

# Outline of an IR Theory of Industrial Conflict

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*Focusing on Bombay, locations around Bombay and more distant labour market areas in the state and on the basis of a sample of about 180 plants or other establishments controlled by 125 companies belonging largely to the private sector, this paper elaborates an industrial relations theory of industrial conflict. Conflict is seen as part of a bargaining process and the notion that the strike experience of individual plants is determined fundamentally by the industry to which they belong is rejected. Conflict is seen as belonging not to the plant itself but to its experience and the space described is phenomenological and not objective. Consequently there is no determinism which can explicate a pattern of conflict and the diversity of available choices does not bind workers to set responses. Likewise even if management behaviour conforms to certain determinisms even managers have choices. The study concentrates on plants in manufacturing sectors which may be called 'modern', that is, whose evolution was a product of the industrial expansion of the 1950s.*

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## Introduction

BOMBAY'S industrial expansion came to a halt in the early 70s (at least). Partly this was due to physical saturation—there was literally no room for further expansion and consequently strong government restrictions on attempts to expand even existing sites. But the saturation effect shows a locational staggering: the industrial expansion of the new manufacturing sectors starts in the heart of the city, in spaces left vacant by the textile industry (Sewri, which has Lever Bros and Firestone by the 40s; Worli, which has Metal Box, Glaxo and May & Baker in this early, pre-expansion phase; Kurla, where Mukand finally settles down, close to the city's only car manufacturing plant, after relocating from 1-ahore to Batala to Reay Road!) and moves progressively outwards, with a main line of evolution which moves from Ghatkopar (British Oxygen has a plant here by the mid-50s; Wyeth starts in 1962) and Kanjur (Ciba-Geigy relocates here from lardeo in 1954)—between them lies Vikhroli which a local business family, the Godrejs, moves into and occupies during the Depression, at throwaway prices—into Bhandup and Mulund (early 60s) and then beyond the municipal limits of Greater Bombay into the 'new industrial areas' where (at least on the Thane-Belapur Road) the last plants (Mindia, Roussel) are commissioned as recently as 1976.

The evolution is continuous; every inch of space is occupied; the plants are lined up in unbroken succession. The other locations confirm this theory of 'phases' of evolution, of a movement outwards, of progressive saturation: Poona (now Pune) mushrooms, then explodes in the 60s, attracting chiefly engineering plants; Nasik expands in the 70s, through the 'related diversification' of Bombay companies (Crompton, Siemens, Glaxo, Mahindras, etc); Chandrapur's expansion, at the state's borders, is even more recent—by the time Larsen & Toubro starts a highly automated cement plant at Chandrapur, the company has at least 30 years of industrial relations experience behind it.

When the new plants (of the late 70s/early 80s) are commissioned, it is impossible for the big companies moving into new locations simply to forget their histories in Bombay. In the remote universe of these new centres Bombay, rationalised and forced into decline, will at least live as a star whose massive explosion occurred many years ago!

In purely formal terms, we might distinguish two types of locations (in reality, of course, there are further types, but these are disregarded here):

- (i) clusters, an area of variable dimensions dominated by some four to five major plants which usually have some feature in common;
- (ii) line-ups, that is, linear concentrations along a major axis, for a stretch which is variable.

Bombay's industrial landscape is characterised by both sorts of locations; to be more precise, the physical distribution of Greater Bombay plants is dominated by a single-major line-up, running from Ghatkopar to Mulund, along the LBS Marg, and exactly parallel to the more heavily used of the two main railway lines. This is a typical linear concentration which groups something in the order of 25 major plants (or even groups of plants: Godrej and Crompton are both large complexes). Its industrial evolution belongs to the phase of rapid expansion over 1955-63, when the central government progressively modified its stand on the need for foreign investments, and a short (for India quite exceptional) period of economic liberalism closed markets to foreign exporters but opened them to investors. Bombay also has a whole series of clustered locations, but two of these are especially significant: Sewri (or 'Reay Road') because this was the location selected by the first wave of foreign investors, well before the 50s (Hindustan Lever, Firestone, Colgate, Britannia) so that today it has the city's oldest workforces in the 'new' manufacturing sectors; and, further out from the main part of the city, Trombay where Stanvac and Burmah-Shell established sprawling oil refineries, the city's first high-tech plants, in the still uncertain economic climate of the

early 50s; with their investments it became possible for Union Carbide to establish a petrochemicals unit, with company training for the first batch of operators.

Outside the municipal limits of Bombay but within its general labour market area, the Thane-Belapur Road constitutes India's most striking example of the line-up; a pure linear concentration running for some 25 kilometres between Kalwa (the first plant here Indal, once Alcan-controlled, now with the Mahindras) and Turbhe, in relatively open countryside but with no signs of a surrounding rural life. The leading establishments on the road are foreign-controlled (Siemens, Philips, BASF, Pfizer, etc) or foreign associated (Nocil with Shell, Polyolefins with Hoechst, Herdillia with British Petroleum), and most installations fairly capital-intensive. Employees' unionism is a sufficiently conspicuous feature of the area's industrial relations (Siemens Workers' Union, Philips Workers' Union, Pfizer Employees' Union, and so on) to make the location seem, to unions elsewhere (in Bombay, in older plants, etc) a *prime* example of the new industrial relations culture fostered by some groups of employers in the early 70s.

The 'dispersed rural locations' are very different. They are clusters but lacking any significant concentration, generally isolated, riot easily accessible, and overwhelmingly controlled by Indian employers. The job structures are far less sophisticated: dyestuffs, with a massive predominance of 'unskilled' groups, is a good example of the sort of industry attracted by these locations. Distance becomes a qualitative determination: If Thane-Belapur is still part of the Bombay labour market area (despite the fact that much of the labour is recruited locally), Shahad or Ambarnath, clearly, are not.

Thus locations can be distinguished according to their type and degree of massification, of the sheer physical concentration or dispersal of workforces. As the analysis shows, this will turn out to have an obvious bearing on the pattern of conflict. What varies between types of locations, that is, according to the degree of massification, is the

capacity of workers to sustain long strikes and the aggressiveness of employers in reacting with lockouts. Behind these forms of conflict lies a whole psychology, of the persistence and depth of feeling, which is fundamental to all conflict, that is, any sort of dispute, but whose action and laws become manifest only in the long ones. Locations also differ in the sort of firms they attract: the presence of foreign company establishments varies between areas. Foreign investors have a decided preference for centralised locations: for metropolitan or sub-metropolitan areas with a substantial concentration of industry. The LBS Marg (in the northern suburbs of Bombay), Thane-Belapur Road (40 minutes to an hour from Bombay) and the Bombay Poona Road (which leads out of Pune) are locations where much of the industrial activity is directly due to foreign plants.

How far do such plants represent a separate system of labour relations? How far does the greater progressiveness of their industrial structures reflect in more progressive personnel practices? Can one actually postulate the evolution of a managerial style peculiar to the sector of foreign companies, one which reflects a greater willingness to deal with unions and settle 'across the table' in contrast to the widespread hostility of Indian employers in the face of attempts to negotiate? The experience of companies with respect to industrial conflict in the individual establishments controlled by them is an obvious form in which to look for these answers; in other words, to test (and possibly discard) the hypothesis of a distinctive foreign sector which is discernibly progressive in its impact on labour relations. Since this involves comparing the experience of two groups of companies distinguished by their type of corporate control, the general distinction between Indian companies and those which, despite Indianisation, dilution of equity, etc, remain unambiguously foreign, becomes the crucial determination. In terms of the design of the sample, it determines the fact that 40 per cent of sample companies are foreign in the sense of unambiguously foreign-controlled.

Now it is generally felt that labour is the last field where international control of subsidiaries is at all evident. That is to say, while international companies enforce tight financial and technical control over their Indian operations, they show no obvious or direct involvement in the labour relations of their subsidiaries. The implications of this we shall not examine here, having discussed them in detail elsewhere. In fact, however, the distinction between labour and other areas of business is not and could never be so sharply formulated. For example, if an international group launches a drive to increase profitability worldwide, eventually this is bound to reflect in the day-to-day life of its local plants, even in something as subtle as the way the union describes its management: a 'fair' management might be

said to change because it is under pressure, internationally, to improve performance and starts trying to 'force things' on the union. The international influence may be more direct: the SKF plant at Chinchwad (Pune) is one of the very few plants anywhere in the country to have a full-blown piece-rate system; the reason is obvious, as the union pointed out: piece-rates are SKF policy worldwide. The example is an important one because the way you design a pay structure will be quite central to the general style of labour relations in the plant. Our examples: most companies in the Bombay area have, for years, set about reducing employment through the more strategic means of early retirement schemes and non-filling of vacancies; at Philips where the union decided to tackle this problem with the demand for an 'Employment Strength Guarantee', a Kalwa manager is reported to have told them, 'We have a directive (from top management-meaning the Dutch) not to fill in vacancies'. This is perfectly credible given the way headquarters of Eindhoven have handled redundancies in various Philips establishments throughout Europe. But for plants like Kalwa a senior manager at Eindhoven disclaimed any active intervention in local matters. About whether central management in the Netherlands ever intervened in local disputes in third world plants, he said: 'We want to know what is going on, just from our own point of view, so we do monitor what is happening, but we would never in-

terfere, that wouldn't be correct, *it would undermine the confidence of local management*. This is almost certainly the right description of the relationship between the UK, Dutch, German, etc, headquarters of parent companies and their Indian subsidiaries: non-interference does not rule out either consultation (during a dispute, for example, such as the Philips lockout of 1981) or formulation of policy (on further cuts in employment, for example). What it does mean, however, is that parents are in no position to exert any wholesale or active influence on local labour relations. This is an interesting situation because it allows for discrepancies if not actual conflicts within international corporate structures. Even when the staffing of top management functions by foreign managers (the usual practice in international subsidiaries) can be a counteracting force, the inability of international management to affect local conflicts through any more direct mechanisms of control can lead to obvious frustration: when repeated strike actions closed the Firestone plant at Sewri for most of 1967 and part of 1968, the only effective intervention Akron could make, it seems, was to dismiss G L Anderson, who was then managing director and, presumably, its own representative!

At any rate, the unions themselves are quite clear that personnel relations can change quite dramatically once international companies 'indianise' their management

TABLE 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS: COMPANIES

	Indian	Foreign	Joint	Total
Number of companies	70 (56)	50 (40)	5 (4)	125 (100)
Number of local establishments	102	72	5	179
Average number of establishments per company	1.457	1.44	1.00	

TABLE 2: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS: LOCATIONS

	Indian	Foreign	Joint	Total
Greater Bombay	53 (55.2)	40 (41.7)	3 (3.1)	96 (100)
Kanjur to Mulund	14	9	1	24
Trombay	4	3	0	7
Sewri	2	3	0	5
Thane-Belapur	5 (35.7)	8 (57.1)	1 (7.1)	14 (100)
Thana locations	8 (57.1)	6 (42.9)	0 (0)	14 (100)
Semi-rural centres	22 (59.5)	14 (37.8)	1 (2.7)	37 (100)
Puhe	13	11	1	25
Nasik	6	2	0	8
Dispersed rural	14 (77.8)	4 (22.2)	0 (0)	18 (100)

Notes: 'Local establishments' refers to all *Maharashtra* locations of the sample companies excluding plants, head offices, etc, which do not figure in any of the sample conflicts. The main Translocations' are Pokhran 1, Pokhran 2 and Kolshet; 'semi-rural centres' comprises the main Pune locations (Dapodi, Pimpri, Chinchwad, Akurdi, etc), Satpura and Ambad in Nasik, Aurangabad and Khopoli; 'dispersed rural' locations are Taloja, Shahad, Kalyan, Tarapur, Ambarnath or isolated locations in the countryside.

personnel and foreign managers leave, or when the company itself is taken over by an Indian group and the international firm pulls out (as happened with Firestone early in the 80s). This general attitude or feeling is so widespread that it must reflect an objective difference in bargaining behaviour between the two groups of managers (*NB*: not types of companies). A worker with over 25 years' experience at Firestone felt that though they did not have as much shopfloor contact, American managers were much less 'mad about production' than the main group of Indian managers (four were mentioned by name). Clearly, this was not a characterisation of management's objectives (all groups would be interested in production) but of ways of dealing with the workforce. In Pfizer, also American, Indianisation started in 1973 and led, according to the union, to a conscious change in management policy, for the worse. McGee, the American managing director upto 73, was a popular manager, used to mix with people and 'would not drag so much'. In other words, there was more management resistance, once the change occurred. Not only that; 'Now for everything these people (i.e., the Indian managers) have to refer to New York'. In Ciba-Geigy, also pharmaceuticals, the change occurred in 1969. Before that, in the early 60s there were six to seven Swiss managers, 'favourable' to the union. The Swiss attitude was 'You give us production, we'll give you money'. When the company declared a lay-off of almost two years in the early 60s, the general manager committed Ciba to paying almost full wages for the period. After Indianisation significant changes must have occurred because in 1980 Ciba would resist a bonus demand with a lockout of nine-and-a-half months. The (Indian) manager said to be responsible for the lockout 'wants to finish the union', it was claimed.

Even these examples are enough to show that for unions the decisive test of management's (or a manager's) attitudes is its willingness to discuss. This is going to be an important variable in this study, the crucial factor which differentiates the good managements from the bad ones. Conceptually, it 'forms the basis of what this paper calls 'the Industrial Relations theory of industrial conflict', or the IR theory for short. Such a theory sees conflict as part of the bargaining system. As such it rejects the notion that the strike experience of individual plants is determined (fundamentally) by the industry to which they belong. Every plant belongs to an industry and has definite industrial characteristics—a certain kind of manufacturing process, stable or unstable markets, more or less highly qualified labour forces, etc. But conflict belongs not to the plant itself but to its experience. The space it describes is phenomenological, not objective. There is no determinism which can 'explain' a pattern of conflict. Workers are not bound to react, or bound to act in certain ways, or bound to

act with a single conception. At every stage choices are possible. And even if management behaviour conforms to certain determinisms (the features which make up Capital in general' and 'many capitals': the drive to expand, to modernise, to increase efficiency, etc), even managers face choices.

With respect to unions, the two most obvious choices they face are (1) how soon they should settle once they have agreed to negotiate, and (2) whether to negotiate at all. The new manufacturing industries of the Bombay area were the first productive sectors anywhere in the country to witness the widespread evolution of a bargaining structure at plant level. In this sense it would be perfectly possible to maintain that the form of industrial culture which characterises these sectors is one whose essential tendency is collective bargaining. However, this tendency exists initially only in an ideal form. In practice it takes considerable pressure including conflict to establish bargaining habits among employers—to get employers to accept unions and start negotiating on a regular basis. But once this habit evolves, it establishes not just a bargaining culture in the sense of a general willingness to negotiate and a rational perception, by employers, of the need for some forms of 'joint determination', but a bargaining system in the sense of something with institutional form and overriding rationality, e.g., a predominant level at which agreements are negotiated (in Bombay the individual plant or establishment), a predominant cyclicality (three years), accepted ways of justifying demands (bargaining criteria and orbits of comparison) or the evolution of a conflict rationality which is purely instrumental (slowing down to force management to the table, chargesheeting to secure a trade-off, etc).

Whether to negotiate at all; initially, in fact, even in Bombay, employers were not at all inclined to negotiate. There is striking proof of this fact in the repeated need for courts to intervene to establish the most elementary types of service conditions in big Bombay companies which were already in operation by the 50s. The Industrial Award was the mechanism by which this happened

and the first form in which, for many companies, a classification system might emerge, manual grades finally receive a dearness allowance previously conceded only to staff, and so on. Foreign firms were no exception: Glaxo's conditions were defined by the Thakur Award of 1952, Parke-Davis' by the Bilgrami Award of 1959. Firestone is a striking example of a foreign plant with no obvious tradition of bargaining for over two decades of its earliest activity. In existence by the 40s when it took a famous strike soon after independence, the company would only sign its first settlement in 1969! For most of the 60s conditions were governed by the Meher Award. For a whole series of big companies (Voltas, Firestone, May & Baker, Tomco, etc) these early awards were the means by which companies were forced to extend a 'slab system' of DA to most sections of their staff. It was this system which would sustain pay levels through the inflation of the 70s and 80s when employers would do their best to impose drastic ceilings or evolve other formulas.

As long as big companies, Indian or foreign, remained isolated features of the industrial landscape, resistance to bargaining was a perfectly feasible employer stance. What decisively altered the balance in favour of the widespread acceptance of a bargaining culture (and the evolution of a bargaining system) was the massive industrial expansion in relatively new parts of the city, out of which emerged whole productive sectors, new workforces, rapid unionisation and, in the late 60s, new levels of strike activity. Throughout these years the movement of conflict was a definite expression of the historically emerging system of collective bargaining. The IR theory of industrial conflict involves seeing both strikes and lockouts as (basically) forms and effects of a bargaining system. But what sort of forms and effects do they represent?

How soon to settle; there is in fact an objective indicator of the degree of resistance which a management poses to discussing and settling the claims of its employees. In work published by the Union Research Group (Bombay), this is called the 'bargaining cycle' and is defined as the time elaps-

TABLE 3: CONFLICT: TYPES AND FREQUENCIES

	Indian	Foreign	Joint	Total
Number of companies	70	50	5	125
Number of conflicts	589	385	37	1011
Frequency of conflict per company	8.41	7.70	7.4	8.09
Short conflicts (number)	257	190	17	464
Short conflicts (per cent)	43.6	49.4	46.0	45.9
Number of lockouts	77	31	5	113
Frequency of lockouts per company	1.10	0.62	1.00	0.90
Lockouts (per cent)	13.1	8.1	13.5	11.2
Lockouts (per cent) excluding short conflicts	23.2	15.9	25.0	20.7

*Note:* Conflicts' refers to disputes entered in the registers as strikes or lockouts; thus the 'number of conflicts' is the total number of strikes and lockouts over the period 1956-84. 'Short conflicts' are disputes whose total duration is less than forty-eight hours; the minimum recorded duration for the sample is 20 minutes.

ing between the date of submission of a charter and the date of final settlement (or the date when the agreement is finally signed). The longer this interval, the greater the presumed resistance on the part of management. Faced with such resistance, there are several possible decisions a union would have to take: whether to apply any pressure, how much pressure to apply, what forms of pressure to apply, and for how long. Legalistic styles of unionism would in general imply that a union is unwilling or unable to apply any sort of pressure (other than the legal one!). As a general style of intervention legalism was badly discredited by the late 70s. What this means, presumably, is that workers could see that the *kind* of pressure represented by a case against the company was not sufficiently strong, not intense enough, to force a significant retreat or even any sort of retreat on management. By then it was also clear that legalism was in fact a company strategy for avoiding or postponing a settlement indefinitely; it was the standard form in which companies would tackle pay claims which they were simply unwilling to pay (e.g., Hindustan Lever with respect to the pay claims of head office staff). But despite appearances, strikes are not the obvious alternative to a fruitless legal battle. Workers may want to avoid strikes for precisely the same reasons for which they wish to avoid litigation: namely, that going on strike will cost them more than it will cost the company. This is in fact the rationality which underlies most of the reasoning behind the decision whether to strike. And because strikes generally involve wage losses which it could take years to recoup, striking is not the first option most workers (or unions) consider when deciding the issue of how much pressure and what forms of pressure.

This establishes two things: (I) there is no a priori reason to identify strikes as the expression of a superior bargaining position, as the most effective or most aggressive stance workers can take in the face of employer recalcitrance—even if some unions, notably Samant's, base their bargaining strategies on a metaphysics of this type. On the contrary, the natural tendency of workers to avoid strike action, if they can help it, is a strong reason for supposing that if they strike at all, they do so because the company has left them with no option, not to strike, in the given situation, would mean a major tactical retreat, immediate submission or wholesale defeat, and since none of these are options in any real sense, one has to strike. But 'in the given situation' is a problematic notion, since the givenness of a situation is never absolute (or no situation is ever given in an absolute sense). It presupposes (a) that strategic options have been progressively closed, that workers have tried every other means and failed, or (b) that they are not seriously aware of the range of options available to them. In either event, strikes need not represent the most militant or most effective form of bargaining

behaviour. (2) A workforce fully aware of its strategic options would be aware of a whole range of possible forms of bargaining pressure based on implying determinate types of industrial action. Thus there is a field of possibilities. It does not follow, of course, that there is a precise 'economic' calculation which enables unions to select a form of action in some objective way. On the other hand, it is almost certainly true that internal disruption of plants is generally the most effective way of maximising the costs of an action to the company relative to the self-inflicted costs. But not all unions would be willing or even able to pursue this sort of strategy.

By a sort of correlation, the IR theory of conflict enables us to see lockouts as ways in which employers bargain, i.e., refuse to negotiate, since the refusal to negotiate could be a feasible bargaining stance—where, for example, employers (i) want to pressurise workers into accepting important management demands, or (ii) want to break the union. Perhaps the single most important result of this study is the staggering extent to which employers have started making use of the lockout. This is true of employers in the locations we deal with, but presumably also true of employers elsewhere in India.

The most attractive feature of the IR theory is that it enables us to preserve and, in some sense, to account for the enormous diversity of experience with respect to conflict and industrial relations at plant level. The most usual form of deterministic explanation claims to account for this diversity in terms of differences between industries. But the *prima facie* appearance is very different one: the diversity of experience is a diversity between plants and herefore not so much between industries as within them. Searle and Pfizer are both American controlled pharmaceutical plants barely ten minutes apart on the Thane-Belapur Road. But in Searle the union can recollect no strikes or lockouts in the company's history, industrial relations are described as good and the management described as responsive. This responsiveness is important because it was repeatedly cited by the union as a reason for not having any conflict ('no need for action'). Pfizer management has been much more ruthless and the plant's experience quite different. Its deployment practices forced serious divisions in the workforce which in turn led to a major split in the union situation. During the Emergency management used this situation and the general climate of depression to force the union to accept a 50 per cent cut in DA and a ceiling on basic; in 1977 when this happened they lost their bonus as well because the company introduced a PF scheme under which they paid not 20 per cent of gross but 12 per cent. In the years which follow of management used their position to automate rapidly, making Pfizer the most automated pharmaceutical operation in the Bombay area. The personnel manager, Pritam Singh Nair, is said to have describ-

ed the Pfizer temporaries as a 'well-trained battalion'; i.e., management could take a strike if it had to. And in 1980 it did—for 111 days. It took the Pfizer Employees' Union over three years (38 months to be precise) to reach their settlement of the early 80s. Examples of such glaring contrasts within identical product groups could be multiplied indefinitely. The IR experience of Bombay certainly does not support the notion that industry is a primary influence in labour relations.

What are the important factors? We would suggest that the pattern of conflict at plant level can be traced to a conjunction of two groups of variables: (i) *union preferences* with respect to the degree and forms of bargaining pressure: and (ii) from management's side its general 'way of dealing with the union', especially its *propensity to negotiate*. If union preferences depend partly on the past tradition of bargaining activity in the plant, at least as much of it as the union can remember, then management's way of dealing with the union is important if only because it contributes decisively to the tradition which shapes union preferences. In short, the IR theory states that conflict is plant-individuated and not industry-specific. It stresses the autonomy and significance of IR culture and factors in accounting for the distribution of conflict both between plants and within plants over time.

There is a methodological circularity which sustains deterministic models: the standard form in which disputes data is usually available predetermines the study of strikes as a study of the conflict patterns of entire industries or groups of industries: of Knowles, and Kerr and Siegel especially, but even Cronin's recent study of the UK or Michelle Durand's work on France. At these standard levels of aggregation where the strike experiences of numerous individual plants are 'averaged' into a more abstract sort of entity, namely, the experience of a whole industry (however that is defined), there is of course no way of making any sort of statements about what conflict actually means at the level of individual establishments, and how workforces or managements differ in their approach to conflict. These internal differences, between workforces or between companies, can clearly only begin to emerge if the data on disputes is retained in its original, establishment-level, form and not subjected to some form of aggregation too rapidly.

## II

### Source and Sample

The data we were able to secure is precisely of this form. It is drawn from two sets of registers which go by different names, but which are kept in the same office and intended to record every industrial dispute which takes the form of a strike or lockout anywhere in the state of Maharashtra, that is, in all (or at least most) areas of employ-

ment in any of the main industrial concentrations (Greater Bombay, Thane, Thane-Belapur, Pune, Nasik, etc) or of the numerous smaller locations spread through districts which are more purely rural. Disputes are recorded in these registers (a) manually, by the clerical staff employed in the office, and (b) following a standard rudimentary format, which is as follows:

- (i) Name of the establishment
- (ii) Location(s) involved in the dispute
- (iii) Starting and closing dates of the dispute
- (iv) Number of workers involved (workers' stands for all groups of employees)
- (v) Size of establishment
- (vi) The union or unions associated with the dispute
- (vii) Reason or reasons for the dispute
- (viii) Whether a strike or a lockout
- (ix) Outcome

In transcribing data from this source, we decided to eliminate the category (ix), since subjective estimates of outcome are not likely to be helpful, and might be misleading, especially when only three options are open (successful/failed/compromise).

Since the registration and recording of disputes is seen as a clerical function (as opposed to something assigned to a research department) and the staff seem to have no guidelines as to the form in which information should be elicited and entered, beyond the schema just described, these records, the only ones of an official character, display some inevitable defects. The main ones are: (ii) frequent imprecision or inaccuracy about locations, (iii) some imprecision about dates, e.g., discrepancies in the starting or closing date, sometimes in both, as between the two registers, (iv)-(v) when only one figure is cited, unclarity about whether that figure represents the size of the establishment or the numbers involved in the dispute; also, unclarity about whether establishment size is always defined to include the whole establishment, management included, or just bargainable categories, or even just the number of workers; as between the two registers, however, one shows a tendency to round off, while the other generally cites specific estimates which could only have been got from the company, (vi) when two or more unions are involved, unclarity about which union has initiated the dispute, and which unions are non-participant; also, occasional inaccuracies regarding the affiliation of a particular union, (vii) lack of interest in the causes behind/reasons for the dispute and usually (but not so much in the early registers) only the most summary description of this aspect, e.g., 'pay', 'general demands', 'reinstatement of suspended workers', but only rarely, 'protest against non-payment of wages to a workman who had refused to carry out the assigned work as additional help was not given to him', and (ix) no indication as to what constitutes a 'successful' outcome as opposed to a 'compromise', and so on.

Despite these defects, the data recorded in these registers through the patient labour of the office staff remain an invaluable source for any more precise sort of conception of basic features of the pattern of conflict in the state. Two final remarks about the source: for a large number of disputes which finally figure in our sample it was possible for us to have an independent control in the form of information on disputes obtained directly from the plants, through management or union. This stock of information was built up over a number of years, through the work of the Union Research Group. Secondly, for us the most serious drawback of the registers is their neglect of the column\* reporting issues. There is an important methodological reason for this, which Michelle Durand has drawn attention to. Standard causal explanations are relatively uninterested by the issues behind conflicts. This is because 'the demands which in a sense are an invitation to explore the strike itself... simply figure as various sorts of immediate or even local causes'. In the structural approach advocated by Durand and the IR theory followed by us, demands are

crucial. The issues behind a conflict or reasons for a dispute are thus a vital dimension of disputes data. But in any form of large-scale data entry, at least three sorts of 'simplifying assumptions' are likely to be involved here. First, that the grounds stated for a dispute by either or both of the parties to a dispute are in some sense a reliable expression of what that dispute is about. This involves a simplification in the sense that there may be other grounds for the dispute which are not stated because, for example, the issues they involve are not negotiable or the real grievances do not translate so easily into demands. This relates to the standard sociological distinction between 'latent' and 'manifest' causes. Secondly: that the basic issue or set of issues behind a conflict will not change while the conflict lasts; and thirdly, that the grounds- for a dispute have been accurately recorded in the official sources.

The sample we work with is every dispute entered in the registers for any of the local (that is, state level) establishments controlled by a set of 125 Indian-registered companies: 70 (56 per cent) Indian, 50 (40 per cent)

TABLE 4: CONFLICT LEVELS: MOVEMENT OVER TIME

	1956-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
Number of conflicts (overall)	101 (10.0)	164 (16.2)	226 (22.4)	268 (26.5)	252 (24.9)
<i>of which</i>					
Indian	58	110	123	144	154
Foreign	41	50	94	115	85
Joint	2	4	9	9	13
Number of short conflicts	64	102	139	99	60
<i>of which</i>					
Indian	40	70	71	48	28
Foreign	22	30	63	49	26
Joint	2	2	5	2	6
Short conflicts as per cent of total in group—					
Indian	69.0	63.6	57.7	33.3	18.2
Foreign	53.7	60.0	67.0	42.6	30.6
Number of long conflicts	37	62	87	169	192
<i>of which</i>					
Indian	18	40	52	96	126
Foreign	19	20	31	66	59
Joint	0	2	4	7	7

Note: 'long conflicts' are conflicts whose recorded duration spans a minimum of 3 calendar days; they are 'long' as opposed to the 'short' conflicts; the really long conflicts are grouped together and studied separately.

TABLE 5: THE MOVEMENT OF CONFLICT: STRIKES VS LOCKOUTS

	1956-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
Number of strikes	96	160	211	241	190
Number of lockouts	5	4	15	27	62
Strike/lockout ratio	19.2	40.0	14.1	8.9	3.1
Number of strikes					
Indian	53	108	113	124	114
Foreign	41	48	90	110	65
Joint	2	4	8	7	11
Number of lockouts					
Indian	5	2	10	20	40
Foreign	0	2	4	5	20
Joint	0	0	1	2	2

purely foreign, and five (4 per cent) sharing characteristics of both. The total number of establishments controlled by these companies and for which at least one dispute is recorded in the registers works out to 179. The only registers we could actually locate were those for 1956, 1957 and for the whole period from 1961 to 1984. There have been some major conflicts since 1984, one at the Kalwa plant of Philips, one at Nocil (the first in its history), a lockout at Modistone (previously Firestone), but these, obviously, are not considered here since they fall outside the sample period. The working sample is drawn from a more extensive list of disputes for which it was decided to transcribe every dispute occurring, anywhere in Maharashtra, in any establishment controlled by the main large or middle-sized companies active in manufacturing excluding textiles. Thus textiles, non-manufacturing (banking, transport, etc) and small firms were the main casualties of the selection process. What the transcribed sample effectively isolated was 'modern industry' in the areas around Bombay, the kinds of manufacturing which emerged in the 50s and 60s when the government abandoned its opposition to the operation of foreign firms and allowed import of technology on a large scale.

How much of the actual total volume of conflict does the working sample finally capture? By the end of the 70s our registers were recording a total of well over 600 disputes per year. (For the period 1978-1981, when there was a rapid escalation in the level of conflict, the second peak of the 70s, they recorded an average of 566 strikes and 70 lockouts.) This means that our sample captures about 8 per cent of the total number of conflicts noted in the registers. As a proportion of all conflicts occurring in the manufacturing sectors which the sample studies, the coverage is likely to be well over 50 per cent.

### III

#### Frequencies, Durations and Issues

The 'results' are presented in two sections. The first deals with Tables 3-8 and describes results involving either (i) all sample conflicts or (ii) all conflicts with a minimum duration of three calendar days. The next section will deal with Tables 9-19 which embody the results for only the major conflicts (long conflicts with a minimum duration of 60 consecutive calendar days) and for conflict intensity levels.

As bargaining habits have become generalised among employers (though not, it seems, among the powerful group which controls Bombay's textile industry and who are rigidly organised behind the Bombay Millowners' Association), largely under the pressure of the unions, management's average 'propensity to negotiate' has undoubtedly increased. Take a not untypical case of this evolution: the Greaves Cotton

and Allied Companies' Employees' Union was established in 1946 on the initiative, mainly, of people in Greaves Cotton (then British-controlled, and later one of the firms which floated Crompton Greaves, now controlled by the Thapars); yet for almost 26 years of the federation's existence, the service conditions of Greaves Cotton employees continued to be defined by a series of awards: in 1946, 1950, 1959; the first negotiated settlement on general demands occurred only in 1974! and it took the union three-and-a-half years to reach that agreement because the company wanted a DA ceiling (which it did not finally get). But since 1974 there have been at least two other agreements: so after a prolonged period of simply refusing to negotiate, a phase came when management would even sign three agreements in the space of nine years.

One important reason why there is less apparent resistance to signing agreements on some regular cycle is the idea, now increasingly popular among Bombay managements, of using agreements as a way in which they can get their own demands through—that is to say, accepting collective bargaining but giving it an employer's rationality. Insofar as employers see agreements in this way, there is no reason why they should not have or show a propensity to negotiate. But, and this is the important point here, this can also mean a refusal to negotiate on employee demands as long as management demands are not accepted. Now these are precisely the sorts of features which are reflected in the individual dimensions of a dispute. 'Duration' and 'type of dispute' (strike/lockout) are related to (a) settling time, which measures the degree of employer resistance to settling; (b) union persistence, or the employees' determination to hold out in the face of employer resistance—this implies the capacity to hold out but does not necessarily mean that the longer a strike, the stronger a union; (c) a refusal to negotiate at all, which would reflect in

longer conflict durations and a higher frequency of lockouts. But all of this occurs in *time*. There is a constant evolution which changes the conditions under which unions confront employers, a historical movement which affects industry if only because it affects all sectors of the life of a country. This 'conjunctural' movement is vital to the way industrial conflict looks at any given time, because by altering the general correlation of forces (between employers and employees) the conjuncture affects bargaining psychology in a fundamental way, and through this rates of conflict (the frequency with which open confrontations occur), conflict durations (both the willingness and the capacity to hold out) and the aggressiveness with which employers hit back. Employers in India have always been sensitive to this wider 'political' conjuncture, for example, the union at Pfizer can recall that in 1964, shortly after the clash with China Pfizer management launched its own minor offensive, with the introduction of a six-day week: 'We lost Saturdays and 11 bank holidays'.

A very rough periodisation might help to set the 'results' in a broader historical background: (1) throughout the 50s and 60s a few large key firms reach settlements through awards; these are years of industrial expansion, of the large-scale emergence of modern manufacturing sectors (petrochemicals, electronics and electrical engineering, above all pharmaceuticals...), plants are being commissioned, or relocating, workforces are looking around for unions, much of the conflict which does exist is led by the same group of more (for that period) militant trade unions (notably the Bombay Labour Union associated with the Socialist Party); so the whole picture is one of flux, only the older firms have stable conditions. (2) 1968-74, a phase of *rapid* union expansion, a lot of firms which were unionised in the 60s now have to settle, there is a massive increase in the level of bargaining

TABLE 6: CONFLICT DURATIONS: MOVEMENT OVER TIME  
(Long conflicts (3 days +), average durations in calendar days)

	1956-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
Overall	32.51	24.61	35.09	46.92	69.45
Indian	49.83	25.28	36.50	56.63	73.79
Foreign	16.11	22.85	31.48	32.32	63.64
Joint	—	29.00	44.75	56.00	71.86
Strikes	28.69	23.76	31.08	37.56	49.41
Indian	47.08	23.95	33.40	45.30	46.93
Foreign	16.11	22.78	26.44	28.37	53.60
Joint	—	29.00	40.33	30.20	57.60
Indian/foreign strike duration differential	2.92	1.05	1.26	1.60	0.86
Lockouts	57.00	37.00	54.33	97.52	116.00
Indian	57.00	50.50	49.50	99.65	131.64
Foreign	—	23.50	65.50	79.80	84.79
Joint	—	—	58.00	120.50	107.50
Indian/foreign lockout duration differential	—	2.15	0.76	1.25	1.55
Lockout/strike duration differential	1.99	1.56	1.75	2.60	2.35

activity, a stable bargaining culture begins to emerge, but in and through conflict Strike frequencies peak towards the end of this phase; which is also, of course, a period of intense political unrest as an 'opposition' emerges to Congress, which breaks the hold of the party in several states, is outmanoeuvred and tries desperately to recover ground. (3) 1975-77, the Emergency years, large groups of people are terrorised into quiet submission, strike activity declines sharply, managements become more aggressive and take advantage of the general depression. (4) 1977-81, massive escalation in the level and intensity of conflict as the Emergency is lifted and employees hit back; but by now Indian employers have started to make repeated use of the lockout; their right to do so is not challenged legally; the period ends with the catastrophic defeat of the textile strike; thousands of textile workers lose their jobs and a general phase of 'rationalisation' becomes increasingly evident, throughout industry. Finally, (5) the early 80s, the ruling psychology is defensive, a lower frequency of conflicts overall, but a significantly higher relative frequency of lockouts, and a dramatic extension of conflict durations. Attitudes harden, on both sides; managements start using agreements to push through their own demands.

Table 3 shows that there is no major difference between Indian and foreign controlled companies in overall conflict frequency: in other words, foreign companies are not conflict-free enclaves. The average frequency for the sample as a whole is at least eight conflicts (per company) over the sample period, but Indian firms have had slightly more than this (8.4), foreign firms slightly less (7.7). In foreign plants, half of the sample conflicts are short (that is, not exceeding 48 hours and in most cases lasting only a few hours), but the proportion is not significantly lower in the other groups. With respect to lockouts the pattern is much more distinctive and almost certainly significant. Eight per cent of all conflicts in the foreign sector have taken the form of lockouts (disregarding differences between periods), whereas in Indian companies the proportion is 13 per cent. Our figures indicate that *on average an Indian-controlled company would have had at least one lockout in the sample period*. There is no doubt that what this indicates is a systematic use of the lockout which may very well be the single most distinctive feature of the IR behaviour of employers in India. The typical joint ventures behave ambiguously: in their frequency of conflict per company, they resemble the foreign plants, in terms of the relative predominance of short conflicts they fall between the two groups, in their occurrence of lockouts they are like the Indian establishments. This seems to suggest that in such firms (viz, Otis, Vickers Sperry, Indal [these three run by the Mahindras], Ralliwolf and Century Enka), employees behave like workforces in foreign plants, while

TABLE 7: MAIN DEMANDS/ISSUES—EVOLUTION OVER TIME

	Indian					Foreign					Total
	6-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	56-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	
<b>A Pay-Related</b>											
1 Charter	1	19	22	32	36	4	8	13	26	21	196
2 Adjudication			1	1				1			3
3 Interim relief	1		1	1	1		1				5
4 Dearness allowance	2	14	2	5	2		2			1	30
5 House rent [HRA]						2			1		3
6 Bonus	3	18	16	18	12	2	7	10	9	15	111
7 Ex-gratia					1			1	2		4
8 Festival advance		2	3	4					2		11
9 Allowances	1	3		1		1	1	1	1	1	10
10 Incentive payments	1	1	2		1	2		3	3	2	15
11 Overtime		2							1	1	4
12 Holiday payment			1								1
13 Gratuity		1									1
14 Parity					1					1	2
15 Minimum wages									1		2
16 Non-payment/arrears		1	2	3	1	2	1				10
17 Pay reduction					1						1
<b>B Conditions/Facilities</b>											
18 Canteen			4	3	2	1	1	1	2		14
19 Transport			1	1	2		1		1		6
20 Uniforms	1	1				1					3
21 Medical facilities								3			3
22 Temperature									1		1
23 Accidents		1		1			1			1	4
24 Safety-related				1	1			1			3
<b>C Job Security</b>											
25 Permanency	1	4	2		4	1	1		3	1	17
26 Retrenchment	2	12	5	4	2	3		1		1	30
27 Lay-off	1	3	1		2		2	1			10
28 Refusal to take back			1								1
29 Retirement age					1						1
<b>D Leave and Hours</b>											
30 Paid holidays	2	6		2		2		2	1		16
31 Annual leave, etc		1			1			1			3
32 Weekly off	3			1					2		6
33 Working hours		1	1					2			4
34 Reporting time		1	1					1	1		4
35 Refusal of leave	1										1
<b>E Deployment</b>											
36 Grading/classification		1	1	3	1			1		2	6
37 Upgradation						1		1		2	4
38 Promotion		1	1	1		1	1	2	2	2	11
39 Transfers	2		6	4	1	1	4	2			20
40 Shiftwork				2		1			1		4
41 Time deployment		1	1	1	1	1	1	2			7
42 Production standards	1			3		1	2	1	2	1	11
43 Manning levels		1		1		2	1	1			7
44 Quality standards				1							1
45 Refusal of assignment		1				2	1	1			5
46 Job demarcation	1		1		1		1	1			5
47 Work methods		1		1		1		2			5
48 Computerisation			1		1						2
49 Shifting machinery				1							1
50 Subcontracting		1		1						1	3
51 Hiring methods		2		1		1			1		5
52 Filling vacancies									1		1
53 Conflict with supervisors	1	2			3	2					8
<b>F Treatment of Employees</b>											
54 Management attitudes		3	1	1		1	2			2	10
55 Insulting behaviour	5						1				6
56 Abusive language		1	3		1					1	6
57 Assault on employees	2	1	1	1	1	1			1	1	9
58 Refusal of access				1	1		1				3
59 Harassment				1	1		1				3
<b>G Disciplinary Action</b>											
60 Showcause notice	2			2	1			3	3	3	15
61 Charge-sheeting	3	1	10	6	4	4	2	8	7	3	49
62 Suspensions	11	8	10	10	13	1	6	9	8	6	85
63 Dismissals	6	8	11	7	10	4	2	10	9	3	73
64 For domestic enquiry		1		1		1					3
65 Against enquiry			2				1	1			4
66 Police arrests				1	1	1			1		4
67 Deduction of pay				1		2		1			5

(Contd)

TABLE 7: (CONTD)

	Indian					Foreign					Total
	56-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	56-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	
<b>H Bargaining Relationships</b>											
68 Union recognition	1	7	3	4	6	1	2	4		1	29
69 Union rivalry	2	2	6	4	11	4			6	6	41
70 Supportive actions	1		1	2	12			3	1	3	27
71 IR conflicts	2			2	5	2		1	1	1	14
72 Victimization	1		1		2				1	2	7
73 'Anti-labour policy'			1						1		2
74 Against lockout					1				2		3
75 Union rights				1				1	1		4
76 Reject settlement					1						1
77 Failure to implement				1	2						5
78 Go-slow			2	5	12			1	1	8	31
79 Disruptive action			1	3	2			1		2	9
80 'Indiscipline', etc				2	7					4	13
81 Violence			1	5	3				1	3	14
<b>I Others</b>											
82 Miscellaneous	1	2		1	1	1	2	2			10
											1129

Note: 'Total' includes demands/issues listed for conflicts in the companies classified as joint ventures. 'Main demands/issues' are those entered against each dispute as the 'cause' of the dispute, in some cases supplemented by our own information about individual disputes. Excluding 34 conflicts where this information is absent or insufficient, the average frequency of main demands/issues per conflict works out to 1.16.

TABLE 8: PREOCCUPATIONS IN INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT AROUND BOMBAY, 1956-84 (Expressed by the relative weight of different groups of demands or issues (per cent))

	Overall N=1129	Indian N=665	Foreign N=423
Pay-related	36.2	36.2	35.5
Disciplinary action	21.1	19.5	23.4
Bargaining relationships	17.7	18.8	15.4
Deployment	9.4	8.1	12.1
Job security	5.2	6.8	3.3
Treatment of employees	3.4	3.8	2.8
Leave and hours	3.1	3.2	2.8
Conditions/facilities	3.0	2.9	3.5
Other	0.9	0.7	1.2
Charter	17.36	16.54	17.02
Bonus	9.83	10.08	10.17
Suspensions	7.53	7.82	7.09
Dismissals	6.47	6.32	6.62
Chargesheets	4.34	3.61	5.67
Union rivalry	3.63	3.76	3.78
Transfers	1.77	1.95	1.65

Note: 'Overall' includes the companies classified as joint ventures.

TABLE 9: THE MOVEMENT OF MAJOR CONFLICT: TYPES AND FREQUENCIES

	1953-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
Number of major conflicts (60 days +) (N=157)	15	17	51	74
Indian	12	11	36	49
Foreign	3	5	12	23
Joint	0	1	3	2
Number of major strikes (N=89)	12	13	32	32
Indian	9	9	22	20
Foreign	3	3	9	11
Joint	0	1	1	1
Number of major lockouts (N=68)	3	4	19	42
Indian	3	2	14	29
Foreign	0	2	3	12
Joint	0	0	2	1
Strike/lockout ratio	4.0	3.25	1.68	0.76
S/L ratios for				
Indian	3.0	4.5	1.57	0.69
Foreign	—	1.5	3.0	0.92
Joint	—	—	0.5	1.0

Note: Major conflicts are long conflicts whose duration spans a minimum of 60 consecutive calendar days. The strike/lockout ratio measures the relative frequency of the basic types of conflict.

employers behave like employer! in the Indian group.

Table 4 introduces the time dimension by five-year periods. The overall number of conflict (short + long) escalates through most of the sample period and peaks in the late 70s. This could reflect the actual movement in manufacturing but if we take an annual breakdown of the total volume of conflict reported in the registers (manufacturing and non-manufacturing) the peak seems to come slightly later, in 1980-81 (the Figures are: 1978-630, 1979-619, 1980-663, 1981-636). It seems likely that the rapidly escalating conflict levels of the post-Emergency period did in fact climax earlier in the big companies which were almost certainly catalysts in the general unrest throughout industry. However, the overall curve combines conflicting movements: the rapid shopfloor confrontations which make their way into the registers as short conflicts show a different pattern. In the Indian sector conflicts of this type *decline progressively* from 69 per cent of all conflicts in the earliest period (up to 1964) to only 18 per cent in the early 80s; indeed, even the absolute number of such conflicts declines in the last two periods (1975-1984); for foreign firms there are two opposed phases—the predominance of short conflicts in the early period actually increases up to the early 70s when they come to account for 67 per cent or two out of every three foreign company conflicts; but from the late 70s the movement is reversed and short conflicts decline both relatively and in absolute terms. It looks as if a general tendency is forcing itself through but with some retention of traditional patterns in the foreign plants; thus even in the early 80s, at least 30 per cent of all foreign-Company conflicts continue to be confrontations of the rapid kind.

Long conflicts (those lasting at least three days, and generally of course much longer, several weeks or months) behave very differently, increasing continuously through all periods\* to peak in the 80s. One should note the sharp increase in the number of such conflicts in Indian firms in the late 60s, as if signifying that if there was ever an industrial consensus in Bombay industry, it collapsed more rapidly here, whereas in the foreign sector it seems to persist till the end of the 60s, then starts cracking slowly in the early 70s, to collapse completely in the general upheaval at the end of that decade. And this is our first indication of an interesting feature of the results: the general *tendencies* of industrial conflict in the Bombay area are first pre-figured, always, by movements in the *Indian* sector. For foreign firms there are fewer long conflicts in the 80s, as if a consensus was re-emerging; but the absolute level of such disputes remains high, and not significantly below the late 70s peak; and certainly, there is no reduction in the intensity of conflict in this period, as other movements (duration, lockouts) will show.



Table 5 introduces the 'strike/lockout ratio', which measures the frequency of one type of dispute (initiated by workers) in relation to the other (initiated by management). *There is a sustained, rapid decline in the S/L ratio between 1965 and 1984* (which corresponds, of course, to an increase in the proportion of lockouts), a result which implies an increasing aggressiveness on the part of employers. But such aggressiveness is likely to reflect not only the higher overall combativity of their workforces but the fact (also highly significant) that among these workforces there is an increasing recourse to forms of industrial action, especially go-slows, which employers have no means of crushing or at least containing other than the lockout. Thus a declining S/L ratio need not imply only an increase in employer militancy, it could also reflect, and probably does, an increasing sophistication in the forms of industrial action used against employers.

In both sectors strike frequencies peak in the late 70s, lockouts in the 80s. The obvious implication seems to be that the 80s represent an employer backlash against the dramatic spurt in union militancy in the late 70s. But in that case it would be more accurate to visualise the backlash as a deeper reaction whose forms include changing employer strategies and to see these strategies as having an independent effect on the intensity of conflict. An unwillingness to deal with certain unions, that is, the use of lockouts against them, may well be mainly a response to the late 70s, but a more fundamental movement would have to account for the tendency of managements, in the same period, to formulate demands of their own and make settlements conditional on their acceptance. In any case, there is a difference of rhythm in the general evolution of the 'employers' offensive'—in the foreign sector the number of lockouts remains low to the very end of the 70s, then increases dramatically (four-fold) in the 80s; in Indian firms the movement starts earlier and its development is both consistent and rapid. Again, the pattern of conflict is clearly hegemonised by managements in the Indian sector.

A chaotic, apparently random variation in the length of individual disputes is likely to be a characteristic of any sample which groups together a large number of plan conflicts. In our sample disputes can range from 20 minutes to over a year and clearly it makes no sense to treat these types as even remotely comparable. Thus the analysis of conflict durations abstracts from the short conflicts on the grounds that in such conflicts duration is a purely notional dimension; in practice it makes no difference to the nature of these disputes whether they last for less than a shift or range over a succession of shifts, since, within certain limits, they continue to retain their general character as spontaneous outbreaks.

Table 6 studies the movement of durations over the sample period. In Indian firms the

average duration, of three plus strikes increases sharply throughout the 70s, then appears to stabilise; the duration of foreign strikes progresses only gradually until a sudden, dramatic increase (89 per cent) occurs in the last period. Thus, over all groups of establishments, *strike durations peak in the 80s*, though this conceals two distinct movements—a very slight increase in the duration of Indian strikes in this period but a sharp increase in the duration of foreign strikes which actually reverses the Indian/foreign strike duration differential: in other words, by the 80s, the strikes in foreign-controlled plants are beginning to last considerably longer than those in the Indian companies. If increasing durations express the subtle hardening of attitudes, then again at this level it appears that the crisis starts off in the Indian sector, somewhere in the 70s, and reaches the foreign plants only in the 80s.

There appear to be three phases: (a) a sharp differentiation of sectors, with Indian companies taking much longer strikes than the foreign managements (1956-64), (b) homogenisation of the sectors as industrial conflict is generalised, i.e., both sectors register progressive increases in strike duration in 65-79, but the foreign plants only gradually, Indian firms more rapidly. For the latter this would imply one or both of the following situations: (i) that Indian employers become less willing to settle, so employees in these firms encounter more resistance; (ii) that employees in Indian-controlled companies are now actually capable of sustaining strike action for much longer periods and are also, of course, less willing to submit, (c) the third phase (1980-84) reverses this pattern, with foreign strikes moving sharply upwards while Indian strike durations register almost no increase. This striking reversal in the Indian/foreign strike duration differential certainly indicates that foreign sector managements pose sudden resistance in the 80s, and react to the claims of their employees with an obduracy more

characteristic of the Indian firms. Coupled with the declining relative predominance of the short strike in foreign establishments, what this seems to indicate is the progressive diffusion of a model of industrial relations whose basic form was already given in the evolution of an Indian company conflict pattern. Finally, in the joint ventures strike durations display an evolution closer to foreign strikes, which could be taken to imply that the employees in Otis, Vickers, etc., behave like foreign sector workforces, but it is quite possible that the results are less systematic and cannot be interpreted in this way.

Still on Table 6: the general movement by which lockouts become progressively longer, through four successive phases of the sample, is exactly analogous to the way strike durations behave. *The determination of employers to force their employees into submission is most obvious in the 80s*, for that is when lockout durations reach their high point, to display the incredible tenacity by which the average management is apparently willing to close its plants for *close to four months* in order to have its way! For the Indian companies, the period of sharpest increase in the duration of lockouts is the late 70s; by this period both frequency and average duration double, which implies an enormous increase in the intensity of conflict, from the employers' side, and shows, incidentally, that a 'backlash' effect is already at work before the end of the decade. We have to visualise the period after the Emergency as a phase when employers oppose to the militancy of their workforces an 'employers' militancy'. However, *foreign-management-declared lockouts are considerably shorter than Indian company lockouts*, except for one period, which implies (a) more bitterness in the conflicts between Indian employers and their workforces, (b) greater irrationality in the way these employers run their plants, and probably (c) greater bargaining power on the part of workers in foreign companies. But even in

TABLE 10: THE PERSISTENCE OF CONFLICT. DURATIONS OF MAJOR CONFLICTS; THEIR EVOLUTION

	1953-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1953-84
Duration of major conflicts (60 days' ) (in days)	98.13	98.59	124.04	154.73	133.27
Indian	96.00	94.82	129.81	164.35	138.16
Foreign	106.66	104.60	110.17	130.13	119.95
Joint	—	110.00	110.33	202.00	140.83
Duration of major strikes	98.00	98.15	120.53	152.56	125.74
Indian	95.11	93.89	127.81	154.25	126.48
Foreign	106.67	107.00	107.11	142.18	121.88
Joint	—	110.00	90.00	233.00	144.33
Duration of major lockouts	98.67	100.00	129.95	156.38	143.13
Indian	98.67	99.00	133.57	171.31	152.75
Foreign	—	101.00	119.33	119.08	117.00
Joint	—	—	120.5	171.00	137.33
Indian/foreign strike duration differential	0.89	0.88	1.19	1.08	1.04
Indian/foreign lockout duration differential	—	0.98	1.12	1.44	1.31
Lockout/strike duration differential	1.01	1.02	1.08	1.03	1.14

these companies the fundamental evolution is similar and based on a model determined by the Indian sector.

The lockout/strike duration differential' which measures the aggressiveness and bargaining strength of one group (management) relative to the other (employees) is maximal in the late 70s but remains well above 2.0 throughout the period 1975-1984. During these years *the production losses of one lockout are equal to those of some two and a half strikes, ceteris paribus*. But this pattern is heavily dominated by the lockouts of the Indian companies (the value of the differential is 2.81 in the Indian sector, 1.58 in foreign plants). Finally, the joint venture lockouts can even be scrutinised individually: of the five companies in this category, two had had no lockouts till 1984; of the remaining three, Vickers Sperry and Indal account for two each, and in both cases the second lockout is considerably longer than the first and tests over five and a half months; in the five sample lockouts of this group the longest disputes come from the late 70s/80s, which confirms the general postulate of a spectacular increase in employer militancy in this period.

Tables 7 and 8 study a third dimension, as fundamental as frequency and duration, namely, the issues which conflicts are about. 'Being about' is subject to the reservations we made earlier: the issues which *sustain* a conflict in the sense of supplying its motive force need not be the issues because of which the conflict was sparked off. The Pfizer

strike of 1980-81 is a perfect example of this distinction: in the registers the issue behind this strike is given as 'signing of fresh agreement' and this was confirmed in discussions with the employees' union, according to which provident fund and the charter were the main issues. In fact, the strike started spontaneously when Mendes and Pereira, leading office-bearers of the Pfizer Employees' Union, were mobbed and man-handled by supporters of a rival union ('As they were walking in the corridor in front of the canteen') and management took no action. The legal mechanism of the strike notice which is a way of eliminating spontaneity from industrial conflict would normally prevent this sort of clash from moving any further, but it was possible for Pfizer's protest to become a strike because luckily the union had earlier served a strike notice on a totally different issue—against automation!

Now if the experience of Bombay and surrounding companies is anything to go by, the forms of consciousness which underlie industrial conflict in the typical sectors of modern industry do *not* display the sort of characteristics assigned to normal working class consciousness by the notion of 'economism'. This can be construed as the argument that as long as employees are confined to normal, trade union forms of activity and their work or employment relationships form the only source of their conscious experience, the spontaneous modes of consciousness displayed in their behaviour

and activity will fail to constitute any real awareness of the true nature of their social relations, including any awareness which might be called potentially revolutionary. But in our sample *less than half the principal issues cited as reasons for conflict are pay-related*. Conflicts on non-pay issues, especially disputes involving clashes with managerial authority, are as widespread and common in Bombay companies as conflicts on pay. Overall, pay issues constitute 36 per cent of the major issues; disputes intended to force management to reverse or revoke a decision involving disciplinary action are next in importance, with 21 per cent. This is followed by a series of conflicts in which the main issue relates to, or stems from, the nature of the relationship between management and union, or between individual managers and individual employees; their share is close to 18 per cent. Finally, conflicts on deployment, that is, on the forms of mobility and management's way of using labour, account for 9½ per cent of listed occurrences of a principal issue.

Three features of these results are worth developing: If one were to take the relative predominance of pay issues as an operational index of the prevalence of 'economism' within a given working class, then in 1971 there was considerably more 'economism' in the French working class than among employees in Bombay. According to Michelle Durand's figures, in a total of 4,585 demands counted for disputes occurring in France in that year, the share of pay issues (*salaires*) was as much as 49.7 per cent; this contrasts with 36.2 per cent in our sample. In fact, however, a comparison of this sort is unlikely to make any sense, since modern industry creates the same conditions for employees, whichever country they work in, and differences between groups of industries or kinds of workforces are likely to be more significant for the structure of issues than differences between the workers employed by big companies in various parts of the world. On the other hand, it *is* significant that in Durand's study '*Droits syndicaux, repression, etc*', i.e. purely IR issues related to the degree of resistance which managements pose to union activity in their plants, account for 10.6 per cent of issues listed in France, but at least 17.7 per cent of the Bombay issues.

There is no obvious difference between Indian and foreign companies in their relative emphasis on pay. However, certain differences exist in the relative importance of conflicts against the various types of disciplinary action. Relative to the disputes within each sector, there is more conflict over charge-sheeting in the foreign plants, but more conflict over suspensions in Indian companies. This almost certainly indicates that in plants under Indian control a lot of the disciplinary action escalates into suspensions (or that charge-sheets escalate more rapidly into suspensions) whereas in foreign plants much of the disciplinary action re-

TABLE II: MAJOR CONFLICTS: LOCATIONS INVOLVED AND LOCATION EFFECTS  
(Number of occurrence of the area in major conflicts (60 days +) and average durations)

	Greater Bombay	Thane-Belapur	Thane Locations	Semi-Rural Centres	Dispersed Rural
Occurrences in major strikes (N = 91)	50 (54.9)	11 (12.1)	5 (5.5)	18 (19.8)	7 (7.7)
Occurrences in major lockouts (N = 73)	36 (49.3)	5 (6.8)	9 (12.3)	12 (16.4)	11 (15.1)
Strike/lockout ratio	1.39	2.20	0.56	1.50	0.64
Occurrences in exceptionally long lockouts (200 days +)	8	3	1	1	0
Occurrences in exceptionally long strikes (200 days +)	2	1	3	1	4
S/L ratio for exceptionally long conflicts	4.0	3.0	0.3	1.0	—
<b>Durations</b>					
<b>Indian</b>					
Strikes	143.29	132.3	115.60	92.11	87.20
Lockouts	126.27	221.67	211.14	111.00	177.80
L/S	0.88	1.68	1.83	1.21	2.04
<b>Foreign</b>					
Strikes	119.46	99.00	—	129.88	140.00
Lockouts	117.89	(156.0)	71.00	88.75	(275.0)
L/S	0.99	1.58	—	0.68	1.96
<b>Joint</b>					
Strikes	(110.0)	(233.0)	—	(90.0)	—
Lockouts	119.50	(173.0)	—	—	—
<b>Overall</b>					
Strikes	136.15	132.40	115.60	108.78	102.29
Lockouts	123.58	198.80	180.0	102.91	186.64
L/S	0.908	1.502	1.557	0.946	1.824

Note: L/S = lockout/strike duration differential; ( ) indicate a single case.

mains at the level of charge-sheeting (or fewer charge-sheets are actually converted into suspensions). But this general difference between the two sorts of firms could be interpreted at either of two levels: (a) It could mean that in general employees in foreign companies are more successful (or have been more successful) in fighting charge-sheets, whereas despite resistance Indian company managements force their way through to suspensions, (b) It could also mean that managements in foreign companies make a conscious use of charge-sheets as a way of bargaining with their workforces, so that some indeterminate proportion of the charge-sheeting which occurs in these establishments has a purely instrumental significance, that is, is not seriously intended to progress any further. (This aspect will be expanded below.) Another almost certainly significant difference between the two groups of companies is the *higher incidence of conflicts on deployment in the foreign plants*. That is to say, management's operational control and its personnel decisions encounter visibly more resistance in the foreign establishments. The chief examples of this pattern are conflicts on (a) promotion and upgrading (12 foreign conflicts against only three Indian), (b) production standards and manning levels (11 foreign, six Indian), and (c) refusal of job assignments (four foreign, one Indian). The chief exceptions to the pattern, that is, more resistance from Indian workforces are (d) demands for job classification (six Indian, no foreign) and (e) transfer of personnel to other jobs, departments, machines, etc. (13 Indian, seven foreign). Again, one probable implication of such differences in degrees of resistance to specific forms of deployment is that foreign company managements have been careful about the way they handle certain issues (notably, the classification system) but in general unwilling to cede any control, e.g. unwilling to negotiate, in areas which they (like most managements everywhere) regard as their prerogative (notably, promotions, manning, job assignment). Finally, in the Indian companies there is a more obvious preoccupation with retrenchment and permanency, especially the former (of 30 sample conflicts where retrenchment is the key issue, 25 are from Indian plants); with methods of supervision and the general way of treating employees including the way managers speak to them; and with management's relations with the union.

Our analysis is able to define an absolutely decisive feature of the Bombay system of industrial relations: *the bargaining behaviour of Bombay managements (and presumably of private sector managements throughout the country) is characterised by a conscious, massive and widespread use of disciplinary action*. As Table 8 shows, strikes against discipline, i.e. actions intended to force management to withdraw charge-sheets or warning letters or to revoke suspension or dismissal orders are the main form of conflict on "issues other than pay (forming 33

per cent of these conflicts). However, it is important to make the following distinction; between (i) recourse to disciplinary action as the expression of an underlying *management authoritarianism* and (ii) a purely *strategic use* of disciplinary action as part of a bargaining or conflict process. The distinction is probably crucial to a deeper understanding of the Bombay system of industrial relations, (a) because the structure of the disciplinary process, with its possible but not automatic progression from less to more serious forms of action gives managements an enormous flexibility in the use of such action as their major form of bargaining pressure; this flexibility is in no way reduced by the specific formulations of model standing orders where 'misconduct' is defined in ostensive terms, by enumerating acts specifically stated to amount to misconduct; 'wilful insubordination or disobedience of any lawful and reasonable order', 'wilful slowing down in performance of work', and 'commission of any act subversive of discipline or good behaviour on the premises of the establishment', leave employers free to cover an extremely wide range of behaviour under grounds for disciplinary action, (b) Authoritarian vs strategic charge-sheeting, etc., implies another distinction between a legal determination (employer authority) and a more purely technical one (management control) which almost certainly expresses a major difference in behaviour between the average Indian-controlled establishment and the more advanced foreign ones. Indian company managements have a reputation, among unions locally, for being 'autocratic family managements who have not changed their attitudes since independence' (this was how one experienced trade unionist actually described them). The companies themselves strike people as functioning with a '*malik and naukhar* kind of mentality' (this said by an employee who felt that in his own company, American-controlled, the system was quite different: 'Here, no one's the boss'). Now an important part of this real or perceived difference is due to the fact that in foreign subsidiaries (most, if not all) managements are much more careful about the way, the purposes for which, they use disciplinary action, i.e. use charge-sheets and suspensions to force bargaining concessions from the union implies an altogether different sort of calculation from the sort of management behaviour which uses these quasi-legal instruments in a much harsher and more indiscriminate way as a form of reprisal, or to force employees to accept management demands, or to break the union. But the example of Philips shows that when the IR system of a company lurches into crisis, which happened in Philips after the Pune lockout in 81, even foreign-controlled managements can resort to purely authoritarian uses of disciplinary action. Following a major change in its personnel strategy, Philips management decided to break the federation by launching its first

attacks in Pune; after crushing the union in Pune Philips would extend the attack to other centres of agitation within the company, i.e. break the Pune union, management resorted to dismissals. Nothing displays better the largely authoritarian character of this action than the fact that it was, indeed, blatantly contrary to accepted legal procedure. Under standing orders, the basic set of rules which governs employer/employee relations, a showcause notice must be issued; the Pune dismissals were based on a common letter and skipped all the stages which companies normally run through before finally terminating an employee's service.

**TABLE 12: MAJOR CONFLICTS: TYPES OF UNIONS INVOLVED**  
(Number of occurrences in major conflicts (60 days +))

	Employees' Unions	External Unions
All major conflicts	58 (37.2)	98 (62.8)
of which—		
Major strikes	32	55
Major lockouts	26	43
Indian company conflicts	31 (29.0)	76 (71.0)
Foreign company conflicts	24 (55.8)	19 (44.2)
Joint venture conflicts	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)

Note: Employees' unions are unions whose name comprises some essential reference to the company, such as Pfizer Employees' Union, Hindustan Lever Employees' Union, etc. regardless of the extent to which the committee depends on an outsider (or 'professional') for guidance, leadership, and so on. External unions are unions of outsiders or professionals' which the employees of a plant or other establishment affiliate to and whose name (AEW, MGKU, etc) appears on their agreement.

**TABLE 13: PATTERN OF UNIONISM IN SAMPLE COMPANIES**

	Employees' Unions	External Unions
Indian	44 (26.2)	124 (73.8)
Foreign	48 (55.8)	38 (44.2)
Joint	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)
	98	166

Note. The figures outside brackets indicate the number of unions which have led conflicts or been involved in conflicts, at any stage, in any of the sample establishments, excluding purely marginal cases where a union tried to enter and failed.

Philips is in fact a striking example of the rapid escalation of conflict levels and dramatic increase in the intensity of conflict which, according to the analysis of this section, seems to have occurred from the late 70s. The example shows not only that foreign companies in the Bombay area are not conflict-free enclaves, islands which sleep unobtrusively in the sunshine of some tropical liberalism, but that in any company, whatever the nature of the control exercised over its business, what counts is the conscious effort which a management makes to secure stability through the way it deals with its employees, the kind of attitudes it displays towards them, and with representatives of employees.

#### IV

### Major Conflicts, Location and Union Effects, and Conflict Intensity

This section deals with a special type of conflict, the hard conflicts which unions and companies have failed to resolve even when *two months* have passed. Obviously this is a purely arbitrary cut-off point, but it yields a sufficiently large sample (N = 157) for some kind of analysis to proceed. Through but what follows, the term used to refer to the specific area of hard conflict (in the sense of disputes which last *at least* two months) will be 'major conflicts'.

Major conflicts peaked sharply in the 80s. Thus the general movement defined earlier of increasing bitterness in industrial disputes after the mid-seventies and throughout the period 1975-1984, is abundantly confirmed by the evolution of this special group of conflicts. In terms of the total volume of such conflict, *in each of the sample periods there are over twice as many disputes of this length among Indian firms as among the foreign establishments.* Thus whereas Indian firms account for some 58 per cent of all sample conflicts (see Table 3), their share of major conflicts is almost 70 per cent (see Table 9). In general terms this certainly signifies an important difference in the conflict behaviours of Indian/foreign establishments. That is to say, even if the foreign sector is not free of conflict, much of the more bitter, protracted conflict has occurred in firms which have no foreign connections and which are purely subject to Indian control. A second difference: the two types of disputes (strikes/lockouts) display different rhythms of evolution. Major strikes peak in the late 70s and stay at that level into the 80s, so there is no obvious increase in conflicts of this sort between these periods. Indian-management lockouts (exceeding two months) increase sharply in the late 70s (from two to 14!), then continue to escalate in the 80s (from 14 to 29). Thus we should see the *whole* period from the Emergency to the middle 80s as one of rapidly escalating employer aggressiveness against workforces in Indian-dominated businesses. The foreign

evolution is different: foreign-controlled lockouts remain at a low level down to the end of the 70s, then increase four-fold in the 80s. This is a clear indication, from the employers' side, of the timing of the *break* in the IR system of Indian companies and of the retarded diffusion of this model in the foreign sector. In terms of the initiatives taken by employers, it is certainly the Indian firms which determine the character and pace of evolution of labour conflict.

One implication of these differential rhythms for strikes and lockouts is a consistent decline in the S/L ratio for major conflicts: in the early liberal phase of Bombay industrial relations (fifties and most of the sixties), the initiative in major conflicts clearly lies with employees. By the eighties there has been a massive reversal of this pattern; by this stage, the number of major lockouts actually exceeds the number of major strikes. That is to say, if there were some form of statutory ban or restriction on the length of industrial disputes, employers would stand to lose more than their employees.

Table 10 shows that there is no substantial difference in the duration of major strikes and major lockouts, i.e., the lockout/strike duration differential is not significantly above 1. This implies that *beyond certain temporal limits, determination and persistence are equally strong on both sides.* Now the fact that the solidarity and cohesiveness of a group of strikers show no tendency to disintegrate spontaneously will be a strong inducement to employers to *force* a return to work by some means. There are several possible strategies employers can have to try and force a return to work. In central government strikes the strategies used can plunge whole workforces into the nightmare of confronting a 'political' employer who can use the armed force of the state in a crude, authoritarian assertion of bargaining power. This will emerge only too clearly when the real history of the great Railway Strike of 1974 is finally written. In the private sector, the two main strategies have been: (a) "forcing divisions within the

workforce so that some sections start favouring an immediate return to work; (b) the large-scale recruitment of strike breakers so that production is re-started and the strike never finally settled. It is worth noting that whereas most managements including foreign controlled managements (cf, Goodlass in the 1977-78 strike, John sen in the 1983 strike) would use, or at least to use, strategy (a), only the more openly repressive groups of Indian employers (the millowners in the Bombay textile strike of 81, Viren Shah in the Mukand strike of 1984) have resorted directly to strategy (b).

Chronologically, the differential fluctuates only within narrow limits; the increase in management's drive to break the will of its workforce is matched by the ability of workers to sustain increasingly long strikes. In other words, the curves of the two types of conflicts behave with remarkable similarity throughout our period, displaying two distinct phases: (a) 1953-74—stable durations at just over three months, and (b) 1975-84—rapidly increasing durations, first four and then five months. But the pattern differs considerably between sectors. In the Indian sector, strike durations increase by a month in the late 70s, and again by a month in the 80s; on the employers' side, the evolution of lockouts reflects the same type of movement, in fact the tenacity of these managements gives the Indian lockouts of the 80s an average duration of almost six months. In the foreign companies, average strike durations remain stable down to the end of the 70s, then increase by over a month in the early 80s; but here there is no corresponding movement in the way lockouts behave; in the foreign sector, it is the *use* of the long lockout that increases (12 foreign lockouts in the 80s but only five in the whole of the 70s), not its duration. So the lockout/strike duration differential of foreign plants is actually less than 1, and in a period when the managements in these companies have started using lockouts altogether more systematically. (The foreign-controlled sample establishments where a lockout was declared during 1980-84 were:

TABLE 14: MAJOR CONFLICTS: ISSUES INVOLVED  
(Per cent of all major conflicts (60 days +) where the issue is stated)

	Overall N = 186	Indian N = 124	Foreign N = 54
Pay-related	39.8	39.5	38.9
Disciplinary action	15.6	15.3	14.8
Go-slow	14.0	12.9	14.8
Union conflicts	10.8	11.3	11.1
Deployment	8.1	7.3	11.1
Internal disruption	2.1	3.2	0.
Leave and hours	1.6	1.6	1.8
Permanency/retrenchment	3.8	4.0	3.7
Various	4.2	4.8	3.7

Note: N = 186 because more than one issue may be listed under each conflict; 'overall' includes companies classified as joint ventures; 'union conflicts' comprises cases of rivalry between unions as well as management opposition to particular unions; 'various' comprises the following reported issues: transport, canteen food, assault on managing director, sudden strike of spinners, breach of agreement, etc

Abbott, Bayer, Brooke Bond, Cadbury, Chloride India, Ciba-Geigy, C P Tool, Firestone, GKW Screws Division, Hoechst, May & Baker, Metal Box, Parke-Davis, Philips, Sandvik Asia, and Wimco. In the 70s there were lockouts in: CAFI (ICI), Colgate, Firestone, ICIM (International Computers), Pfizer, Siemens, Chemco (Union Carbide). In Hoechst and Siemens the lockouts were directed against only one section of the plant and reflected management's response to an attempted entry by Samant when most workers were still supporters of the employees' union. Of the 22 companies mentioned, 15 are UK or American-controlled.)

Table 11 studies the distribution of the major disputes between distinct groups of locations. As a measure of the frequency of one type of dispute relative to the other, the S/L ratio is clearly some indication of the kind of industrial relations which prevails, if only because it reflects the distribution of *initiative* between companies and their workforces. Between locations, the overall variation (of the ratio) runs from a maximum of 2.2 on the Thane-Belapur Road, i e, here workers have initiated major conflicts at least twice as frequently as their employers, to 0.64 in the purely rural locations and 0.5 in Thane proper (which is an amorphous grouping of distinct smaller locations with an average assortment of

three to four major plants). Thus despite a certain proximity and administrative unification, Thane-Belapur and Thane establishments behave very differently. Apart from the purely physical characteristics of the area (the juxtaposition of plants for an unbroken stretch of almost 30 km and the purely large-scale industrial nature of the area), the companies which run plants on the Thane-Belapur Road are more homogeneous in their industrial, technological and union characteristics. (In spite of this, however, union attempts to form a stable 'area committee' have always failed.) Within Greater Bombay, the concentration from Mulund to Ghatkopar, along the LBS Marg, shows an S/L ratio of the advanced (or Thane-Belapur) type—22 [major] strikes to 11 lockouts, i e, a hard conflict ratio of exactly 2. The less cohesive/more isolated, and indeed more backward, locations reverse the pattern of initiatives—In these areas the hard conflicts are led by employers: beyond the cut-off point of two months, lockouts are more common than strikes; here is the spatial image of what, in temporal terms, happens only in the 80s. In somewhat different terms: by the 80s the behaviour of most employers begins to assume characteristics already familiar from\* the styles and experience of more remote, isolated locations. The geographical distribution of the 'giant' lockouts—those which last for a

whole 200 days at least—reflects this general difference even more sharply. In the sample there are 11 lockouts of this type: but Greater Bombay, Thane-Belapur and industrial concentrations like Pune and Nasik account for only four of these; Thane and the dispersed locations out in the countryside account for the remaining seven. With giant strikes, the pattern is the very opposite—the distribution by areas contraposes 11 of these in Bombay and Thane-Belapur to just two elsewhere.

Major strikes are not in fact a feature of those locations which are a pure expression of 'dispersed rural' characteristics (i e Shahad, Kalyan, Amarnath and plants in the distant countryside). The seven 'major strikes' shown against this locational category are all from two specific locations within it: Tarapur and Taloja. If these locations were reassigned to some other category, then the purely rural type of location would be able to show no major conflicts where workers took the lead by striking; *all* of the really hard conflict in these areas would be due to employers!

The bottom half of Table 11 explores these area differences in terms of conflict durations. One result is especially impressive here: *strike durations (i e, major strike durations) decline almost mathematically as industrial concentration decreases.* We can call this '*the law of the progressive collapse*

TABLE 15: CONFLICT LEVELS AND BARGAINING CYCLE

	Levels of Conflict Intensity	Settling Time (Months)				
		5.99 or Less	6.00-11.99	12.00-17.99	18.00-23.99	24 Months +
I	High		Mukand Siemens* Mafatlal Eng Carona Sahu Nelco	Firestone Hind, Ferodo Crompton	Ciba-Geigy Hind Lever	Indal Amar Dye-Chem
II	Above average	Rallifan	Ceat Vickers Voltas Poysha	Philips (Kalwa) C P Tool Blue Star Sandoz S S Duncan	Wyeth	Duphar-Interfran
III	Average	SKF Telco Elpro Zenith Tin	Otis Hoechst* Vulcan Laval Colgate Cadbury Bharat Bijlee	Johnson Abbott Labs E Merck	Union Carbide	Pfizer Tomco Bharat Petroleum
IV	Below average	Indian Oxygen Geoff. Manners MSL	Burrqughs Well German Remedies Richardson Hind Goodlass Nerolac Standard Alkali GKW (Screws) Asea API	Herdillia Ralliwolf Roche Kamani Eng Hind Antibiotics		CAFI (ICI)
V	Low	Atlas Copco Godrej & Boyce	Mahindra Auto Gabriel MSD Asian Paints Buckau-Wolf	Roussel Glaxo Metal Box	Boehringer	

Note. 'Settling time' is defined as the time elapsing between the date of submission of the charter and the date of final settlement. For each establishment Or company a single settling time has been used, viz, the specific time it took to reach the settlement which, for that company, happened to be operative in the middle of 1985 when the calculations were made. \* indicates cases where the conflict intensity level is largely determined by partial (Siemens) or departmental (Hoechst) conflicts rather than disputes involving the whole plant.

of strike durations in direct proportion to the diminishing influence of industrial massification'. Thus/ Greater Bombay has the longest strikes overall, and the two 'dispersed rural' locations which have any strikes at all (Tarapur, Talaja), the shortest strikes overall. The term 'overall' indicates that this pattern holds when we average between sectors; in fact there is a difference between Indian and foreign establishments, and the law applies only to the Indian-controlled establishments; in foreign companies it is the rural locations which have the longest (major) strikes. What all this implies is that there is a substantial difference in average strike length between the two types of establishments but a difference which is totally reversed between locations and types of locations. Thus in the advanced locations (Bombay, Thane-Belapur) employees in foreign companies call off their (major) strikes at least three weeks before their Indian counterparts; but in locations which have rural characteristics and where workforces are largely (but not entirely) recruited from the local countryside (this time not only the dispersed rural locations but also those which are concentrated but rural, i.e., 'semi-rural centres' such as Pune and Nasik) it is the foreign companies which seem to take the longest strikes. What seems to be happening is as follows: durations are being determined by two sorts of factors or types of influence—in Bombay and Thane-Belapur (advanced locations) the primary influence is management's willingness to settle (its 'propensity to negotiate') because the foreign company managements are more willing to settle, here foreign strikes are generally called off sooner; in the other types of locations (semi-rural and dispersed rural), the primary influence is the workers' capacity to sustain long strikes (not their determination to do so; why should this be any less in the Indian plants in these areas and not the company's willingness to settle, since it is hard to believe that foreign companies which operate here are actually less inclined to settle than their local Indian counterparts); and this implies that workforces in the foreign plants in these areas are relatively less easily beaten into submission than the employees of Indian companies.

One reason for this difference in employees' capacity to sustain long strike actions in the non-metropolitan locations could very well be that in these areas the managements who run Indian-controlled companies have fewer qualms about the kind of strategies they use to force a return to work. Again, the decisive variable is the sort of industrial relations system which tends to control relationships in a given location.

The only aspect of the IR system which is considered here is conflict behaviour. In other words, this paper says nothing about two other aspects, viz, deployment practices or the ways in which managements utilise labour, and bargaining practices, or the ways

in which they handle employees' demands or try to enforce their own. We have also seen that the use of lockouts has become an absolutely decisive feature of the conflict behaviour of large groups of employers in the Bombay area. When lockouts are included in our picture of geographical differences in the distribution of major conflicts, the results are as follows: variations in the lockout/strike duration differential, which measured the tenacity and aggressiveness of one group relative to the other, reflect the influence of location as well as company. Case A: workers are more tenacious than employers = an 1/sdd less than 1—this is the case for Indian firms in Greater Bombay, foreign firms in Greater Bombay, and foreign firms in semi-rural centres like Pune and Nasik. Case B: the strikes companies take collapse or are called off in less than half the time these companies force their employees to stay out when they declare lockouts = an 1/sdd greater than 2—this is the case with Indian firms in the dispersed rural locations, and almost the case with foreign plants in these locations.

Table II begins to allow us to build a geography of the IR system, or an 'industrial relations geography', i.e., to determine where the breaks lie between the more advanced and more backward sectors; and to define the content of these terms in a more precise way. Advanced areas are characterised by a low 1/sdd (in the pure case, less than 1), and by the fact that the lockouts of Indian companies are considerably shorter than the same type of lockout elsewhere Greater Bombay is the pure case of a location of this kind, followed by Pune, Nasik, etc., (the semi-rural centres). The IR culture of rural industrialisation, on the contrary, throws up conflict patterns dominated by employer aggressiveness. Its most striking characteristic is the greater frequency and longer durations of lockouts. Finally, in terms of the internal geographical distribution of Indian/foreign plants, the areas just characterised as 'advanced' show no specific predominance of firms of one

type or the other, but there are significant differences in Thane-Belapur (many more foreign plants) and in Thane and the dispersed locations (more Indian plants, especially in the latter). The results for Thane-Belapur are anomalous (the best S/L ratio but an 1/sdd greater than 1, with the longest Indian lockouts in the sample) but in fact perfectly explicable on the hypothesis that the IR culture of the road is sharply polarised in at least two ways—first in the sense of a sharp contrast between local plants which have had almost no conflict throughout their history (Roussel, Polyolefins, Searle, Indo-Pharma, Rallis Pesticides) and those which have had at least one major conflict (Pfizer, Philips, Richardson Hindustan, Bharat Bijtee) or even several (Mukand, Indal, United Carbon); secondly, in the sense that among plants which do show some level of conflict, both groups, employers and employees, display all the characteristics of strong militancy—employees by their obvious willingness to launch protracted strikes when they are forced to do so, i.e., see themselves as having no option (thus there are 14 sample establishments from the Thane-Belapur Road and 11 major strikes; contrast this with Thana, which has 14 sample establishments but only five major strikes), and employers, by the tenacity of some of their lockouts (though here the pattern is largely influenced by the experience of United Carbon, a lockout of 362 days in 1978-79, and Mukand).

The conflicts which paralysed production at Mukand's Kalwa plant for a large part of 1984 are a classic illustration of the ruthlessness with which some business groups in India handle their labour relations. The main features are described below, but two aspects should be emphasised: Mukand management broke the strike and got legal backing for its action; not only that, however: management broke the union as well and could actually promote a 'company union' in the classic American sense of a union more or less controlled by management. But 'company unions' in this sense are

TABLE 16: DISTRIBUTION OF COMPANIES BY CONFLICT GROUPS AND AVERAGE SETTLING TIME

Conflict Groups by Intensity	Average Time to Settle	Indian (N = 70)	Foreign (N = 50)	Joint (N = 5)
1 High	15.24 [35.00]	18 (72)	6 (24)	1 (4)
2 Above average	14.53 [29.25]	18 (72)	6 (24)	1 (4)
3 Average	13.20 [38.8]	12 (48)	11 (44)	2 (8)
4 Below average	10.21 [24.00]	9 (36)	15 (60)	1 (4)
5 Low	10.35 [18.0]	13 (52)	12 (48)	0 (0)

Note: 'Conflict groups' are sets of 25 in the ranking of companies by conflict intensity. 'Average time to settle', in months; [ ] indicates the maximum time it took for the companies in a given conflict group to reach a settlement; starting with the high group, the maximum settling times given are those for Amar Dye-Chem, Duphar, Pfizer, CAFI and Boehringer-Knoll.

rare in the Bombay area and should in any case never be confused with the more general type which calls itself "employees' unionism".

Tables 12 and 13 are about the possible relationships between conflict and types of unionism. In terms of the general form of union structure which prevails in most manufacturing plants in Bombay area, the 'managing committee' of the union is the chief body, at establishment level, which handles the affairs of the union. In practice, most of the work tends to be done by a smaller group of office-bearers who, as the more active element within the union, would also form the nucleus of the committee which negotiates ('negotiating committee'), if not the whole of it. However, there are enormous differences between managing committees, not just in terms of the size of the committee but in terms of the extent to which they can be said to have an independent existence as the leadership of the union. The key factor which determines the form and extent of this independence is the kind of relation which the committee has to outsiders or 'professionals' who may be involved with the union in a mainly legal or legal as well as bargaining capacity. 'May be involved', because while it is standard practice to use the help of an outsider or outside union organisation, a committee is obviously under no obligation to do so, and there are some committees which prefer not to have anything to do with outside leaderships.

The extent to which a managing committee controls its own agreements, or its 'bargaining autonomy', will determine how far its relationship to external advisers or outside leaderships leaves the committee with a large measure of self-determination or, on the contrary, tends to reduce the committee to a purely subaltern existence. In a purely formal sense, there are three possibilities here: (A) a committee decides to have no substantive relationship with outside leaderships (beyond seeking occasional legal advice, and not necessarily from the same legal adviser); this is the case with some *employees' unions*, but not always for the same reasons; some of these committees may feel they are sufficiently competent to handle their own affairs and may rely on a legal adviser 'mainly for drafting' (as one such committee put it); others, however, may have no real choice in the matter, because management is completely opposed to having any dealings with outsiders or 'professionals' and forces the committee into a position of relative isolation (some companies controlled by the Tatas reflect features of this model). (B) A committee works in close co-operation with a legal adviser or outside trade union, but continues to call itself an "employees' union", and in that sense at least, formally retains its independence: however, the *de facto* relationship between the committee and its outsider will depend on numerous factors such as the personal qualities and individual capacities

of the people who run the committee, the outsider's general style of leadership, who management deals with, etc. (These are the unions which are called 'B-type' in Table 19; here 'B' has the general sense of 'indeterminacy' associated with the truth-value I in 3-valued logic) (C) The committee affiliates its membership to an outside union, traditionally one of the central TUs present in most parts of the country; in this case, it is the name of this larger, outside organisation which appears on the agreement. The term *external unions* covers situations of this type.

Tables 12 and 13 simplify this picture by reducing a 3-valued structure to the bipolarity of employees' unions vs external unions. Here the "employees' unions" include B-type unions, namely, those which call themselves employees' unions but also depend on outside union advice or leadership and so may not have complete control over their own agreements. In terms of the (pattern of unionism between groups of firms, it seems that *external unions are the leading type of unionism in Indian-controlled companies*, where almost 75 per cent of unions involved in conflict have been of this form; on the other hand, the foreign sector is more equally divided between employees' unions and external unions, with a certain tendency for employees' unions to be the more common type. In this respect at least, the joint venture plants resemble foreign-controlled plants, since they also show a certain predominance of internal unions.

Thus *employees' unions are rather more closely associated with foreign companies*. However, there is no significant difference between the two types of unions in terms of their involvement in industrial conflict. If we restrict ourselves to the major conflicts, then 44.8 per cent of disputes in which employees' unions are involved are lockouts, while 43.9 per cent of the external unions' disputes are lockouts. This does *not* support the possible hypothesis that local managements favour employees' unions and direct their lockouts mainly against the external unions. Indeed, some of the strongest opposition, recently, has been to a particular form of employees' unionism which (managements now realise) is the least tractable type of union structure any company is likely to face, namely, the *federations* which organise most or all plants of a company throughout the country. Despite the morphological characteristics which distinguish them from the general mass of employees' unionism, the company federations are far closer to the internal unions than to the external ones, because, like the employees' unions, they take as their framework the legal or *de facto* boundaries of a company or group of companies.

Our results also show that *being an employees' union makes no difference to (he union's participation in major conflicts—* the proportion of employees' unions involved in disputes lasting more than 60 days (37.2 per cent) is almost exactly equal to the proportion of employees' unions in the sample

as a whole (37.1 per cent). If the former (i.e., their share of all unions involved in major conflicts) were significantly below the latter (i.e., their overall representation in the sample), it would be possible to claim that employees' unions are somehow averse to the more intense type of conflict; but this is not so. And this suggests that the more general sort of claim made by the Shramik in Pune that internal unions are a deliberate device of foreign managements or big firms like Telco to ensure industrial peace (with its clear implication that employees' unions are more docile or that being an internal union is associated with negligible levels of conflict) is simply not true. It may very well be true that powerful managements like Telco (which is Tata-controlled) can succeed in dominating their internal unions where unions like the Shramik would pose more obvious internal resistance, but it is equally true that there is massive corruption among some external leaderships and that many local managements in fact prefer to deal with external leaderships, partly because they know much less about conditions in the plant or the company as a whole (and are also far less interested in acquiring such knowledge) and partly because they are open to corruption,

Blue Star, Philips, Voltas, Crompton Greaves, Tomco are all examples of companies where there has been considerable conflict with unions organised as company

TABLE 17: INTENSITY OF CONFLICT: CONCENTRATION, INDUSTRY AVERAGES

	Average Conflict Intensity Level (Days of Conflict)	Concentration of Conflict (Per Cent)
Most conflict-prone Indian	867.4	32.9
Most conflict-prone foreign	485.9	31.6
PAI's share of the Indian group		7.3
Hind Lever's share of the foreign group		7.0
Median level [- BPCI.]	157.6	
Average level	218.25	
Average level p company:		
Tyre manufacturing (3)	363.5	
Mini-steel (5)	351.6	
Auto (7)	346.7	
Chemicals-related (13)	318.1	
Non-ferrous metals (5)	299.2	
Electrical engineering (14)	268.2	
General engineering (27)	204.8	
[Auto excluding PAI. (6)]	[179.8]	
Chemicals (13)	126.4	
Food, drink, tobacco (5)	125.1	
Pharmaceuticals (23)	120.4	
Oil (2)	109.1	

Note: 'Most conflict prone' is the top 10 per cent of each group.



federations and where breaking the federation or weakening its hold has been (at one time or another) the essential motivation behind management's strategy. But even the smaller scale or more isolated employees' unions, those which operate outside the framework of any active (company or industry) federation, have sometimes encountered strong management opposition. One of the best recent examples of this is the way in which management in the American-owned pharmaceutical company, Abbott Laboratories, used divisions within the workforce (between contract workers and permanent employees) to destabilise the employees' union. But in the Bombay pharmaceutical companies the key factor behind much of the opposition to internal unions has been the fact that unions of this sort have made more conscious efforts (and successful ones) to organise the 'medical reps' or field staff and posed a direct threat to the company's control over the work schedules and work loads of this absolutely decisive section of their labour force.

On the other hand, what managements oppose (presumably anywhere) is not employees' unions or internal unions as such, but *strong* unions. Now the 'strength' of a union is not something purely objective, or something which can be decided by an objective test. How strong a union is, is, at least partly, a matter of judgment—based on experience—no doubt, but sufficiently ambiguous to allow managements to have conflicting assessments. A large part of the opposition to Samant (who could build what became, locally, the biggest external union) has been precisely of this type. 'Serial propagation' played a decisive role in shaping employer opposition to the expansion of Samant's unions in the late 70s (just as it did in the expansion itself). By the early 80s it had become dear, to some employers at least, that 'the Doctor' was more amenable to certain crucial management objectives than it was possible for them to see in a period of panic-stricken reactions. For example, when Crompton Greaves management finally broke the hold of its federation, it put up no resistance whatever to signing the next agreement with Samant. By the early 80s it would have been true to say that Bombay employers no longer had a clear attitude to Samant. One militant has explained

this evolution by the fact that by then sufficient time had elapsed for both companies and workers to know what Samant's second settlements were like.

At any rate, a great part of the more intense conflict from the late 70s and early 80s represented outright employer opposition to dealing with the MGKU. This was especially true of whole groups of Indian employers—the people in control of companies like Premier Auto, Amar Dye-Chem, Mukand, Mafatal Engineering, National Rayon (NRC), Carona Sahu, Calico Chemicals, in most of which Samant found himself facing massive lockouts which were intended to keep him out or to break his union, lb these employers it seemed to make no difference that at least one local management (Godrej) had defeated Samant by purely tactical means, some seven or eight years earlier, or that there were foreign companies like Bayer where management seemed to have no special problems with him.

Table 14 is about the motivations behind major conflicts. A comparison with the earlier breakdown for all sample conflicts (see Table 8 and the comments) would show that pay issues, go-slows and union rivalries increase their share of reported issues when only the longer disputes (i.e., major conflicts) are taken into account. In fact, it is possible to make a stronger statement: since the sort of go-slows that actually figure in the strike registers as reasons for a dispute (viz, lockout) are go-slows which workers have probably sustained for several weeks, and go-slows of this protracted type are generally organised to support pay claims which the company is reluctant to discuss (a charter is presented but no discussion occurs for months, or a charter has been pending for several years, etc), a lot of the hard conflict (probably over 50 per cent) is dominated by *demands on pay*. And this implies that *it is duration and not frequency (of conflicts) which forms the true index of the intensity of workers' and managements' feelings about pay*. It was pointed out earlier that in terms of frequency alone, conflicts on non-pay issues, in particular disputes involving direct clashes with managerial authority, are as widespread and common in Bombay area companies as conflicts on pay.

In Table 15 and subsequent tables, 'conflict intensity' has been defined in terms of

(the total number of) days of conflict rather than man-days lost, because it seems to us that *size* of establishment has no bearing on the intensity of conflict. It may be useful for employers or the state to know how strikes have affected production and the 'man-days lost' index may be some index of this, but there is no obvious reason why the study of strikes should assign any theoretical importance to a variable of this sort, when it has none. Our measure of the intensity of conflict consciously disregards the fact that in two disputes of the same duration, the production losses due to one may be far greater than those entailed by the other. Workforces which have been involved in conflict for precisely the same number of days (or weeks or months) in the plant's history are regarded as being at the same level of conflict intensity', regardless of their size. Thus the frequency and duration of conflicts are the only variables that count in defining intensity.

This conception of conflict intensity lacks precision in one respect: it fails to take into account the fact that some plants are older than others, or that plants were commissioned at different stages, or even in quite different decades. Thus something like 'number of days of conflict per year of the plant's existence' might have been a more precise index. However, overall restriction to a sample period eliminates a large part of the chronological diversity which is potentially involved here. For example, in older plants like Hindustan Lever, Firestone, Metal Box, and so on, one simply disregards all conflicts which occurred before the early 50s.

In Table 18 the average intensity level per company works out to just over 218 days. This means that on average sample companies have been involved in that many days of conflict (strike or lockout) during the sample period. However, companies may have more than one establishment, and there is no obvious reason why the different establishments grouped under the same company may not have rather different experiences of conflict. The intensity level per establishment works out to just over 152 days; that is to say, *the average establishment has been involved in one or other form of conflict for a total period of 5 months in the course of its life-span within the sample period*.

The actual distribution of this average is the essential issue behind a study of the IR system. *There is a substantial difference in intensity between the Indian and foreign-controlled groups, with an average of 180 days of conflict (per establishment) in the Indian sector against 110 days of conflict in the foreign sector. Thus the 'total period of five months' mentioned in the previous paragraph averages between six months in the Indian sector and just over 3½ months in the foreign sector. Thus, when we study a concrete system of labour relations in a country like India, grouping together and averaging between Indian and foreign-controlled plants is the first sort of abstraction involved.*

**TABLE 18: INTENSITY OF CONFLICT: OVERALL RESULTS**  
(Total number of conflict days in sample companies)

	Total	Indian	Foreign	Joint
Total number of conflicts with known duration	1007	586	384	37
Total number of days of conflict	27281.28	18446.18	7694.49	1140.61
Intensity level; average per company	218.25	263.52	153.89	228.12
Intensity level: average per establishment	152.41	180.85	109.92	228.12
Average conflict duration	27.09	31.48	20.04	30.83

Note-, 'Intensity level' is defined as the total days (including hours) of conflict reported for companies or their constituent establishments over the sample period. The definition purposely abstracts from size of establishment, for the reasons stated in the text.



However, in both groups of companies or establishments *there is a considerable concentration of conflict*, the top 10 per cent of companies in each group accounting for up to 32.9 per cent (Indian) and 31.6 per cent (foreign) of the total conflict in that group and the single most conflict-prone company in each sector (Premier Auto among Indian companies, Hindustan Lever among the foreign establishments) generating as much as 7 per cent. Thus even the general type of control over plants (Indian/foreign is not sufficient to account for the distribution of conflict.

At the other (less conflict-prone) end of the scale, situations of *low* conflict could indicate either (a) stable industrial relations, or (b) management domination over the union. This distinction, subtle but crucial, is less difficult to establish in practice than through any precise theoretical criterion. In other words, with the appropriate background knowledge it is easier to know which plants actually fall under one category or the other than to be able to say why that is so. But settling time provides one obvious index of the extent of management domination, of the degree to which management determines or controls the bargaining process.

Table 15 does seem to indicate an overall association between settling time (propensity to negotiate) and conflict intensity. The distribution of companies by conflict levels and degrees of resistance to settling implies two industrial relations systems potentially (high conflict with long settling times, and, low conflict with rapid settlements). For the companies actually listed in the table, the distribution is as follows:

	(Per cent)	
	Indian	Foreign
<b>Above average settling time + high conflict</b>	51.4	24
<b>Below average settling time + low conflict</b>	31.4	54

By a process of deduction, this general schema can be translated into the following

'modd': Types of management behaviour: (a) Rapid settlements forced on the union, e.g. Godrej (settling time in months - 4.25) and Telco (2.85), both cases of low conflict, signifying a high degree of employer domination over the union. But this need not imply that in these companies management strategies are identical or in any way similar. For example, recruitment policies have been decisive in Godrej's general stability, whereas a lot of fairly sophisticated management thinking has gone into grade structuring and use of labour in Telco's Pune plants. At any rate, in these companies the strategies have been very different, (b) More or less average settling time - (in Bombay's bargaining system, this works out to just over 12 months) with low conflict—these are the most likely cases of stable industrial relations, e.g. MSD before the Tatas took over (11.75), Mahindra Auto (8.25), Burroughs Wellcome (9.25), none of which have had any serious conflict, (c) More or less average settling time with high (frequent or persistent) conflict—the most probable cases of hard bargaining, e.g. Philips at the Kalwa plant (15.8), Blue Star (16.75) or Hindustan Lever (20.6), all of which have had some massive conflicts or at least been through some extremely militant agitations, (d) Strong resistance to settling (from management's side), e.g. Pfizer (38.8), Tomco (31.55), Bharat Petroleum or BPCL for short, government-controlled since the early 70s (27.35), Indal (24.55) and Amar Dye Chem (35.0). In this group it is possible to distinguish two types of motivation: (i) strong resistance on pay—the purest example of this is BPCL, whose public sector management simply refused to settle until the unions accepted the Rs 1.30 DA formula wWch the central government has been able to enforce in most undertakings under its control; (ii) opposition to recognising or dealing with the union, as in Amar Dye-Chem where Samant encountered terrific resistance from the company until it was finally forced to accept him. Conflicts in Tomco and Indal are cases where both

motives were involved, in one case against a federation which wanted the charter discussed for all Tomco establishments throughout the country, in the other against Samant (whom the Mahindras are completely opposed to).

Table 15 is further proof that foreign firms are not conflict-free enclaves: Philips, Sandoz, Pfizer, Wyeth Laboratories, Ciba-Geigy and Hindustan Lever are all foreign-controlled, but all of them have settling times exceeding 15 months, and ranging up to almost 39 months, as well as high rates of conflict intensity (a total of at least 200 days of conflict, in general much more than that). In the opposite model—that is, low conflict (less than 100 days) and rapid settlements—of 18 firms which register settling times of less than one year, at least ten are foreign-controlled. In other words, *among operations which are foreign-controlled there is a sharp differentiation of management characteristics and rates of conflict.*

A final observation: two sets of factors interact in the results in Table 19, which describes the pattern of conflict for a series of the most important local unions or types of unions. These are (a) *management opposition*, which tends to reflect the immediate bargaining situation, and (b) the *union's* bargaining strategy. Lockouts are an obvious means by which managements express or enforce their opposition, to a specific union (e.g. Samant's) or type of union (e.g. those led from the outside), or finally to the union in some particular situation (e.g. to get the union to accept demands on productivity, as in the Philips lockout of 1981, or to resist a demand for permanency, which was the reason why Pfizer was locked out in 1977). Thus, the *strength* of management's opposition to the union (in any of the senses outlined) is measurable in at least two ways: (i) by considering the frequency of lockouts in a union's experience with conflict, (ii) by taking into account the (average) duration of lockouts inflicted on particular unions. On the other hand, the

TABLE 19: SOME UNIONS: MANAGEMENT OPPOSITION AND PRONENESS TO CONFLICT

	Samant	R J Mehta	BLU	CITU	SSS	ACW	BKS	B-Type	Co Federations
<b>No of sample conflicts of which:</b>	107	13	19	58	24	12	15	64	102
<b>Strikes</b>	71	12	16	55	20	8	10	56	77
<b>Lockouts</b>	36	1	3	3	4	4	5	8	25
<b>Lockouts as per cent of total</b>	33.6	7.7	15.8	5.2	16.7	33.3	33.3	12.5	24.5
<b>S/L ratio</b>	1.97	12.0	5.33	18.33	5.0	2.0	2.0	7.0	3.08
<b>Average duration of strikes</b>	60.4	80.3	12.4	37.5	36.7	28.2	20.5	34.8	37.3
<b>Average duration of lockouts</b>	141.2	(51.0)	28.3	56.3	91.2	121.2	106.8	73.0	81.2
<b>L/S</b>	2.336	—	2.28	1.50	2.48	4.3	5.2	2.096	2.177
<b>No of major strikes</b>	20	7	0	13	4	1	1	12	17
<b>No of major lockouts</b>	27	0	0	2	3	2	4	5	15
<b>No of strikes 200 days +</b>	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
<b>No of lockouts 200</b>	8	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Note: The figures in this table are no indication of the actual distribution of conflicts between the unions mentioned; they are based on the disputes reported for the sample companies; unions which are found mainly among workforces in the smaller firms almost certainly have higher conflict rates than those shown in this table. 'Sample conflicts' refers to disputes with a duration of 3 days +. The unions/types of unions mentioned accounted for some 75 per cent of all sample conflicts of this duration (3 days +). 'B-type' unions are employees' unions which retain an outsider (or professional) in some significant capacity; they are 'internal' but not purely so. 'Co federations' includes unions which are clearly known to be purely internal (in contrast to B-type) and which, for an important group of companies (but not all) cover all or most establishments of the company through a federation.

sort of strategy which unions pursue with respect to collective bargaining emerges from the (far from standardised) ways in which they handle their options: faced with management resistance (normally to demands) the union can opt for (a) conflict (some form of confrontation) as opposed to discussion, or at least to repeated attempts to get management to discuss, (b) particular forms of confrontation (repeated internal disruption rather than a strike) and (c), if it does decide to strike, particular ways of using strike action (prolonged strikes which the union may expect workers to sustain for over a year, cf Samant's handling of the Bombay textile strike early in the eighties; alternatively, short departmental stoppages which may embody considerable planning).

This way of analysing conflict patterns makes it possible to use the experience of conflict (the union's, in this case) to group unions into more general but well-defined 'styles'. In Table 19 four models are discernible:

(1) The ACW (Association of Chemical Workers, INTUC-related) and BKS (Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, Shiv Sena-controlled) both encounter a high proportion of lockouts (33 per cent of all conflicts they have been involved in), the lockouts themselves are fairly protracted (above or close to the extremely high average durations of the early eighties), but these unions also register the lowest strike frequencies, which implies that they are certainly averse to strike action.

(2) CITU (CPI(M)-controlled) and B-type unions, that is, employees' unions led by an outsider (in most cases, their legal adviser) have low lockout proportions as well as the lowest 1/sdd ratios, i.e., in comparative terms, encounter *less* aggressiveness from employers; thus in Bombay at least, there is no evidence to support the notion that employers are especially hostile to a union controlled by a party which calls itself Marxist; the logic which governs Bombay labour relations is an industrial relations logic, not an obviously political one. The SSS (Sarva Shramik Sangh, connected with the Lai Nishan Party, also leftwing) and the BLU (Bombay Labour Union, strong in the sixties when it was led by George Fernandes for the socialists) reflect the general characteristics of this 'left wing' model, but with clear signs of having encountered more opposition from employers. The BLU's average strike duration (12 days, by far the lowest for Bombay) almost certainly expresses the general style of conflict which characterised BLU plants in the period when Fernandes led Bombay unionism: rapid confrontations involving department stoppages over day-to-day deployment, for example, in Firestone throughout the early sixties.

(3) Samant, who emerged as the single most important union leader of the late seventies and early eighties, but with a style of bargaining rooted more in quasi-political charisma than in any conscious control of strategy; his unions, the AEW (Association

of Engineering Workers) and the MGKU (Maharashtra General Kamgar Union) display a pattern of conflict intermediate between the two just described. Samant's unions encountered more opposition from employers than any other unions—not only a high rate of lockouts (33 per cent, like the ACW and BKS) but three-quarters of them (27 out of 36) lasting generally well over three months. Of the giant conflicts in the sample (200 days+), the majority involve Samant. On the other hand, Samant reacted to employer opposition both by calling strikes more frequently than most unions (except for those described in (4) below) and by attempting to sustain strikes for longer periods—durations which could actually cease to have any instrumental significance, as management slowly resumed production with the *en masse* recruitment of strike-breakers (cf the Mukand steel plant at Kalwa or the Bombay mills) and a hard core was forced to hold out indefinitely. So the model here is: strong employer opposition (not necessarily permanent, however) matched by

a conscious, overtly propagandist use of the strike as a means of increasing support (for Samant) rather than achieving settlement (for workers).

(4) The model defined by the internal unions—employees' unions in the pure sense and company federations based on them; after Samant, most of the hard conflict (60 days+) has centred on unions of this type—a surprising and significant result which completely discredits the idea that internal unions are simply submissive management tools, 'company unions' in the American sense, lacking any real autonomy and encountering no opposition. On the contrary, employees' unions/federations account for 19 per cent of major strikes (compare Samant's 22 per cent) and 22 per cent of major lockouts—a level of employer opposition halfway between Samant (40 per cent) and the rest. On the other hand, the strike behaviour of this group of unions resembles the more perfectly rational durations of (2) as opposed to the long but often ineffectual conflicts launched by Samant.

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