

THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN INDIA

By the same author

I. Factory Labor in India

A critical and analytical study in the rise, growth, conditions and problems of the factory workers in India.

II. Factory Legislation in India

With an introduction by Dr. John R. Commons, Professor of Economics, University of Wisconsin.

A historical and analytical study in the legislative institution relating to Indian factories with special reference to the social, political and economical forces which led to its origin and growth and influenced its nature and function.

III. Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast.

A study in the social and economic conditions of the Hindustanees on the Pacific Coast, based on the report made by author as special agent to the Department of Labor, United States Government.

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Printed in Germany.

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PREFACE.

"The Labor Movement in India" is a preliminary study in the working class movement with special reference to its origin, growth, nature and significance. It was begun as a part of "Factory Labor in India" in 1913 and elaborated in connection with "Factory Legislation in India" in 1916. In 1918, the movement entered into a new epoch and achieved a new significance. The treatise has since then been revised and enlarged. Like the springs of a river, the forces of a movement are manifold and concurrent. The division of the labor movement in India into three periods is, therefore, more or less arbitrary.

The application of mechanical power to the productive system and the private ownership of the means of production are the two essential features of modern industrialism, the former giving rise to the factory system and the latter to capitalism. The factory system has evolved through the gradual conquest of nature by man and is, therefore, the most efficient method of production known up to the present time. But it appeared in its final form in England at the time when there was a strong reaction against state control which went into excess under mercantilism and when the doctrine of *laissez faire* and individualism was the dominant social philosophy. It was naturally taken up by private enterprise which eventually developed into capitalism. Although capitalism has been a great incentive to the growth of the factory system, the relation between the two is historical and accidental rather than necessary and fundamental.

The extreme poverty of the people and the international character of modern industries make the adoption of the factory system by India ab-

olutely necessary. Under the economic and political conditions, the growth of capitalism is also inevitable in India. The reasons for such inevitability are obvious: First, capitalism is still the quickest method of industrialisation of a country. Second, social ownership and even social control of industries imply a certain degree of concentration and integration which can perhaps be better developed under capitalism. Third, under the political domination of capitalistic England, it is the only course open to her. Fourth, the experiences of Russia within the last few years show that the overthrow of capitalism is the problem of the world rather than that of any one weak nation. Capitalism will run its full gamut in India as in other countries. But Indian capitalism being largely imperialistic, the chances are that it will play itself out more quickly.

Like feudalism, capitalism is a passing phase in social evolution. It has already outlived its utility in industrially advanced countries and has even become a hindrance to social progress. It is bound to change or give way to some other system. In order to succeed it, a new system must, however, be equally efficient in production and capable of doing away with the present injustice in distribution. Moreover, as industrial control encroaches upon political rights and social privileges, the new system must also secure social and political equality to the majority of people.

Such a system cannot be achieved by merely dethroning capital and enthroning labor. Even the establishment of the rule by the workers including peasants and artisans does not necessarily solve the social problem. As long as control, whether social, political or industrial, remains with a few, ex-

plotation and dictatorship are bound to continue and thus to retard social progress. A democratic society is possible only when a considerable number of social population can replace industrial experts rather than merely "wheel them out", can participate in local and national governments rather than vote for political candidates and can create a new social attitude rather than accept old social custom. Moreover, social democracy is not so much a goal in itself as a condition for the highest and richest expression of an individual and the moral and intellectual progress of society, which can be achieved by the development of new ideals and aspirations, especially among the masses. The solution of the problem lies not in the mere substitution of one system by another, but in the inauguration of an elaborate system of education in modern science and philosophy and of training in the efficiency for social, political and industrial service.

The economic interests occupying the greatest part of the youthful vigor and of the wakeful days are one of the primary forces of social evolution. They are, therefore, the foundation upon which social democracy can be built. The labor movement aims primarily at the reorganisation of the industrial system and secondarily at the readjustment of the social and political institutions, and is, therefore, one of the most important means to the achievement of social democracy. It is from this viewpoint that the author has tried to understand the labor movement.

Berlin, February 1, 1923.

Rajani Kanta Das.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.

Old Industrial Organisation.

From the earliest times, India has been a country of small communities. A comparatively large village, or a group of smaller ones, forms the village, the chief industrial unit in the country.

Agriculture is the principal industry of the village. Of other industries, weaving, smithing, oil-pressing, and pottery-making are the chief. These industries together with some other minor ones make up the self-sufficing system of the village economy, which is still the dominant feature of the industrial organisation of India.

The whole industrial population of the village may be divided into two classes, the cultivators and the artisans, the former providing food and raw materials, and the latter supplying the other simple needs of rural life. In addition to these principal original classes, there have grown up, in the course of time, other classes of people, such as bankers, tradesmen, physicians, scribes, and landlords. Every village has also its menials or "servants", such as washermen, barbers, and scavengers.

Towns began to grow among these village communities even in the early times. Royal residences, places of pilgrimage, and seaports rose into prominence as industrial centres. Generally each town developed one highly specialised industry, such as the manufacture of muslin at Dacca, and of calico at Calicut, although other minor industries also developed to a certain extent.

The handicraft system, which was more or less in the rudimentary stage in the village, became