

Notable and important events in the history of MRF workers' union up to 1988.

Tyre Industry :

The tyre tube manufacturing industry in India is only fifty years old. Dunlop Company started the production in 1936 followed by Firestone (Modi-stone of today) in 1939. Before 1936, the tyres and tubes were imported from foreign countries. Madras Rubber Factory was started in 1936 by late. Sri. K.C. Mamman Pillai, producing rubber ballons only, in the beginning. In the process of development, MRF started manufacturing tyres and tubes in collaboration with "Mansfield" tyre Company of USA, in 1962.

Growth of MRF :

Started with a lone factory in Thiruvottiyur, in the name of Madras Rubber Factory, new factories were commissioned in Goa, Kottayam and Arakonam for which, the company changed its name to MRF limited. With 25 years in the field of manufacturing tyres, the company stands in the forefront of such industries, the tyres of the company being exported to more than fifty countries today.

Formation of the Union :

The union was started and registered in 1959. Late Sri. T.S. Ramanujam was the first President. With the lack of opportunity and unfavourable circumstances of the day for the effective functioning of trade unions, ours was also naturally weak in the beginning. That apart, the designs of enemical forces to divide the workers and form parallel unions, was and is also not uncommon. That our workers' were of different linguistics was all the more helpful for these nefarious designs.

Unifications of the two unions:

It was unfortunate that two unions existed in the factory in 1961-62 and in fact an agreement was reached with the minority union. The apprentice workers were made permanent only on condition of accepting the agreement. But these divisions in trade unions were not always permanent. Getting united defined the division is natural for the trade unions. With such unity feelings emerging among the workers the two unions got merged in 1963. Com. Mohan Kumaramangalam and K.M. Sundaram, were elected President and VP and the Union was affiliated to AITUC.

Agitations on Agreements :

During this period a fourteen days strike took place for "bonus". Due to the Indo-China conflict of the time, with emergency in force and the threat of the CM, Sri. M. Bakthavatsalam, to ban the strike – the same was called off without any settlement. No notable agitations or struggles were there still 1971-72, though two agreements were signed during this period. The first agreement signed by the President and the VP in 1964 was effective upto 1967. The second agreement signed on 1-1-68 by Sri. K.M. Sundaram and Sri. Kuruvilamani, VPs and P. Panchasheelan, G. S., V. Chandrasekaran G.S., and Joint Secretaries P. Pappan and M. Purushothaman and Treasurers K.C. Chacko expired in June 1970.

Negative Trends :

A new wave started sweeping the TU movements in the suburbs of Chennai in 1970. In the 60s the majorities of Unions were controlled by AITUC, HMS and INTUC with a few by DMKs, LPF. During this period, a trend developed in many unions against the interest of workers. Throughout the country the capitalists were vying with each other in increasing the production, products and their profits with the active help of the Governments

industrial and economic policies and “5 -Year Plan”. In the name of rationalisation, mechanisation and automation, the capitalists imposed heavy workload on workers and reaped higher production and profits. On the other side the workers’ standard of living was coming down, with increased living expenses. Under the circumstances the imperative need of the “TUs” was for uniting workers and guiding them for valiant and uncompromising struggles against the evil designs of the capitalist. But ignoring this need, collaborating with the capitalists and satisfied with small concessions received from them, a compromising trend was patently visible in many TUs.

A new Wave :

The resentment among the workers against the above trend was also on the rise. As a result of the same, CITU, was formed in 1970, splitting AITC with the aim of unifying the workers on the right line. The TU leadership engaged in compromises giving up the path of struggle gave a blow to democratic TUs also. To preserve the democratic setup and to achieve greater unity among workers to fight for their rights, conscious workers organised themselves throughout the country. Such a wave had its echo in suburbs of Chennai also in early 1970s.

In MRF :

With the expiry of the earlier agreements in 1970, new demands were placed and negotiations were held for more than 10 months without any trace of settlement. The management wanted link productivity with the settlement, which proposal was mooted by the union leadership also. Against the style of functioning of the leadership the general body union met, demanded the resignation of the then leadership and unanimously elected Com. R. Kuchelar as President in 1971. The fighting cadres of the union stood solidly behind him.

On the path of Struggle :

In the absence of a settlement, workers went on a strike from 17-4-71, under the new leadership. Though started on wage demands, the strike had a terrific impact on the suburban Chennai belt itself. On 5-7-1971, the TN government banned the strike. This changed the course of the struggle dramatically. Against the anti-labour policy of the State Government, the strike engulfed the entire workforce of the Chennai suburb. The strike continued defying the ban and 10,000 workers of the Tiruvottiyur area went against the Government policy. The management with the help of the Police, forcibly removed the strikers in vans and lorries and left them 15-20 miles away. They tried to create the impression that the factory was functioning by utilising some paid people work. On July 13, 1971 a massive procession of 50,000 was taken to the Secretariat.

Arrests and Repression :

On the same night, the President Kuchelar was arrested. Again the Suburb workers went on a days strike on 20th July, 1971. Due to the Govt. repression and attack on workers families, the union changed its tactics. On July 21st, 1971, the strike was called off, but the workers decided to continue the struggle from within. Kuchelar was then released. But in a week’s time, President Kuchelar, CITU leaders V.P. Chinthan and K/M/ Gilbert, CPIM, Chennai District Secretaries P.R. Parameswaran were arrested under MISA and kept in separate jails. Protests agitations continued throughout TN for their leaders. The CITU leader Com. P. Ramamurthy filed a case in Chennai High Court for their release and argued the case himself. Due to the unified struggle of the workers of TN, these leaders were released after 40 days of retention on 9-9-1971.

Agreement signed :

As a culmination of this historic agitation an agreement was signed in 1971. It was insisted that the agreement should be signed in the presence of the state labour minister. The union conducted a referendum on this issue among the workers and the Govt. proposal was rejected by a massive voting of 1193 : 91. This struggle of 1971 was a turning point in MRF union life.

Union office :

Even during the above struggle period, the union was successful in having its own union office in its own building. Sri. J.V. Ramana, the Manager of the factory, opened the building with the president Kuchelar in the Chair. The Management helped in repairing the building and erecting a compound wall in the silver jubilee year. Thereafter the struggle became a part of the life of the workers. An attempt was made to take away the rights of the workers in 1973. An 8 days strike was observed. During this period apart from the agitations on the demands of the Company's workers, union members participated in threatanal struggles as well as the common demands of the area.

Emergency Period :

In 1972-74, there was a general execution of workers struggle throughout the country. Valiant strike of railway workers in 1974 and the repressive measures of the Govt. to defeat the same were worth mentioning. Pursuing an attempt to take the rights of the workers the Govt. declared an emergency in 1975 taking away in one sweep the democratic rights also. During this period, the TUs were not allowed to function at all. The TU leaders were either arrested or to go underground. With the idea that it might help the union and the workers in the dark days of the emergency, Sri. P. Chidambaram was taken as the President of the Union. Even then, the union was not cowed down. We were forced to go on a 45 days sitting strike, to thwart the multi pronged attack on the workers.

Lock-out:

The management declared a lockout, which lasted for 131 days. When workers returned for work after the lockout was lifted, 45 workers lost their jobs and the work force was slowly down sized. Earlier agreement had expired on 30-9-1975, but it was unimaginable under the circumstance to think or even talk of a new agreement,

Struggle again :

After the emergency was lifted the Union tried for a new agreement under the President ship of Mr. R. Kuchelar but was forced to take on the path of struggle, hence on the new demands of 1977, a 50 days strike was observed as a result of which an agreement was reached on 2-11-1977, signed by Kuchelar, President, Vice President AM. GOPU and General Secretary, Sri. Sampath. This was in force upto 31-12-1980. Even after this agreement the Union was forced to give a call for sitting strike for 13 days in 1978, with a victory on the legal front also. In spite of successful and victorious struggles difference of opinion and disunity among the workers in contract to the spirit of 1971 surfaced and this came to the forefront in 1980. The union tried to negotiate and settle a new agreement after the expiry of the old one on 31-12-1980. The management which tried to link the agreement with the productivity even in 1970, tried to force it now. The leadership having split into tow factions, an agreement was signed on 9-2-1981, against extraordinary circumstances with President Kuchelar not participating in the discussions and signing the agreement. The agreement providing for 100% production ratio, as against the existing 87.5% was signed by the VP, GS and one Joint Secretary was in force from February 1981 – August 1984.

New leadership again :

The next year of the agreement saw a change of agreement. Com. V.P. Chintan was elected as President in 1982, in which post he continued till his death in 1987. Along with V P Chintan, W R Varadharajan, (Vice President and others) negotiated and signed a settlement in 1985. A new agreement signed by V P C, WRV and General Secretary. P.C. Thiagarajan, on 16-5-1985 covered the period upto 15-12-1988.

Bonus agreement :

Along with the 1981 agreement a long term agreement regarding yearly bonus also was concluded. By this the bonus coupled with the productivity linked bonus would be 20% irrespective of the amount under the Bonus act. Commensurate with the increase in the ceilings under the Bonus act, 20% was assured as bonus and productivity linked bonus. Along with this and in addition to this, an incentive bonus of Rs.200-300 was provided on the basis of a day's production in a year. In view of the successive agreement and increases in DA, due to raise in cost of living index, many workers lost eligibility for their ESI benefits. For these workers separate agreements were reached in 1982 and 86, providing for alternate medical benefits.

Lock-out of 1985 :

In the background of expiry of 1985 agreement, a demand covering ESI benefits and bus facility were taken up. And in retaliation the Company declared a lockout on 24-3-1986. But due to unified and firm struggle for 45 days the lockout was lifted, Thereafter an agreement was reached for alternate medical facilities for those who came out of purview of ESI scheme and was signed on 21-5-1986. Another agreement on their longstanding demand for bus facilities for the three shifts was reached on 22-2-1988, providing for Bus facilities from Chennai Central Station and Manali-Meenchur Areas.

Cordial Industrial Relations :

While union has a reputation of intensified struggles on the basis of unity in action, whenever the same was forced on it, it has the fair name of extending its hand in good faith for cordial industrial relations. A function was arranged on 5-11-1980, to commemorate the cordial industrial relations that existed for two years after the 78-79 struggles. In the functions celebrating 743 days of uninterrupted functioning of the factory ever silver pots donated by the company were distributed by the then labour commissioner Mr. S. Narasimhan, IAS, to the workers. The union established factories in Goa, Kottayam and Arakonam, the basic pay and DA is much less when compared to the main factory and a major portion is linked with productivity. But in the main factory in Thiruvottiyur, wages were substantially high, with lesser amount linked with productivity, hence it has become a practice for the company to give priority and preference to the new factories in the matters of new investments, new pattern of tyre manufacturing etc. This is being done by the Management to reap more profits, with less industrial action. By this way, the management is neglecting the Thiruvottiyur factory, and its workers. The Thiruvottiyur workers being no way inferior to others in their capacity and sincerity, and as contributors of a major proportion to productions as well as to export orders, deserve a more generous treatment and priority in the matters of investment etc., and their own interest.

Silver Jubilee of the Union :

The Silver Jubilee of the tyre manufacturing year of the Company was celebrated on 18-4-1987. HMT watches were given to the workers on Silver Jubilee day and the Management had agreed to give silver plates every year, for those who have completed 25 years of service. Union expressed its gratitude to the management for celebrating Silver Jubilee year, for bringing out the souvenir of the SJ of the Union for distributing mementos to the workers.

Call to workers :

On the Silver Jubilee Day of the Union, Union gave a call to the worker –

- to bare in mind the arduous path travelled
- the valiant cadre who bore the front of the attack and made sacrificies
- the conscious cadres who stood firm in unity and struggle forgetting their personal and other differences
- the threatening TUs of the Chennai Suburb who stood with them, during the period of trials and troubles and
- to contribution our share to the valiant fighters of working class in fulfilling the historic duties of Trade Unions.

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List of office-bearers: - MRF

Year	President	Vice-Presidents	General Secretary	Joint Secretaries	Treasurer
1959-60	T.S. Ramanujam	M.V. Narayanasamy K. Balan	T.K. Kesavan	Yohanan, V.C. Mathew	Arumugam
1960-61	T.S. Ramanujam	N. Thiyagarajan, A Raman TK Kesavan	P. Ganesan	P.G. Samuvel, K.V. Verghee	K.V. Vergheese
1961-62	T.S. Ramanujam	N. Thiyagarajan, A. Raman	R.M. Venkatesan	K. Balu, P. Ganesan	N. Ramanujam
1962-63	R. Rangasamy	S.M. Narayanan, Ramachandra Iyer	P.G. Samuvel, P. Guruvilamani	K. Verghee, K. Dhakshinamurthy,	O.C. Vergheese
1963-64	Mohan Kumaramangalam	K. M. Sundaram, P. Kuruvilamani, Arumugam	N.S. Paramasivam	K.V. Verghee, T.K. Kesavan	Ramakrishnan
1964-65	Mohan Kumaramanagalam	K.M. Sundaram, Hanumantharao	Nevili Kosan	S. Sundaramoorthy, P. Chellaiyah	P.N. Ramalingam
1965-66	Mohan Kumaramangalam	K.M. Sundaram, P. Panchaseelan	V. Chandrasekaran	G. John Krishnan, E.N. Ramakrishnan	P.N. Ramalingam
1966-67/ 1967-68	K.M. Sundaram	P. Kuruvilamani, P. Panchaseelan	V. Chandrasekaran	P. Pappan, M. Purushothaman	K.C. Chako

Year	President	Vice-Presidents	General Secretary	Joint Secretaries	Treasurer
1968-69	K.M. Sundaram	P.N. Ramalingam, P.T. Josh	V.N. Srinivasan	M. Ambalavannan, D. Gopalakrishnan	K.C. Chako
1969-70	K.M. Sundaram	L. Balaraman, D. Gopalakrishnan	N. Chandrasekaran	L. Lawrence, M. Ambalavannan	K.C. Chako
1970-71	K.M.Sundaram	L. Balaraman, R.M. Venkatesan	V. Chandrasekaran	M. Ambalavannan, M. Vilson	K.C. Chako
1971-72	R. Kuchelan	R.M.Venkatesan, C.D. Radhakrishnan	A. Sundar Arthor	V.V. Chako, R. Sampath	K.ChinnaThambi
1972-73	R. Kuchelan	M. Kesavan, N. Sundararajan	V.N. Srinivasan	V.U. Abraham, M.A. Chittar	K. Lohan
1973-74	R. Kuchelan	P. Chellaiah, K. Venugopal	M. Viswanathan	V.R. Chitrabalam, A. Barkath Ali	M. Alaikchandar
1974-75	R. Kuchelan	V.R. Chitrabalam, U. Vasakamani	M. Viswanathan	A.N. Dasan, A.N. Sakthivel	M. Alaikchandar
1975-76	P. Chidambaram	T. Thirugnanam, G. Dillidurai	A. Palani	S. Selvaraj, N. Manoharan	N. Ramakrishnan
1976-77	P. Chidambaram	A.M.Gopu, S. Selvaraj	R. Sampath,	T. Thirugnanam, N. Ramakrishnan	P. Gajendran
1977-78	R. Kuchelan	A.M. Gopu, K.K. Narayanan	R. Sampath	Ramachanra Nair, G. Joshi	T.C. Thiagarajan

Year	President	Vice-Presidents	General Secretary	Joint Secretaries	Treasurer
1978-79	R. Kuchelan	C.K. Madavan, U. Vasakamani	Ramachandra Nair	T.C. Thiagarajan, R. Seeralan	PLSomasundaram
1979-80	R. Kuchelan	C.K. Madavan, T. Thaneeslas	V.R. Chitrambalam	P.J. Anthony, K.B. Swaminathan	T.C. Thiagarajan
1980-81	R. Kuchelan	T.P. Elumalai, T.C. Thiagarajan	V.R. Chitrambalam	P. Kathaleeswaraswamy, T. Neelan	J. Francis Ticroos
1981-82	R. Kuchelan	R. Chakrapani, P. Kathaleeswarasamy	D. Dhakshinamurthy	V. Aron Devadasan, D. Gopalakrishnan	T. Thaneeslas
1982-83	V.P. Chinthan	W.R. Varadharajan, K. Chinnathambi	P.Kathaleeswarasamy	J. Francis Ticroos, T. Thaneeslas	D. Devaraj
1983-84	V.P. Chinthan	W.R. Varadharajan, R.M. Venkatesan	T.C. Thiagarajan	J. Francis Ticroos, K. Kasinathan	R. Ranganathan
1984-85	V.P. Chinthan	W.R. Varadharajan, R.M. Venkatesan	T.C. Thiagarajan	J. Francis Ticroos, K. Kasinathan	R. Ranganathan
1985-86	V.P. Chinthan	W.R. Varadharajan, J. Francis Ticroos	T.C. Thiagarajan	E. Govindaraj, R. Mahalingam	G. Sukumaran
1986-87	V.P. Chinthan	P. Govindarajan, J. Francis Ticroos	P.Kathaleeswarasamy	R. Amalraj, E. Govindaraj	G. Sukumaran
1987-88	W.R. Varadharajan	A. Soundrarajan, J. Francis Ticroos	T.C. Thiagarajan	R. Amalraj, E. Govindaraj	G. Sukumaran