

10. A Satyanarayana (AITUC), Vishakhapatnam Shipyard

BIO-NOTE

A short biographical note on A Satyanarayana, a retired worker and AITUC leader of the Vizag Shipyard interviewed at Ukkunagar, Vishakhapatnam on September 11, 2004

A Satyanarayana was born on 5 September, 1941 in a village called Arabapillan in Ankkapalli area of Vishakhapatnam district with a population of 400 families only. Satyanarayan's father was a landless worker and could not afford to educate his son after he passed ninth standard in the village school. Satyanarayana entered ITI after leaving school and did plumbing courses in 1962. However after five years of unemployment, Satyanarayana managed a job in the shipyard in 1967 as pipeline fitter.

Satyanarayana joined trade union accidentally as the leader of the CITU union, Krishnamurthy from Tamilnadu, a draftsman in the shipyard, undertook him in his folds. He taught him to fight for the workers' demands and made him aware of his rights as a worker.

In 1967 itself, shortly after joining, Satyanarayan was asked to contest the election for the post of General Secretary of the union. He came out victorious. In 1967, the basic salary of the workers was only Rs 30 and Dearness allowance was Rs 130. There was no incentives, pension schemes or medical facilities for the workers. With a charter of demands, the workers went on strike in 1967 for 56 days. The MPs like AK Gopalan and Ramamurthy took up the workers' demands in the parliament as Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of the country realised the difficulties of the striking workers and conceded to their demands. VKRV Rao took initiatives to resolve the crisis.

Those were the days when most of the workers came from rural areas and their agriculture was dependent on rains that often ditched them. Their financial conditions were pathetic. These workers had blind faith in their leaders and were ready to go to any extent at his behest. Satyanarayana led the workers for sixteen years with a four years gap in between.

In 1986, Satyanarayana had differences with the CITU as well as CPI(M). The then leader Sunderaiyya had asked Satyanarayana to become wholetimer in the union but the acute poverty in the family stopped him from leaving job. Sunderaiyya sent several others to lead the union who were fresh from university and lacked practical experiences. Satyanarayana was criticised by

them. He was asked no explanation for the charges and was attacked by the state and central leadership both. This absence of democracy and over centralism alienated Satyanarayana from the CPI(M). He resigned and joined CPI as well as AITUC though he has no political differences with the CPI(M).

The union led by Satyanarayana got the pension scheme implemented even for the contract worker. Rs 5000 incentive was given to each worker. The shipyard union was formed in 1944 by CPI leader Vijay Kumar.

Satyanarayana also tried to save workers from other forms of exploitation like indebtedness. There were some among the workers who used to lend money and on salary day, used to take away the interest that sometime was the entire pay packet. Satyanarayana negotiated with the management and any attempt to take money from the workers was stopped. Satyanarayana also introduced cooperative shops for the workers families that used to offer consumer items like soap, oil etc and deduct the money from the salary.

Today there are 10000 workers in the shipyard with 6000 working with the small cranes, 3000 as clerical staff and 1000 officers. Scindia company has constructed quarters for the workers. The electricity is free and washing machines, electric irons and other gadgets are used freely.

Satyanarayana was opposed to the "Separate Telengana" movement but was not able to control the crowds always. Sometime he had to go with the demonstrators against his wishes and he has high respects for the CPI leaders Sanyas Rao and Vijay Kumar who faced the agitating crowds and remained true to their principles.

Satyanarayana has taken voluntary retirement and works among the unorganised stone cutters.

TRANSCRIPTIVE NOTE

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facilities for the workers. With a charter of demands, the workers went on strike in 1967 for 56 days. The MPs like AK Gopalan and Ramamurthy took up the workers' demands in the parliament as Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of the country realised the difficulties of the striking workers and conceded to their demands. VKRV Rao took initiatives to resolve the crisis.

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