

Name: Vasant Mahadik

Native Place - Ratnagiri, Born in Mumbai

Wages Starting Wage Rs.150/- to Rs.175/- per month in year 1960. Now drawing Rs.4,500/- for 26 days.

History: He has been a mill worker in the Winding Dept in the New Great Eastern Mills, Byculla, since 1964. His political life began with his election as a secretary of the local mill committee.. His father was a mukadam in the same mill. He was active in 1982 strike led by Dr. Datta Samant. He lost his job during this strike. He regained his job after two years intense struggle against the management which wanted him to rejoin the mill as a temporary workers. He finally managed to be absorbed as a permanent worker. However, in 1987, his mill closed down again, to be opened in 1994. Since then, Mahadik and his family had to undergo severe financial hardship. He is active in Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti.

Vasant Mahadik:

' My father was in the same mill in the winding department, just as I am now. He was a mukaddam. We are in Bombay and we have no links with our village any more. I was good at my work so I became permanent very soon, in 1964. In those days there was always strike for bonus every year. Dange led a strike in 1974 and it was also for wage hike, but he settled without us getting very much- just 4 rupees. Yes I participated in that strike. I was not in the Communist Party. But Dange saw to it that workers went back into the mill. The strike went on for 45 days. Whenever there was a strike the Congress sent goons to break it. They have all done it. The RMMS is the representative union. They fill lorries in the night with outsiders and bring them into the mill. They did this to break the 1982 Datta Samant strike. These workers would stay inside the mill for days on end. Free meals were provided inside by the mill management.

The strike was total for 6 months. The Congress wanted to break the strike, They didn't want to settle it. The RMMS opposes the right of the textile workers to vote the representative union. They want to retain their monopoly status without the support of the workers. Why are textile workers not given the right to vote which union they want? The RMMS is afraid that no one will vote for them.

I never went to work during the strike period. We survived because my son did two jobs, He used to go to the post office during the day and at night he worked in a press. Even then running of the house was difficult. It was a very difficult time. My son could not complete his education. My wife started working. My daughter could not be educated. She too started working.

There was a lot of violence during the strike. Many people died. My mill started working after a year and a half. Some workers were not taken back on work. Who knows where they went and what they are doing?

The first mill where workers went back to work was Century Mills. This was after 6 months. The trick used by the management was simple. They went to the quarters of the workers and told them-“if you are not coming back to work get out of the chawl and go where you like”. The workers had no option but to go back to work. This way in each mill the owners broke the strike. I went back to work after two years. Until then I stayed out because the strike had not been called off. Finally I had to go to the mill and ask for my job back. They said they would only keep me as a badli- temporary. I refused. Finally they did take me back.

I don't think that Datta Samant made a mistake. He had warned us. He had asked us to keep enough provisions to last for six months. He had to make tall demands because he had kept the standard he had set in his agreements in other industries. It was not his fault. He didn't call the strike. The workers did. He had said we should first settle the issue of the six mills which were already on strike. The Congress wanted to finish him. The Shiv Sena started everything. Then when they refused to finish what they had started, the workers got angry and went to Doctor Samant. They started strikes in some mills. The workers were supporting the Girni Kamgar Sena. When they asked the workers to withdraw the strike based on the assurance given by the chief minister the workers refused. They must have had some pact with Antulay; who knows? Workers say that Doctor first called the RMMS leaders on the phone and asked them what was happening, and they refused to say anything. I don't know if that is true. The workers started to pressurise him for an indefinite strike after the one day token strike on January 6th, in 1982. The Sena opposed the strike. But they did not do anything to the striking workers. It was the RMMS which broke the strike.

The textile workers fought for DA which everyone got the advantage of. Then later the textile workers were getting paid less than everyone else. Even workers in small scale industries got more wages. Earlier workers in other industries used to demand that they should get the textile DA, Then they started getting that as well as wage hikes. Then the sweepers in these industries started getting more wages than a textile worker. The textile workers get about Rs 4000 or so, and a sweeper in a big engineering company gets almost that much! And textile workers used to be the number one workers in the city. Now no one wants to give their daughters away in marriage to a textile worker or his son.

Datta Samant's union filed cases on behalf of the workers who had not been taken back. Some got justice, some didn't. Agriculture? What land do textile workers have that they

can do agriculture. And as to business what business is possible without capital. All they could sell were vegetables and things. Today the plight of the mill worker is such that he can barely keep himself, not even his family.

My mill closed again in 1987. First they said they were closing for three months but they did not open it for 7 whole years when we united under the banner of the Band Girni Kamgar Samiti and fought. I went on a hunger strike along with Datta Iswalkar, and Sudhakar Naik who was the Chief Minister came and gave us assurances. It took a long struggle of three years before they opened the mill and at least the workers got their dues.

The revival proposal was

After Gayatri Singh and the BGKSS struggle, at least the workers got their gratuity. Some one lakh or two lakhs.

In 1994 there was a fire in the mill. In the spinning section. This is a common tactic of the management. Then the RMMS signed a new agreement but even then the mill owner is not really interested in running the mill, even according to that. He is only interested in selling the land.

Now we, the workers who are remaining in this mill are being paid, But that's all.

Although the GKSS has fought, we have fought, the mill is not working.

My wife started work in this strike period. She was kept as a private *ayah* by couple of old Parsee women. She was paid only Rs.1000. But it is preferable to stealing or crime. The condition was very bad. This was during the time our mill closed from '87 till '94. We got Rs. 2000 from our provident fund, but it was spent on Ganpati expenses. So my wife had to work. She worked at that place till Aug. 93, till the women were alive. Our mill remained closed even then. Then she took up a job in Byculla, where she still works.

After '82, for about a year we remained jobless, on the hope that something will work out. Some friends helped, our family doctor friend helped during this time. My brother-in-law sent Rs. 200, 300 monthly, but this did not suffice.