

Bionote

A. Ramsubbu (Worker-leader; HMS/INTUC/AITUC) (Tamilnadu)

He entered the movement as an ordinary worker, and rose to become a leader of his union after intense struggles and even physical beatings he received.

He is 70 year-old. He joined as a worker in a match factory in 1956. It was there that he came into contact with the HMS union. P.S. Chinnadurai of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) was the leader at that time. Ramsubbu used to work as a domestic help in his house. He used to hear talks about TU activities.

He then joined Janardhan Mills and then Narasimha Mills at 4 annas a day. Then began a long journey of changing mills and towns. His wife also was with him in the thick and thin of life. He was taken as a worker and then thrown out for belonging to this or that faction of the TU organisations. He came into contact with the INTUC and the AITUC in the course of his travels. He was beaten on several occasions, sometimes fatally, and he was saved only by the skin of his teeth. He formed unions in the Arnie sister concerns, and among 19 coop mills in the Vellore area. Worked in Madurai, Tirunelveli, and other textile areas, constantly changing his job. He has great experience of organising the textile workers of the spinning mills in particular.

At present he is associated with the AITUC.

Transcriptive note

A. Ramsabbu (Worker-leader; HMS/INTUC/AITUC: Tamilnadu)

(The interview was given in the state headquarters of the CPI in Chennai on 12 March 2005 at noon. He is an ordinary worker, and as such had difficulties of language. Therefore he managed in Tamil, as well as smatterings of English and Hindi, helped by others. He gave fascinating details of his life with enthusiasm. —Krishna Jha and Anil RAjimbale).

I am 70 years of age, and I do not know my date of birth. I belong to the district of Tirunelveli. I have studied upto 8th standard. Originally I was a textile worker; I also worked in a match factory. I worked in Janardhana Mills in Coimbatore. There I came into contact with the HMS people. I used to work as a domestic help in the house of an HMS leader. There I used to overhear teh conversations on the trade union problems. I had to leave his place and join a mill again. I now came in contact with the AITUC people. I had got married and it was difficult to earn a living. So I had to go from place to place. Also because the various TU leaders punished me for belonging to this or that TU faction. Management was dead against me, because I used to ask the workers to protest against any injustice.

Once myself and my wife walked with our child for about 100 kms to go to a new place because we had no money to but a ticket. At the end of the journey a lorry driver picked us up and dropped at a place, which he recommended for work. It was near Madurai. There I tried to form a union and was beaten by the management people and thrown in a pond for dead. Fortunately I survived. There was a protest strike and it was successful. I was taken back on work. I came in active contact with the AITUC leaders like P. Ramamurthy and P.T. Narayanan.

Between 1958 and 1961 I had to change many places. I was dismissed several times. INTUC tried to win me over. I was dismissed again in 1967. Met A.M. Gopu of AITUC. I also had the privilege of meeting R. Murugesan, one of the railway drivers and leaders. He was one of those persons who in 1947 were requested by Pt Nehru to drive trains across the newly-created Indo-Pak borders because other employees were not prepared to do so.

In one of the incidents in my life, the CITU people pured petrol on one of the rooms in which we were staying. 3 people were burnt to death; I survived. I worked in the Arnie group of textile factories. I also worked among the 19 coop societies near the place in Vellore, and formed their union. I was instrumental in establishing AITUC in the Sholinger-Vellore area.

Today these and other areas arrre having lot of units and strong unions. There are large number of spinning mills. Windmill generation of power can also be met with. This is also the area where the 'sumangali' system of work is in operation, which is a very exploitative system.

I am very active in the AITUC unions.

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