

PUBLICATION No. 4

**LIFE SKETCH OF
Com. G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR
- tribute to a Centenarian -**

9.9.1892 :: 5.1.1985



**PUBLISHED BY
GURUSWAMI ALAMELU LABOUR
RESEARCH CENTRE
26, KHANA BAGH STREET, MADRAS-600 005**

Rs. 5/-

DEDICATED TO
OCTOGENARIAN
M. BALAKRISHNAN
a true and trustful colleague of
G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR

who nursed his needs at the fag end of
Chettiar's life

Released on the occasion of 89th birthday of S. GURUSWAMI on 28.9.1992, by Com. C.S.S. SHEITY, a trade union leader with independent outlook who is serving selflessly the cause of workers' betterment in their social status in the Society and President, Ennore Foundries Employees' Union.

FIRST COPY PRESENTED TO
Com. N. JEENARAJ,

Ex. General Secretary, Madras Labour Union.

CENTENARY TRIBUTE TO COM. G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR, GRAND PATRIARCH AND THE FORGOTTEN PIONEER OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN INDIA

"Speak up for the people who cannot speak themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge." : BIBLE :

GURUSWAMI ALAMELU LABOUR RESEARCH CENTRE, is proudly bringing out this book on Com. G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR, at the end of centenary year, on 28.9.92, with a sense of gratitude.

Com. Chettiar was one of the founders of the MADRAS LABOUR UNION, first trade union in India, followed by M.&S.M. Railway Employees Union and umpteen Unions during the alien British rule, when the workers were subjected to pinpricks without any trade union rights and privileges.

Chelvapathi's father had a Bhajan Mandir called Sri Venkatesa Gunamruthavarshani Sabha in General Muthiah Mudali Street, Madras. After the demise of his father in 1908, Chettiar shifted his residence, business and also the Sabha to De'Mellows Road, Perambur, Madras. Being a predominant workers area with the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills situated nearby in the locality, workers were used to attend the bhajans, discourses and religious functions held in the Sabha, regularly. After the function was over, workers narrated their untold and unbearable miseries and sufferings due to the cruel treatment and harassment by the European Subordinates to them in the Mills and pleaded to find out a solution to Chettiar and Naidu.

ORIGIN OF BINNY & CO., & BUCKINGHAM & CARNATIC MILLS

JOHN BINNY deputed by his uncle Charles Binny came to Madras in May 1797 as a Physician to the last Nawab. In fact, John Binny was not a Physician and did not know the basic knowledge. But, he was appointed as a Physician in the Court of Nawab, on a monthly salary of Rs.500, a fabulous amount, at that time. He had never prescribed any medicine nor done any surgery and God only saved the people and Nawab and his family !

John Binny was allotted a Bungalow near Mount Road. Now, the road is named Binny Road. In addition to Physician, he was doing money lending for the cloth business. He was also a Commission Agent. He expanded his business after relinquishing his Physician job. He earned a lot and was one of the leading business magnets in Madras. He died at the age of 55 in 1824. After his death, his Binny & Co., was looked after by his relatives and they started a Mill in 1876 and named BUCKHINGHAM MILL in memory of Duke of Buckhinham Sandos. He was Governor of Madras. Another Mill opened in 1881 called CARNATIC MILL was merged with Buckingham Mill and named BUCKINHAM & CARNATIC MILLS and the Managing Agents were Binny & Co.,

(Extract from an article on John Binny by Com. Rander Gay.)

FORMATION OF MADRAS LABOUR UNION

A celebrated centenarian G. RAMANJULU NAIDU, who was a rice dealer, a very close associate of Chettiar, a textile business man and both of them patiently heard the sufferings of the workers and wanted to help them. Both were humble and devoted humanists.

Both were deeply thinking and decided to prepare a Memorandum pinpointing the sufferings of the workers and sent to the Management. In turn, the Management solved some of them. Encouraged by this, both Chettiar and Naidu used to redress the problems of workers through their own inimitable way. But, the workers grievances were mounting day by day. Both were unable to contend and control the issues facing daily, were seriously thinking of finding out a permanent remedy for the redressal of the suffering of workers and bringing all of them under one umbrella. Chettiar invited THIRU. VI. KALYANASUNDARANAR, affectionately and fondly called "Thamiz Thenral" (Breeze of Tamil) to address meetings in the Sabha. Thiru.Vi.Ka. after hearing the workers plight and pitiable conditions, agreed to help them. On his advise, a mammoth workers meeting was held on 2.3.1918 when it was decided to form an organisation purely to solve workers problems. Thiru.Vi.Ka. presided over the meeting. The workers realised that to ventilate their grievances, a Union and unity among them, was must.

Gooty KESAVA PILLAI, a humanitarian, wrote several articles on labour problems in the INDIAN PATRIOT and the need for an organisation for them. The MADRAS MAIL in a rejoinder felt there was no need for an organisation for solving the problems of workers. In NEW INDIA, B.P. WADIA supported Gooty Kesava Pillai and wrote articles for the formation of Union. These articles were translated by Thiru.Vi.Ka. in his DESA BHAKTHAN. Through circulation of pamphlets, workers hearts were kindled and touched, adding fuel to the fire of forming Union.

As soon as the information about decision to form Union reached the Management, they started giving un-

necessary troubles not only to Chettiar and Naidu but also to the workers who were behind the decision, in their day-to-day life. Both Chettiar and Naidu were living in a rental house. If both were separated the idea of forming Union and helping the workers could be nipped in the bud itself. The owner of the house was summoned by the Police officials, as instigated by the Management, to vacate both. But, the owner stoutly refused to do so. It was a severe blow to the Management. Being perturbed, both Chettiar and Naidu, decided to contact and consult Dr. ANNIE BESANT, mother of Home rule movement in India. They had been to 'New India's Office to meet Annie Besant but she was not in office. Then, they met Com.P.Wadia, Assistant Editor, New India, and explained everything and sought his guidance. Wadia took both Chettiar and Naidu in his car to the workspot and witnessed. Fortunately, when they reached, workers hurriedly came out for their lunch provided only for "swallowing a few morsels and running back lest they be shut out." Wadia watched the pitiable scene. Workers should work from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and were closely watched even during natural call. Even a minute delay deprived them a day's wage.

Com.B.SHIVA RAO, President of the Madras Labour Union, in 1931, wrote an article in "Com.G.CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR's 75th BIRTHDAY SOUVENIR", as under:

"It would be no exaggeration to say that but for the zeal and earnestness with which he (Chettiar) championed the cause of the workers at the Mills in Perambur Barracks, the starting of the trade union movement in Madras, indeed all over India, might have been delayed by some years. My mind goes back by almost fifty years to the end of the first world war, when two youngmen, one of whom was G. Chelvapathi Chetty and other G. Ramanjulu

Naidu, came to the office of Besant's "New India" in George Town to seek the advice and assistance of its Assistant Editor B.P.Wadia. Those who have joined the Mills during the last 30 years may have no conception of the terrible conditions of workers and of the low wages which were the lot of those working in Indian Mills at the end of the first world war in 1919.

The duration of work was for twelve hours per day with only half-an-hour break for the mid-day meal. There was no trade union law giving the right to workers to form Unions for collective bargaining with the employers. The wages were a fraction of what they are to-day. Most of the workers were condemned to a life of misery in which they had hardly any right and little hope of improvement".

It was under these depressing circumstances that Chettiar and Naidu roped in Wadia in the organisation of trade union. The response from the workers side was marvellous and tremendous. Thousands came to the meetings willing to sacrifice everything, prepared to face suffering for the sake of building up a Union.

ROLE OF THIRU.VI.KA

Wadia addressed several meetings outside the Mill and also in the Bhajana Sabha. His effective speech was translated by Thiru.Vi.Ka. effectively and touched the heart of the workers. In one of the meetings, Wadia, hitherto addressed 'Brothers and Sisters' changed to address the workers as 'Comrades'. Thiru.Vi.Ka. normally before starting speech, he used to pray Almighty first singing a song composed by Saint Appar alias Thirunavukkarasu, the great Saivite. In that song he characterised God as "*Ezhisayai Isaipayanai Enathu Thozhanumai*"

Thiru.Vi.Ka. immediately translated the word 'Comrades' into Tamil as 'THOZHARGALE'. A tremendous applause from the workers shook the place, hitherto they had not heard that word. From that day onwards, that word 'Thozhargale' became familiar gaining currency among the trade unionists. Wadia very much appreciated Thiru.Vi.Ka.'s translation and liked his speech. His speech was shortened when Thiru.Vi.Ka. was away. When Wadia left India for England, he dedicated his book "LABOUR IN MADRAS" to Thiru.Vi.Ka. for gratitude.

The Management had furiously imposed restrictions on workers. They threatened, harassed and punished, when workers approached the European Subordinates to air their day to day grievances. The European Subordinates sarcastically told the workers "you have got Wadia and Chettiar, go to them and they will not only redress your grievances but also pay the wages." There was deeprooted disillusionment and desolation among the workers. The leaders realised that if it continued, the workers would be frustrated and demoralised.

To get rid of victimisation and safeguard the workers rights, the MADRAS LABOUR UNION was born after agony and anguish of the workers and the same was inaugurated on 27.4.1918 with Comrades. B.P. WADIA, as its first President and G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR and G.RAMANJULU NAIDU, as its Secretaries. The Madras Labour Union had a regular constitution with a membership fee of one anna per month and was open to workers of other industries and was not restricted to the textile labourers only.

The Management was taken aback by the rousing response of the workers. Legal proceedings were launched against Wadia and other leaders for interference with the

war effort of the Mills. It was a celebrated case which drew the attention not only of the whole country but also of many parts of the World. Ultimately, the Government introduced legislation giving industrial workers the right to form trade unions and get them registered under the law. Other progressive legislations followed in the next few years reducing the hours of work, granting compensation to workers injured in accidents in the course of their duties, benefits of pregnant women workers, etc.

SOLIDARITY OF WORKERS

All honours should go to the workers who were the pioneers in the movement and for the sacrifices they made risking their employment and for active interest and participation in their Unions and they had full faith in the leadership.

Wadia left for Europe and America in May 1919 to give evidence on behalf of Indian workers before the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament set up in connection with the Moniform Reforms Bill and to participate in the International Labour Conference held at Washington. An interesting event took place when Com.N.M.JOSHI, father of Indian Trade Union Movement, was first deputed to represent labour from India to attend the International Labour Conference held at Washington during 1919, the workers of Madras Labour Union had agitated and insisted to nominate Wadia also for the Conference. The Government conceded the demand. In this Conference, Wadia - a stormy petrel - thundered to reduce the working hours to 10 hours and due recognition should be given to workers and the dignity of labour must be preserved at all costs.

During Wadia's absence in India, Dr. GEORGE S.ARUNDALE was made President of the Madras Labour Union. He was the first Englishman who was arrested in India during our freedom struggle and he proved himself more than an Indian. He was associated with the Theosophical Society.

Dr. Arundale presented a Memorandum to the Management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills to negotiate and settle the demands of the workers. But, the Management had not only refused to oblige but also made a complaint to the then Governor of Madras, LORD PENTLAND, against Dr. Arundale. The Governor called and warned him that he had received reports that he was indirectly helping the enemies of Britishers and encouraging the workers to affect the production in the Mills who were engaged actively in military contract work.

FIRST COURT OF ENQUIRY

Dr. Arundale straightaway denied and rejected the Governor's false allegations and urged the Governor to appoint a Commissioner of Labour to look after the interests of workers within four weeks. The workers' solidarity behind him had made Dr.Arundale to give an ultimatum to the Governor. The Governor was satisfied and appointed PADDISON as its first Commissioner of Labour. A Court of Enquiry was appointed for the first time in the history of trade union movement to go through the disputes. As a result of Dr. Arundale's untiring efforts and hard labour, the workers got increase in wages, 15 days of annual leave with pay and benefits of Provident Fund, etc.

Chettiar edited "INDIA THOZHILALI" and owned a Printing Press for the Madras Labour Union. He educated the workers in all respects with right earnest. On account

of his hard and sincere service, many workers plunged into the freedom movement. He was the author of the book, in Tamil, on "Origin of Indian Trade Union Movement".

The Government appointed an Enquiry Committee headed by Justice KUMARASAMI SASTRIAR to go into certain basic demands of the workers. But, the then politically awakened workers demanded the Government to withdraw Justice Kumarasami Sastriar on the ground that he was one of the members in the Committee of the ROWLET ACT, an Act enacted after the PUNJAB MASSACRE, Sastriar had not given any dissent note against the decision of the Committee. Sensing the united protest by the workers, the Government dissolved the Committee.

FIRST LOCK-OUT

The Management without any reason, suddenly on 28.10.1918, declared a lock-out and the same was lifted on 27.11.1918. MAHATMA GANDHIJI showed significant sympathy with the workers and deputed DEENABANDU Rev. C.F. ANDREWS to initiate talks with the Management and settle their disputes. On another occasion when workers were on strike, he sent Rs.30,000 to relieve and release the difficulties of workers and their families.

But the Management indirectly victimised the workers by way of increase of the working hours. This was protested by the Union. The Management suspended some of the office-bearers of the Union. This provoked the workers and they decided to stage demonstration to protest against the same.

FIRST MARTYRS

In the meantime, on 20.10.1920, an European Official, entered with a Revolver and threatened the workers

in a vituperative language. Workers moved towards him and snatched the Revolver. It created panic among the European Officials. The Mill was closed on the ground that there was no safety for European Officials. On 9.12.1920, the Management recruited men with the help of Police and paraded them to the Mills. It sparked off a spate of protests by workers. They blocked the roads shouting slogans. Police fired and two workers died on the spot and many injured. The Management was hostile and directed hatred towards workers especially the leaders.

In support of the families of the workers, the Union helped them drawn from the deposits in the Banks. The Union distributed day to day needs without hitting the stomach of their families. The M.&S.M.Railway Employees Union had donated Rs.8,000 and showed their solidarity.

FIRST VICTIMISATION

On account of Dr. Annie Besant's negotiation, the Mill was opened on 27.1.1921. The negotiated settlement was not accepted by the workers and some of their leaders on the ground that 13 workers were victimised. The workers were reluctant to go back to duty. With great persuasion, the workers resumed duty. All the 13 workers and their families were supported by the Union in all respects.

There was a strike in the Cording Department in the Mills due to the dismissal of two workers. On the advice of the Union, the workers were ready to call off their strike. But, the Management issued a notice that the Bonus for the workers would be forfeited and if the Union agreed to this proposition, the Mill would be re-opened.

This arbitrary decision of the Management was condemned by one and all. The matter was referred to the

Labour Commissioner, Sri Moir and Sri K Srinivasa Iyengar, the Executive Councilor in-charge of the Labour portfolio. They expressed their inability as it was not within their jurisdiction to intervene in the incident.

FIRST COMBINED STRIKE

In support of Carnatic Mill, workers of Buckingham Mill issued strike notice. About 10,000 workers took part in the strike. The struggle went on peacefully in spite of the combined opposition of the Government and the Management. To defeat the strike and demoralise the workers, the Management employed the tactics of dividing the workers by alluring the Adi-dravidas to make separate provision for them as against the Caste Hindus. Some of the workers yielded to this. The Mill began to resume work with Police bandobust.

LORD WELLINGTON, the then Governor held meeting with leaders. He threw the responsibility for the untoward incidents on the labour leaders and threatened them with deportation, if such events were repeated. He appointed a Committee to enquire into the disturbances. The enquiry began on 10.8.1921. The Union declined to take part in the enquiry on the ground that the disturbances were subjects of Magisterial enquiry and that the Union had no connection with them. Consequently, the enquiry became abortive.

Finally, the strike ended when Sir P. THIAGARAYA CHETTIAR called the workers meeting and said that the conditions were not favourable to them and advised them to return to duty. Workers revolted against this but pressures mounted and half-heartedly workers returned to duty in December 1921, after loss of lives of 7 workers including a woman on 29.8.1921, due to Police firing.

The historical strike lasted for six months and the workers and their families suffered a lot with fortitude and patience worthy of admiration and this provided a memorable example in the history of labour movement in the Madras City and also in the whole of India.

V.O.Chidambaram Pillai, M.Chingaravelu, V.V.S.Iyer, S.Srinivasa Iyengar, Subramania Siva, V.Chakkarai Chettiar and Sister Balammal and many nationalist leaders and freedom fighters voluntarily came forward for relief work and contributed their mite and some of the leaders went along with the workers to important business centres to collect money, provision, rice, clothes, etc. When the workers approached Sir P.Thiagaraya Chettiar, he told to the workers "I will not pay money. Money may make a split and break your solidarity". But, at the same time, he instructed his known merchants to supply rice, cereal, chilli, oils, vegetables and clothes to workers, on his account.

WELFARE COMMITTEE - FIRST STOUGE

In spite of repression and suppression, the Madras Labour Union was growing from strength to strength. To put an end, the Management started "B.& C.Mills Management Welfare Committee". The object was workers should not approach Madras Labour Union but seek the help of the Welfare Committee only for their day to day redressal. In nut-shell, the Welfare Committee was a stooge in the hands of the Management. To attract workers, the Welfare Committee organised Children's treat and workers were invited with their families to attend. The Governor was to preside and distribute the prizes to the winners and also consolation prizes to all.

The Union called workers rally and the leaders exposed the evil intention of the Management to break the

unity of the workers and crush the Union and passed unanimous resolution to boycott the function. On the day of the function, none went to it and the function had to be cancelled. Only then, the Management had realised the real strength of the Union. Thiru.Vi.Ka. had vowed that he would not wear his turban until he did away with the Welfare Committee. Though the Welfare Committee was discarded by workers, it continued till Com. S.C.C. ANTHONY PILLAI was elected as President of the Madras Labour Union. Thiru.Vi.Ka.'s vow came to an end only in 1946.

N.M.JOSHI'S SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT

Workers throughout India had no protection from the Industrial action. Com.N.M.Joshi was then a nominated member of the Central Assembly to represent labour who with great perseverance over this impending issue and through his earnest efforts got the INDIAN TRADE UNION ACT 1926, enacted. Thus, the first trade Union of India Madras Labour Union, became responsible for the enactment of the Indian Trade Union Act 1926. HATS OFF to MADRAS LABOUR UNION and KUDOS to N.M.JOSHI, the father of Indian Trade Union Movement.

THE TRADE UNION ACT, 1926

The fundamental right of freedom of association was denied to Indian workers till the passing of the Indian Trade Union Act in 1926. The growth of the trade union movement was, therefore, seriously handicapped. According to the then prevailing law of the land, the leaders of the trade unions were liable to civil actions in damages in infringing contractual rights and obligations and for interfering with the employers' right to carry on free trade and

business. In addition, they were exposed to criminal proceedings and punishments for any concerted action.

In fact, such a situation arose in Madras when in 1921 the Madras High Court granted an injunction restraining the leader of the Madras Labour Union from interfering with the business of the

Buckingham & Carnatic Mills. This decision resulted in the breaking of the Union and also focussed public attention on the handicaps to workers in the absence of the right to free of association. Sri N.M.Joshi, the father of the trade union movement in India, therefore, introduced a Trade Union Bill in the Indian Legislature. Even though it was not passed immediately, five years of persistent efforts led to the enactment of the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926. This Act gave a trade union a legal status and immunity to its leaders and members from civil and criminal liability for concerted actions.

(Industrial Disputes Act 1947 by Vithalbai B.Patel, Advocate, Supreme Court)

RIVAL UNION

The Management to break the Madras Labour Union and curtail the influence among the workers, started a rival union called B.&C. Mill Employees Union, made a Clerk as its President with workers as office-bearers. The Union was registered under the Trade Union Act 1926 and recognition was immediately accorded without following any norms.

Women workers were all in the Madras Labour Union. The Management tried to divide them but in vain. The solid support of women workers and the new Union which was started under the patronage of the Manage-

ment were not able to draw women workers in their fold. It decided to retrench all the women workers, with one month notice on 1.7.1926.

The Madras Labour Union protested against the indirect victimisation of women workers because all of them were members of the Union. The 'New India' and 'The Hindu' condemned and wrote editorials. The Management in a rejoinder said that they have taken a decision to retrench all women workers during 1911 itself and the same was implemented now. It was a joke of 1926, the Trade Union Act 1926, was enacted.

The Indian Women Organisation had called for a meeting in the Gokhale Hall, angrily agitated and created opinion among the people against the Management. Series of meetings and rallies were held throughout Madras and gained momentum. As the women organisation took the issue to the streets and in view of the strong public upsurge, the Management ordered to withdraw the retrenchment notices.

UNITY URGED

In December 1926, the International Textile Committee headed by Lord Dhamsha of the British Labour Party visited the Buckingham & Carnatic Mills. They opined that there should not be two Unions in one Industry and it itself showed that the workers were divided. He voluntarily gave some suggestions to unite both the Unions. His suggestions were welcomed by the Madras Labour Union and adopted a resolution in this regard and handed over to Lord Dhamsha. But the other Union under the thumb of the Management, kept mum.

HISTORICAL JUDGMENT

In Choolai Mill, workers went on strike during 1939 after exhausting all the channels for negotiation and settle their long standing demands. The Management had closed the Mill and thousands of workers were thrown out on the streets. Chettiar, as a General Secretary, Madras Labour Union and as an M.L.A. representing Labour, approached RAJAJI, the then Premier of Composite Madras State, to interfere, but no useful purpose was served. The Management refused to pay the wages entitled to the workers who worked prior to the strike. The Union had gone to Court. Sri S.Parthasarathi, son of Sri S.Srinivasa Iyengar and Sri V.K.Thiruvengkatachari, argued the case effectively, free of cost. Sri B.G.Kher, eminent lawyer, also helped the workers in winning the case. They obtained decree from the Madras Labour Commissioner and argued in Bombay Court. The judgment was in favour of workers and about Rs.35,000 were disbursed due to workers. The Mill was completely closed and all the workers in a phased manner were absorbed in the Buckingham & Carnatic Mills. It was a major achievement of the Madras Labour Union.

VICTIMS OF BULLETS

On 14.3.1942, 9 workers were died during the police firing to control the mass demonstration by striking workers and many were injured and hospitalised. The Madras Labour Union sanctioned Rs.800 to the families of each of the nine workers.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

During August 1942, Quit India Movement spread like wild fire, and the leaders were put behind prison, the workers of Buckingham & Carnatic Mills struck work on

24.8.1942 inside the Mills. Lock out was declared by the Management but due to the timely intervention of the leaders, workers resumed duty. But the Management had dismissed 51 workers arbitrarily.

CHETTIAR'S HONEST AND SINCERE SERVICES

Chelvapathi Chettiar was the General Secretary for 25 years continuously and on the day of the silver jubilee celebration of the Madras Labour Union on 14.4.1943, he voluntarily retired and relinquished to give way to others. Com.N.JEENARAJ, a Mill worker was elected as General Secretary. He is now living in Madras.

During his dutiful, honest and sincere services, the workers achieved the following :

Madras Labour Union got recognition in 1932 ;

The working hours reduced from 12 to 10 and then from 10 to 9 ;

Wages raised from Rs.100 to Rs.150 ;

15 days leave with full pay per year ;

13 holidays in a year ;

15 days Bonus in every year ;

Quarters to workers ;

Co-operative Stores and Canteen facilities ;

Free Medical Dispensary ;

Equal promotion to Indians on par with Europeans upto

Supervisory grade ;

Welfare facilities ;

The three-storey building of Madras Labour Union was constructed.

Chettiar attended as a labour representative in the International Labour Organisation Conference held at

Geneva in 1936. In 1937, Chettiar participated in the Asian Labour Unions Conference held at Tokyo in Japan.

Chettiar was elected as a Councilor of the Corporation of Madras continuously from 1927 to 1948. He was elected as Deputy Mayor of the Corporation. He was also elected as a Labour M.L.A. representing Textile Mill Workers Constituency from 1937 to 1939.

During his tenure as Councilor in the Corporation, he had constructed a larger play ground in the name of a famous humanist Gooty Kesava Pillai. With the co-operation of Conronsmith, Commissioner, Corporation of Madras, he removed the unhygienic slums in Beggipalayam and re-built the same in a decent manner thereby ensuring respectable living for many slum-dwellers. The slums were named as Conronsmith Nagar. He also opened many educational institutions and afforded educational facilities to the wards of the workers. To recognise the services of Thiru.Vi.Ka., Wadia, Arundale, Annie Besant, parks were named after them.

Wadia, Thiru.Vi.Ka., Arundale and Shiva Rao were drawn to trade union movement by Chettiar and Naidu-twins in the trade union history- with consistent and continuous contacts.

Thiru.Vi.Ka. rightly described Chelvapathi and Ramanjulu as his two lungs and Madras Labour Union and Railway Employees Union as his very eyes.

The foundation stone of Madras Labour Union was laid by Thiru.Vi.Ka. on 29.5.1931, and it had been named after "CHELVAPATHI-RAMANJULU NILAYAM" and was opened on 16.9.1931 by Gooty P.Kesava Pillai. Wadia's

bust was in the front of the Building. At that time Com.B.Shiva Rao was the President of the Union.

BOLDNESS OF MADRAS LABOUR UNION

The marriage of Dr. George Arundale and Rukmani Devi, created sensation among the intellectuals, revolutionaries, freedom fighters and even self-respect leaders and raised many eye-brows. They condemned and resisted their marriage on the reason that a Britisher married an Indian girl and spoke ill off them on the street corners. They were shocked and outraged that she defied the convention. Even "The Hindu" and "Swadesamitran" wrote against the marriage. It was the Madras Labour Union which invited both Dr Arundale and Rukmani Devi and took out a procession with a participation by thousands of workers with their families to the Union Office and honoured them. Thiru.Vi.Ka. and Chettiar were solidly behind them and responsible for the success of the function.

BIRTH OF M.&S.M. RAILWAY EMPLOYEES UNION

Prior to 1919, the British-owned Management with the help of Government and hooligans spared no efforts to stifle railway workers to form a Union in M.&S.M. Railway right from the beginning.

Railway workers were subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment meted out by European officials. There was no way to voice their grievances. The the sit-down strike in front of Workshop gate in 1905 revolted against the insults hurled out by European Supervisors. The sponsors of the strike were severely punished. Probably, this was the first sit-down strike in the history of railway trade union movement.

In 1911, another strike was launched by Drivers, Guards and Station Masters. It was partially a successful one. But, the moving spirits who organised the strike Com.MARGAM IYER, a Station Master and Com.ALEXANDER, a Driver, were summarily removed from service. The Management sensing the solidarity, realising the genuineness in their grievances, conceded some of the demands.

During 1912, Perambur workers had called a strike and it was lasted for a week. Though a settlement was reached, the following workers who spearheaded the strike were arbitrarily removed from service :

Comrades

Parthasarathi

Gopal

Subbarayalu

Krishnan

Wright

Mohamed

In the first week of December 1913, the Union demanded to allow a reasonable walking time between the Time Office and the Shop Token Boards. The Management refused to oblige the demand. On 19.12.1913, workers in a batch took their tokens from the Time Office to their Shop taking a minimum reasonable time. European Officials had prevented and the workers resisted this. The Works Manager advised the agitated workers to disperse from the workspot. The entire workshop employees gathered en-masse. The Deputy Superintendent, Loco and Carriage, P.G.Porteous who misunderstood that workers were advancing to attack the European Officials and damage the machineries, had taken his revolver and shot. Comrades NATESAN, a Carpenter and SEERALAN, a Fit-

ter, died on the spot. The provoked workers angrily shouted slogans inside the workshops and forcibly entered the offices. The local Police were called and they were unable to control the situation. Then, military personnel stationed at Fort St. George was summoned and they controlled the workers but only after arresting P.G. Porteous, Deputy Superintendent, Loco and Carriage.

Workshop was closed and re-opened on 2.1.1914. The Management identified the 75 militant workers and foisted criminal cases against them. In the trial, the following 12 workers were sentenced ranging from 6 to 18 months imprisonment.

Comrades

Arumugham

Chengalvarayan

Doraisami

Kathirvelu

Kollapuri

Madurai Pillai

Murugesan

Natesan

Shanmugham

Subramanian

Thangavelu

Vaidyanathan

The workers very much felt the need for an organisation and were fed up with the Management, who wantonly harassed, and victimised for no fault of them.

Knowing the formation of Madras Labour Union, the workers of Perambur workshop approached Chettiar and Naidu were requested to help them to form a Union for railwaymen. Chettiar and Naidu had agreed to help. On

2.2.1919, Com.N.GOVINDARAJULU NAIDU, a worker in Machine Shop, boldly issued a signed pamphlet containing some of the demands such as leave with pay, residential card pass, medical facilities, quarters, over time allowance, reduction in working hours, reasonable time for lunch, tiffin shed, provision of latrine, drinking water in the Workshop, etc., and calling railwaymen to come forward in forming a Union like Madras Labour Union.

A chain of two meetings were organised. It was disturbed by hirelings of the Management. Although response from the workers were encouraging, the hooligans swept the meetings, ransacked and attacked the workers. On 7.2.1919, without any publicity in a meeting held at Semmathamman Kojl, the Madras & Southern Mahratta Railway Employees Union was formed after so much of mental and physical pains. The following were nominated as adhoc Office-bearers :

Dr George S. Arundale	President
Com.Thiru.Vi.Kalyanasundaranar	Vice-President
" V.O.Chidambaram	"
" V.Chakkarai Chettiar	"
" G.Chelvapathi Chettiar	Secretary
" G.Ramanjulu Naidu	Joint Secretary
" N.Govindarajulu Naidu	Treasurer
(an employee who boldly issued pamphlet)	

Com.Krishnasami Iyer, the correspondent of 'New India' covered the meeting and published the formation of the Union. The 'Indian Patriot' also gave due publicity.

Immediately after the formation of the Union, a General Body meeting was convened at Jamalla grounds and ratified the deliberations of the meeting held on 7.2.1919. The following were elected :

Com B.P.Wadia	President
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"	Thiru.V.Kalyanasundaranar	Vice-President
	Dr. George S Arundale	"
Com..	G.Chelvapathi Chettiar	Secretary
"	G.Ramanjulu Naidu	Joint Secretary
"	B.Shiva Rao	"

Within a short spell, with the solidarity of workers, they achieved 15 days leave with pay and free residential card pass.

Chettiar was Secretary from 1919 to 1921 only.

ARCHITECTS OF UNIONS

Chettiar and Naidu were architects of the following Unions in addition to Madras Labour Union and M.&S.M.Railway Employees' Union, and spent the major portion of their youthful and energetic period risking their lives. In those days, it was very difficult to organise workers in a particular place and form Unions of their own. The British Imperialists were very cautious and careful that workers should not be allowed to join the mainstream of the freedom movement and thereby with iron hands they crushed, suppressed the feelings of the workers unity and solidarity. In a most diplomatic way, with different outlook, Chettiar and Naidu not embroiled in party politics, ably forged unity among workers to form Union in their field. It was a tough, tremendous and uphill task and both fulfilled the ambitions of workers, as compared to the present days. In short, Chettiar and Naidu steered the Madras Labour Union and other Unions with self-determination and tolerance when it was in a difficult situation.

Their immense contribution will always be remembered. Their sincere services will be a source of inspiration to workers cause.

Aluminium Workers Union
Bakery Workers Union
Barbers Union
Defence Employees' Union
Iron & Steel Workers Union
Kerosene Workers Union
Madras City Police Union
Port Trust Workers Union
Policemen Union
Postmen Union
Printing Press Workers Union
PWD Employees Union
Rickshaw Pullers Union
Scavengers Union
Tramway Workers Union
Union for Employees working in the European Houses

SERVICES OF GURUSWAMI FORUM

On behalf of GURUSWAMI FORUM, Com. Chettiar unveiled a portrait of Com.S.Guruswami to mark his 70th birth anniversary at the Southern Railway Headquarters, Madras, on 28.9.1973, in the presence of Smt. Alamelu S.Guruswami. During the course of his speech, he decried the trend among political parties to start labour wings leading to multiplicity of unions.

On 16.12.1973, GURUSWAMI FORUM, wrote a Letter to the Editor's column in 'The Hindu', praising the yeoman services of Chettiar to the Indian Trade Union Movement. Chettiar thanked GURUSWAMI FORUM through letter dated 20.12.1973.

On 18.1.1979, GURUSWAMI FORUM, submitted an appeal to Thiru M.G.Ramachandran, Chief Minister, Tamil

Nadu, pleading assistance to such of those who had once sincerely served the working class and trade union movement but were not being taken care of now either by the Society or Unions, mentioning very few leaders like G.Chelvapathi Chettiar, on the lines of a scheme formulated by him for indigent artistes, political sufferers, etc. In spite of reminders, there was no response to our appeal.

On seeing our appeal, through the Newspapers, Smt.Rukmani Devi Arundale - one of India's most liberated women - helped Chettiar Rs. 100/- every month, till he expired.

GURUSWAMI FORUM had the privilege of honouring Chettiar on 26.5.1981 by presenting a purse and also by way of paying monthly financial help of Rs.50, sometimes Rs.100 every month, till Chettiar passed away on 5.1.1985. A condolence meeting was held on 11.1.85 at Madras, organised by Com. M. Dharma Rajan of S B I Officers' Association.

The appeal was reiterated on 26.5.1981, at the time of honouring Chettiar in the presence of Thiru Ma.Po.Sivagnanam, the then Chairman, Tamil Nadu Legislative Council.

During the centenary year of G.RAMANJULU NAIDU, GURUSWAMI FORUM, had dedicated a book in July 1986 containing the life sketches of 22 eminent saviours of the past who sincerely served and sacrificed for the cause of trade union movement.

In an article under "The forgotten pioneer" by a veteran Journalist, Com.V. RAM MOHAN GUPTA, in the 'Indian Express' on 29.11.82, rightly pointed out that "once a pioneer of the trade union movement in South India, today, a lonely and forgotten old man". He also narrated

that "a far cry from the elitist leaders of today's trade union movement, Chelvapathi Chettiar, spent his own hard-earned money for the cause of workers. He neglected his textile business and this sacrifice plunged him into debts amounting to more than a lakh. He managed to clear a major part of the debt by selling his only piece of property - a house. Some of the balance was wiped off, thanks to a purse presented by well-wishers, most of whom hailed from outside the labour fold.

EARNEST APPEAL

Before concluding, we are going to give 'FOOD FOR THOUGHT' to workers. They must think and act according to their conscience.

We are celebrating and honouring Acharyas, Artists, Philosophers, Poets, Literary Pandits, Philanthropists, present day political as well as trade union leaders, but not celebrate or honour the saviours who sincerely served for the cause of upliftment of workers and got for them "a status in the society. This is most unfortunate.

In these days of posters praising all and sundry, we should not fail in our sense of gratitude to those leaders who served the society placing it above self. The privileges we now peacefully enjoy are due to the valiant struggle of such illustrious leaders who died in penury, forgotten by the society. Let us not betray them atleast for their souls would never forgive us.

**"ONE WHO DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THE PAST,
WILL MISHANDLE THE PRESENT AND
BETRAY THE FUTURE"**

Let us keep this in our heart and act always.



G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR



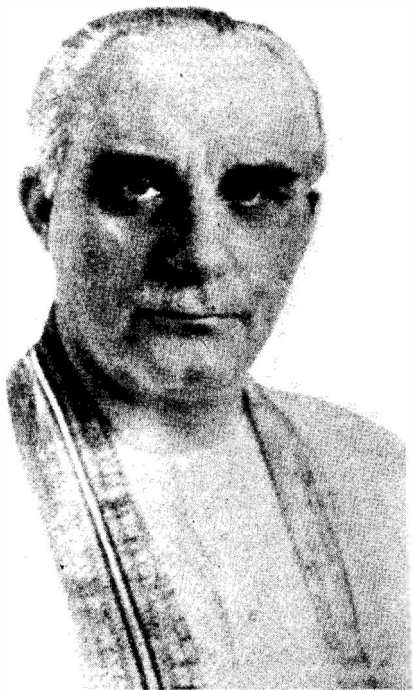
G. RAMANJULU NAIDU



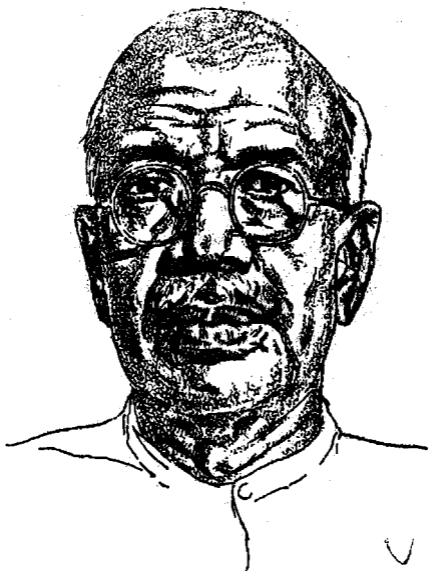
B.P. WADIA



THIRU. VI. KA



Dr. G.S. ARUNDALE



N.M. JOSHI

Father of Indian Trade Union Movement



S. GURUSWAMI

Father of Indian Railway Trade Union Movement

GURUSWAMI FORUM & GURUSWAMI
ALAMELU LABOUR RESEARCH CENTRE,
MADRAS, reverentially salute to the memory
of Martyrs who laid down their valuable lives
for the betterment of the Madras Labour
Union during G. CHELVAPATHI CHETTIAR, as
its General Secretary.

9.12.20

MURUGESAN
BABU RAO

29.08.21

PABANMAL
VENUGOPAL
GOVINDASAMI
ETHIRAJ
RAJAGOPAL
2 NAMES NOT KNOWN

14.03.42

RATHINAM
RAMAN
RADHAKRISHNAN
NARAYANASAMI
NATARAJAN
LOGANATHAN
MUNISAMI
KUPPUSAMI
KUPPAN

LONG LIVE THIER NAME & FAME

DO YOU KNOW 'COMRADES' AS 'THOZHARGALE'

Thamiz Thenral THIRU. VI.KA was the first leader who coined the egalitarian excellent tamil term 'Thozhargale'. In one of the Madras Labour Union's meetings, Wadia, after returning from England, addressed the workers as 'Comrades', hitherto addressed as 'Brothers and Sisters'. Thiru. Vi. Ka normally used to pray God by heart singing a song from Saint Appar Thevaram "Ezisyai, Isaipayanai Enathu Thozhanumai"

Thiru Vi. Ka immediately translated the word 'Comrades' as 'Thozhargale'.

INVENTOR OF THE CATCHING SLOGAN 'INQUILAB'

Veteran freedom fighter and trade union leader Com. MOULANA HASARAT MOHINI, during 1921, in the massive morcha by the workers of Kanpur, added a new term - a very attractive and catching slogan - 'INQUILAB' zindabad.

Com. MOULANA was a leading torch bearer of the Socialist Party of India and one of the founders of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. A chief advocate of free labour movement pleading that the workers should be saved from the power politics of thier leaders.

Com. MOULANA HASARAT MOHINI was born in 1881 when Indians were treated as slaves and died in 1951 , four years after India liberated from British rule.