

Answer:

Indian working class had to face imperialist political rule and economic exploitation at the hands of both foreign and native capitalist classes. After the advent of modern industry, Indian working class suffered from low wages, long working hours, unhygienic and hazardous working conditions, absence of basic amenities etc.

Under these circumstances, Indian working class movement became intertwined with political struggle for national emancipation.

First Phase (1875-1918)

- Early nationalists were indifferent to workers' cause because they did not want a division in national movement on the basis of classes. Also, they differentiated between British and Indian owned factories and felt that laws favoring workers would hamper competitive edge of Indian factories.
- As a result, trade unions were of a sporadic or ad hoc nature, devoid of funds, regular membership, constitution, etc.
- However, some prominent nationalist leaders like B.C. Pal and G Subramanya Aiyer demanded pro-labour reforms.
- During Swadeshi movement, workers participated in variety of political issues. Various strikes were organised under the leadership of nationalists. However, attempts to form trade unions were not very successful.
- During WWI, establishment of Soviet Union, formation of Comintern and emergence of Mahatma Gandhi lent new dimension to the movement of working class and the focus shifted towards addressing workers' concerns.

Second Phase (1918-1924)

- During 1918-1921, several organised labour unions sprouted throughout country's industrial centres owing to economic miseries experienced by Indian working class by way of price rise, low wages, long hours of work etc.
- Recognising this, Gandhiji founded **Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association** in 1918, which desisted workers from taking militant class struggle against capitalists by advocating for class collaboration.
- Formation of national level **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)** in 1920 helped in coordinating all India level activities and aimed at organizing the workers on a national scale. Thus, trade unionism accelerated and 1920s was the period of some of the biggest strikes in country.
- Nationalist leaders advocated for continuation of the struggle against imperialist domination by taking along the worker class. For e.g. C.R Das advocated for incorporating worker's cause in the struggle for Swaraj.

Third Phase (1924-1934)

- Recognizing this trend, the British Government passed **Trade Union Act, 1926** with an aim of directing labour movement into safe channel by putting restrictions on political activities of unions.
- After following a period of lull, working class activity was again spurred by emergence of Left Bloc in national movement under the leadership of S.A Dange, P.C Joshi etc.
- Strong communist influence on the movement lent a militant and revolutionary content to it. For instance, workers participated in massive Simon boycott demonstrations in 1927 and Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930s.
- There was considerable participation of workers in Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930.
- In early 1930s, trade union movement reached a low ebb when disunity and dissensions rose to a great height.

Fourth Phase (1935-1947)

- Next wave of working class activity came with provincial autonomy and formation of popular ministries in 1937. Congress Ministries in various provinces gave a fillip to trade union activity. They were sympathetic to workers' demands and passed several favorable legislations.
- After following a **policy of industrial peace** during initial years of WWII, workers even participated in post-War national upsurges. They organised multiple strikes on economic issues under the direction and leadership of various nationalist leaders.

The participation of the working class helped in economic and political gains, thus aiding the process of freedom struggle in a variety of ways.