

Comrade V V Ramarao

A short biographical note on Com V V Ramarao, President of State AITUC, General Secretary of Port, Dock and Water Front Federation of India, Honorary President of Vishakha Steel Workers' union, President, Vishakhapatnam Port and Dock workers' union, Honorary President, Chitti Valsa Jute Labour Union, Trustee of Port Trust Board for more than 20 years and member of the Vishakhapatnam Dock Labour Board for more than 25 years.

Com Ramarao was interviewed in Vizag on September 15, 2004 at the Port and Dock workers' union office.

Vemuri Venkat Ramarao was born on October 7, 1947 in a village called Chittigudu in Krishna district which was his mother's place. His father was an agriculturist. Ramarao had his primary education at Chittigudu. He studied upto graduation then discontinued without appearing for the exams. He did engineering diploma course.


While in school, Ramarao joined All India Students Federation and was an active member of the organisation. He met Madhav Rao, a member of the Communist Party of India at this point and was deeply influenced by him. He also took part in the land movement in Kurnool. He met here Com Rajshekhar Reddy, one of the secretariate members of the Communist Party of India (CPI). At that time, Ramarao was one of the state secretaries of AISF.

Ramarao was asked to become a whole time worker in trade union after he finished his studies. Ramarao had only one condition that he did not want to work in his home district. Comrades from Vishakhapatnam invited him to work in the port workers union where Com Bhadram was the founder leader of the union and he was getting old. Another leader Com Bhadra Murti Sarma died in 1969. Ramarao was asked to join to fill his place. Coming from the hills of his village to the ocean, Com Ramarao joined the union in 1971.

In 1975, Com Ramarao became the working president of the organisation and in 1984, honorary president.

As Com Ramarao was comparing the times, he said that earlier there was a work culture in the trade union which has now gone. In 1970, there were 30,000 workers in the loading and unloading job. But now the number has come down to 6000. Most of the work is mechanised and hence the need for workers has dwindled. The workers take voluntary retirement unhesitatingly while the trade unions had fought many battles against such moves by the management. At least 3000 to 4000 workers have opted for voluntary retirement recently. The loading was a manual work and workers could not carry more than seven to eight million tonnes. But now the machines carry more than 47 millions a day. Industries are expanding and the need for automation is growing accordingly.

According to Ramarao, the capital generation has gone up while the employment opportunities have receded. There are growing number of contract labour for whom the management does not have any responsibility. There were 210 workers in the Port and Harbour units who got affiliated to Hind Mazdoor Sabha. These workers were getting even less than minimum wages.



They were working at the daily wages of Rs 24 only. However under the leadership of Com Ramarao, AITUC has taken initiatives to get more wages for them. Now they are working with a daily wage of Rs 250,

In the cargo handling pool, there are 1300 contract workers who get same wages as regular. Altogether 2000 contract workers are employed here who have formed a society of their own. There are still those who get only Rs 150 as daily wages though all of them enjoy the status of regular worker.

In 1995, under the leadership of AITUC, a struggle was launched for wage revision. At least 2000 workers stopped work for 15 days. Finally there was an agreement for incentives.

Again in 1999, workers struck for ten days in which entire loading and unloading staff was involved. It was in this strike that entire work force of AITUC and HMS gave in writing that Com Ramarao had all the rights to take decisions regarding their working conditions.

Com Ramarao is not in favour of launching struggle when the problems could be solved with mutual consent as each strike meant huge losses for the unit. "We want organisation to survive and for that trade unions too have to adjust some time though I would not support total surrender of workers' rights," says Ramarao as he is not for stretching the struggle beyond the unit's capacity.

Com Ramarao cited example of the strike lauched in 2003 by the HMS union among marine workers that was destructive in every sense as the workers are already getting Rs 4000 as consolidated salary alongwith free medical and housing facilities.

The AITUC union collected Rs 30, 00000 from the workers alone to build an office of their own which has been named after late Com Rajshekhar Reddy.

Com Ramarao is with time and wants change in the trade union tactice. He understands the changing character of the present working class and has brought changes in the functioning of the unions led by him.

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While in school, I joined All India Students Federation and was an active member of the organisation. At this point, I met Madhav Rao, a member of the Communist Party of India and was deeply influenced by him. I also took part in the land movement in Kurnool. I met here Com Rajshekhar Reddy, one of the secretariate members of the Communist Party of India (CPI). At that time, I was one of the state secretaries of AISF.

I was asked to become a whole time worker in trade union after I finished my studies. I had only one condition that I did not want to work in my home district. Comrades from Vishakhapatnam invited me to work in the port workers union where Com Bhadram was the founder leader of the union and he was getting old. Another leader Com Bhadra Murli Sarma died in 1969. I was asked to join to fill his place. Coming from the hills of my village to the ocean, I joined the union in 1971.

In 1975, I became the working president of the organisation and in 1984, honorary president.

If one tries to compare the times, earlier there was a work culture in the trade union which has now gone. In 1970, there were 30,000 workers in the loading and unloading job. But now the number has come down to 6000. Most of the work is mechanised and hence the need for workers has dwindled. The workers take voluntary retirement unhesitatingly while the trade unions had fought many battles against such moves by the management. At least 3000 to 4000 workers have opted for voluntary retirement recently. The loading was a manual work and workers could not carry more than seven to eight million tonnes. But now the machines carry more than 47 millions a day. Industries are expanding and the need for automation is growing accordingly.

As the capital generation has gone up while the employment opportunities have receded, there is a growing number of contract labour for whom the management does not have any responsibility. There were 210 workers in the Port and Harbour units who got affiliated to Hind Mazdoor Sabha. These workers were getting even less than minimum wages. They were working at the daily wages of Rs 24 only. However, AITUC has taken initiatives to get more wages for them. Now they are working with a daily wage of Rs 250,

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I am not in favour of launching struggle when the problems could be solved with mutual consent as each strike meant huge losses for the unit. We want organisation to survive and for that trade unions too have to adjust some time though I would not support total surrender of workers' rights. I am not for stretching the struggle beyond the unit's capacity.

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