternative livelihood. But soon this ephemeral passivity gave place to ever-sharpening conflicts. Sporadic and usually short-lived combinations had appeared from an early date, some even in the Middle Ages. And by the eighteenth century they were becoming more numerous, stable, and effective at any rate among the skilled artisans in a number of labour crafts. At the initial stage of the growth of capitalist enterprise prior to the establishment of large-scale modern industry, in many of the skilled trades it became harder for the apprentice to eventually become master. So the journey-men, conscious of the fact that they had no hope for advancement, used their Trade clubs more and more as Trade unions to defend or better their conditions. In the woollen industry where the merchant capitalists reduced the weaver to the status of a wage-earner under the domestic system, combinations of workers appeared to secure better conditions. In large-scale enterprises, however, the combinations were comparatively little. The miners had no permanent organization in any of the coalfields. In the engineering and iron industries trade unions developed among the specialist workers, but not among the
less skilled. The Trade clubs of the urban artisans actually grew stronger as the demand for skilled labour rose in consequence of the general advance of production.

In the antagonistic relationship between these two social classes the law has intervened in favour of the employer right from medieval times. The Ordinance of Labourers was enacted in 1349 to fix the wages of workmen in certain crafts at levels that existed before the Black Death had decimated the working population. By 1640 the arbitrary system of wage-fixing by the justices was extended to all workmen. Since the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers there had been a tradition that the State should regulate labour conditions. The weaver or artisan who had a grievance could appeal to Parliament or to the law for help against low wages, long working hours, truck payments or the non-observance of the apprenticeship regulations of the Elizabethan Statute. Initially, Parliament sometimes considered the workers' case and granted a few of their claims but, simultaneously limited their right to combine in future. Soon the policy of Parliament changed. The masters argued that the regulations, which in fact were never seriously meant for safe-guarding the interest of the workers, were unnecessary and harmful and this appeal carried more weight than the labourers' appeal for protection. Trade after trade was 'freed' from restrictions.

In fact, by the end of the Middle ages, legislations combined with liberal ideologies based on a static concept of natural law had deprived the workers of the right to determine their own work and life by united action. This tendency did not confine itself in England alone. It had shown itself in France, Germany and other Western countries as well. In 1731 the Imperial order of the Guilds, following virtually every European State, imposed a ban by a common law on apprentice unions throughout the Holy Roman Empire. The protagonists of medieval natural law and the classic liberal economists propagated that freedom and equality were best secured by guaranteeing the property relations of, and private competition between, numerous small producers. With this object they pleaded prohibiting the association of 'particular interest groups' whose power, they feared, would only limit the freedom of others. The bourgeois revolutions sweeping Europe did, however, nothing to change this. The workers too remained prisoners of such ideas as long as they continued to regard themselves as inferior 'plebians'. But the workers and the revolutionary intelligentsia soon realized that they could only regain their own rights by demanding equal political rights for all and thus prevent the State being abused in the interests of a minority. That is why the working class and the revolutionary intelligentsia were the chief defendants of the French Revolution outside France and the English workers provided the social basis for the ideology of international solidarity in the struggle for democracy and human rights in defence of the Revolution.
End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @
http://kinige.com/book/Working+Class+Of+India

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of working class in India. Also, in rural areas, the unorganized labour force is highly stratified on caste and community considerations. Workers in the unorganized sector are usually subject to indebtedness and bondage as their meager income cannot meet with their livelihood needs. The unorganized workers are subject to exploitation significantly by the rest of the society. In addition to the above, following data also gives measure of happiness of Indians: Human Development Index â€“ India has ranked 130 among 189 countries on Human Development Index released in 2019. HDI is measure of per capita income, living standard, life expectancy/health and access to education. Some African and Central Asian countries viz Namibia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, have fared better than India.