

# Labours Troubles and Congress Party in Tamil Nadu (1900- 1947)

**T.Balasubramanian**

*M.A.,(His.), M.A.,(His. & Tour Mgt), M.A., (PloiSci), BLIsc, M.Phil, Ph.D.  
Karaikudi, Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu, India*

## OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 6

Issue: 3

Month: Januray

Year: 2019

ISSN: 2321-788X

Received: 11.12.2018

Accepted: 05.01.2019

Published: 30.01.2019

Citation:

Balasubramanian, T. "Labours Troubles and Congress Party in Tamil Nadu (1900-1947)." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2019, pp. 44–46.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2550013>

## Abstract

*In tamil nadu which was predominantly agricultural, the maximization of agricultural productivity and output was an essential condition of economic growth and improvement of the masses. the system under which the cultivator worked was of key importance in determining the agricultural growth.*

*The cost of living index, which started increasing during the world war, continued its upward trend even after the war. wages and dearness allowances were not proportionately increased to completely neutralize the price rise. it caused much finance by labor the establishment of war industries generated employment opportunities for workers and yet the soaring prices, low wages and rising cost of living adversely affected the standard of living of laborers. hence the war period was marked unrest in madras and under the defense of india rules; the government declared strikes illegal in many essential industries.*

*On the direction of the central government, the state government advised the employers to pay compensation for involuntary unemployment, resulting out of shortage of coal and raw material. nevertheless, problems of this kind caused disturbances in the labor front for the workers retrenched from 1 april 1947.*

## Introduction

In Tamil Nadu which was predominantly agricultural, the maximization of agricultural productivity and output was an essential condition of economic growth and improvement of the masses. The system under which the cultivator worked was of key importance in determining the agricultural growth. Agricultural productivity per acre and per capita was often limited by the prevailing system of land tenure. Hence land reforms occupied a central position in the programme of planned development of communities engaged in agriculture. "There is only one fundamental method of improving village life namely, the introduction of a system of peasant proprietorship under which the tiller of the soil is himself the owner of it and pays revenues direct to the Government without the intervention of any zamindars or Taluqdar". In the old Madras Province, the Zamindari System took roots only in the northern parts while in the southern areas, lands were held by a class of people known as Poligars, confined to a few villages. Various economic and social factors were combined to produce an inefficient and exploitative land system which hampered the economic progress and led to inequitable distribution

Much of the problem that Rajaji was confronted with had been the result of his own innovative measures. But problems came from other sources also. The gravest problem that caused him considerable depression throughout his tenure of two years and three months was that of labour.

Though he was not responsible for the labour troubles, his methods of tackling them were denounced by his friends and foes alike. In 1918 Madras Labour Union was started by Thiru.V.Kaliyanasundaram, Kuthikesavapillai, C.Sellapathi (Chettiyar), Ramanuchalu (Naidu), Vadiya, M.C.Raja, etc., With such a man as the Labour Minister, Congressmen and industrial workers hopefully looked forward to a new era of labour relations when police brutalities and intervention in industrial disputes would become things of the past. This optimism, coupled with the improved economic conditions, gave birth to a new type of labour militancy which found expression in wage demands and strikes. To nip this trend in the bud and to bring about some harmony between the labour and the capital, the Government issued a communiqué in October 1937 to the effect that the Ministry would strongly disapprove of any strike unless all other methods of representation had failed.

The first clash between strikers and police occurred in February 1938 when the workers of the Saroja Mill in Coimbatore went on a lightning strike over the dismissal of fifteen employees. The second one occurred a few days later in the Indian Leaf Tobacco Distributing Company's Factory at Chirala in Guntur District. It was a more serious and protracted dispute which assumed serious proportions on 14 February when nearly 6000 workers gathered outside the factory, some wanting to go back to work and others preventing them. Failing to subdue the crowd which indulged in heavy stone-throwing even after a lathi charge, the police opened fire. The warning given by the police was treated lightly by the crowd under the thought that a popular Government would not resort to shooting. One person was killed in the shooting incident and another was badly wounded. The crowd dispersed thereafter. Justice Horwill, who conducted an enquiry into the incident, fully exonerated the police. The Government accepted the Report, vindicating the police, though reluctantly.

The establishment of War Industries generated employment opportunities for workers and yet the soaring prices, low wages and rising cost of living adversely affected the standard of living of labourers. Hence the War Period was marked by labour unrest in Madras and under the Defence of India Rules, the Government declared strikes illegal

in many essential industries. The rise in prices had an impact on the standard of living of labourers and the organized labour agitated for dearness allowance to meet the increased cost of living. Presided over by V.V.Giri, the third annual conference of the Madras Labour Union was held on 1 September 1940. It passed resolutions demanding the grant of dearness allowance to workers and condemning the use of the Defence of India Rules against the labour. The Government yielded to the demand but the dearness allowance did not keep pace with the level of the cost of living index.

The cost of living index, which started increasing during the War, continued its upward trend even after the War. Wages and dearness allowances were not proportionately increased to completely neutralize the price rise. It caused much financial strain to the workers. Further, there was delay in revising the working condition of the pre-War period to suit the post-War period. This position was admitted at the Indian Labour Conference held in April 1947. Jagajivan Ram, Labour Adviser to the Government of India and the Chairman of the Conference, observed that the wage rates and working conditions were far from satisfactory.

For the nutritious diet of the industrial workers in India in the 1940's, Dr.Aykroid fixed a minimum living wage of Rs.35/- per month while the Pay Commission recommended that the minimum wage of an Indian worker should be at least Rs.30-8-6. As against this minimum, even in the comparatively well paid Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, the lowest pay was Rs.19-8-0. But in a memorandum of grievances submitted to the Labour Minister, it was stated that the wage of an unskilled textile worker was as low as Rs.0-6-9 per day. In the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills too, for boys and waste picking women, the wages were Rs.7/to Rs.8/- per month. In the South Indian Railway, the wages of porters, cleaners and coolies were about Rs.12/- and the lowest pay of the cleaners in the motor transport was between Rs.10/- and Rs.15/- per month. While in the foundries, the coolies got less than ten annas daily, the oil companies paid fourteen and eleven annas for ordinary workers and working boys respectively. The workers were discharged in large number for want of work. Some factories made use of the post-War problems to discourage trade union activity. On

17 September 1947, the Gordon Woodroffe Leather Manufacturing Company dismissed 101 workers without assigning any reason. Ramakrishnan, the President of the Union, complained that it was an offensive on the Union, for the organization of the Union frustrated the attempt of the management to start a 'welfare union. However, after a rival union was started with the patronage of the Company on 12 November 1947, the Company sent away about 200 workers out of a total of about 1000 workers. In September 1946, the tanneries at Pallavaram discharged about forty workers on the grounds of lack of work. The workers agitated against it since 10 September 1946 and to tackle it, an order, under section 144, was issued prohibiting meetings and processions. After a long period, the workers resumed work in November 1946.

### Conclusion

On 29 May 1947, the Government appointed an Adjudicator to arbitrate over the dispute. The Company refused to take back the fifty six strikers, but the Adjudicator persuaded the Company to allow the fifty six workers to work from 7 June 1947. It recruited over 100 new workers to get their work done in the factory under construction at Tondiarpet. Since the parties arrived at a settlement, the Tribunal passed a compromise award. Accordingly, the management agreed to take back all the workers who were on the rolls on 30 March 1947 at the Royapuram mills. However, the Union simply rejected the cases of the workers dismissed before 1 April 1947. But their cases were similar to that of the workers retrenched from 1 April 1947. In 1947, on the direction of the Central Government, the State Government advised the employers to pay compensation for involuntary unemployment, resulting out of shortage of coal and raw material. Nevertheless, problems of this kind caused disturbances in the labour front.

### References

- Arnold, D., Police Power and Colonial Rule, 1859-1947, Madras, 1986, p.222.  
A Survey of Procurement and Rationing of Food in the Madras State, 1942-49, p.10.

- Chelladurai, P., Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1918-1947, Virudunagar, 2004, p.203.  
Commissioner of Labour letter to Joint Secretary to the Government of Madras, 15  
G.O.No.2304, Development Department, 26 May 1947.  
G.O.No.2345, Development Department, 27 June 1947  
G.O.No.2481, Development Department, 5 June 1947.  
G.O.No.2609, Development Department, 5 July 1946.  
G.O.No.2609, Development Department, 5 July 1946.  
G.O.No.4637, Development Department, 18 December 1946.  
G.O.No.5874, Development Department, 19 December 1947.  
Hughes, A. "Report on the Cost of Living of Labourers in the Jharia Coal Fields", Manager of Publications, Delhi, 1940.  
Ibid. pp.224-225.  
Madras Administrative Information in 1942, Madras, p.51.  
Madras Administrative Information in 1942, p.13.  
November 1947, in G.O.No.1507, Development Department, 3 April 1947, p.27.  
Rajan, "Genesis of the Present Food Crisis", Madras Information, 11 October 1947, p.15.  
Report of the Labour Investigation Committee", Delhi, 1946, p.336.  
Sundara Rajan, V.C., "Problem of Food Supply". Madras War Review, 21 May 1943.  
The Hindu, 3 October 1939, p.8.