

Quadrant II - Notes

Paper Code: ECG 106

Module Name: History of Labour Movement in India

Module No: 3

Notes

Outline

- Meaning of labour movement and trade union movement.
- Brief introduction
- History of Labour Movement in India.
- Conclusion.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of the session, a student will be able to: -

- Recall the meaning of labour movement and trade union movement.
- Narrate the history of Labour Movement in India.

Concepts

- **Labour movement** covers all the efforts made in the form of protests, legislations, welfare activities that were under taken by philanthropists, social reformers, nationalist leaders, government etc. These efforts were made by them was to improve the working and living conditions of labourers. In other words, labour movement is executed **for the labourers**.
- **Trade union movement** are attempts and reforms made by the organisations formed by the labourers themselves such as trade unions to improve the economic and social conditions of the workers within the industrial system. In other words, trade union movement is executed **by labourers**.

History of Labour Movement in India

- The labour movement began with industrial revolution. The traces of industrial revolution can be seen in the 18th century and it began in Great Britain.
- In India, the growth of industries started with the development of railways, coal, cotton, jute industries in the mid -19th century.
- Development of industries introduced new methods and machineries that simplified work and helped in large-scale production but at the same time some of the worst features of industrialism was noticeable in India.

- The workers being weaker were exploited by the employers. Seeing pitiful condition of workers a number measures were initiated by the philanthropists, social reformers, nationalist leaders and government to improve the working and living conditions of Indian labourers.

The growth and development of labour movement in India can be classified into two periods namely:

Period 1: Regulation Period (1851-90)

- Legislative measures initiated by the British Government such as the Apprentices Act (1853), Fatal Accidents Act (1853), Merchant Shipping Act (1859) etc. However, these laws could not solve the problems faced by the labourers.
- The early nationalist leader Mr. Sasipada Banerjee tried to improve the economic conditions of the workers in the industries. He started the First Labour Organization “Working Man’s Club” in Kolkata in 1870. He also started a newspaper ‘Bharat Shramjeevi’.
- The Government of Bombay on 25th March 1875, appointed first Bombay Factories Commission to investigate conditions of the workers.
- Attempts were made to organize labour in India was initiated by an Indian philanthropist Mr. Sorabjee Shapoorji Bengalee. He drafted a bill for providing better working conditions for labourers and tried to pass it in the Bombay Legislative Council.
- In 1880, the Bombay Mill and Millhands Association was set up by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande. He also published a newspaper ‘Dinbandhu’ a newspaper to legitimate the grievances of the workers.
- The first Factories Act passed in 1881, it was a result of the agitation of Sir Shapoorji Bengalee.
- In 1884, itself set-up the Second Bombay Factory Commission.
- Shri Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, the First labour leader in India, in 1884 had submitted a memorandum to the Second Factory Commission

Period 2: Abolition Period (1890-1918)

- The Second phase of the labour movement was marked by the establishment of a number of associations of labour, such as in 1890, established Bombay Millhands Association; In 1909, Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha; The Bombay Postal Union in 1907 etc.
- These labour associations were not trade unions but were organisations more for the workers. The leaders were primarily social reformers, politicians etc.

Conclusion:

This period till 1918 witnessed when a number of measures through legal enactments, memorandum, welfare activities etc were taken up by the social reformers, politicians, government, management and social workers to improve labour conditions.

As this period, witnessed all initiatives taken were for workers thus reflects labour movement rather than trade union movement. The approach of labour movement during this period were moderate and could not mitigate the evils modern industrialisation. Thus, led to the birth of Indian trade union movement.

