

R Govindrao

A short biographical note on R Govindrao, a prominent activist of the trade union in Andhra Pradesh Pulp and Paper Mills. interviewed on September 21, 2004 at Rajamundri, Andhra Pradesh

R Govindrao was born on March 20, 1949 at Rajamundri in a family of farmers. His father was from a joint family and had four brothers and four sisters. In getting married his sisters, Govindrao's father sold away his land and came to Rajamundri for employment and educating his children.

Govind Rao had two elder brothers who left home after getting married. There was the retired father and a brother and sister alongwith mother in the family and there ws no earning to run the huuse. Govindrao had to leave his studies after school and take up a job.

In front of the house where Govindrao lived, there was Communist Party office where one of its most brilliant leaders called Prabhakar Chaudhry was a frequent visitor. He always talked to the youngmen around, gave them Marxist literature, and replied all their questions. Govindrao slowly got convinced that it was the only way for him.

At school, in 1971-72, Govindrao became close to Stanley, a local Students' Federation leader. He accompanied Stanley to villages around to form the organisation. Both visited all the schools in the district. They also used to have ideological discussions and classes. By this time, Prabhakar Chaudhry got elected to the Legislative Assembly.

Govindrao joined Pulp and Paper Mills on January 22, 1974 and same day joined the union too of which Prabhakar Chaudhry was president and Stanley, a prominent leader. Govindrao soon became a committee member and after three years became vice president of the union. Whatever he had learned in the ideological classes, Govindrao passed them on to the workers.

Govindrao always stood by the suffering workers and gave representations for them for their medication, leave and salary protection. He used to take workers to the ESI and forced the management to organise supply of medicines.

Govindrao also helped to write leaflets and distribute them among the workers on issues that came up time to time. It was only after the ceaseless efforts of these union leaders that negotiations started on the demands posed by the workers.

In 1976, when CITU union was recognised and Balaji became leader, he signed an agreement which suggested that the age of teh workers would be decided by the doctors. It was a manipulation by the management to decide the age of the workers arbitrarily and retire them. The AITUC union wanted to launch agitation against the agreement but since Emergency was proclaimed, they could not do so. However, in the next election, Balaji lost and Prabhakar Chaudhry came back with a thumping majority.

In 1979, a strike was launched by IFTU under the leadership of Subbarao that continued for 88 days. The workers were fed up but IFTU refused to call it off. At this time, Prabhakar Chaudhry managed to withdraw the strike with a negotiated settlement.

In December, 1986, there was flood in Godavari river and workers' houses were flooded. They had nothing to sustain them. All other factories had extended either loan or relief to their workers except the Paper Mills. When the workers asked for advance salary, an officer called Maheswari refused. The workers got infuriated and attacked the officer and beat him up and thinking that he was dead, left him. He was alive and later apologised.

The workers assembled in the courtyard prepared to commit mass suicide as they felt disillusioned with the management. They had chlorine dioxide with them used in paper production. A five hundred strong police battalion was brought in with orders to shoot at sight. However the district collector refused to issue the order to fire and instead called the leaders for a talk. Govindrao and Stanley alongwith few more negotiated and got one month salary in advance which was to be paid back in monthly premiums.

Govindrao is still in harness and works for the union.

Govindrao, alongwith Stanley and many other leaders, negotiated with the management and brought succour to teh suffering workers.

However, till early eighties, the management was not highly educated and managed the affairs of the company irratically. But since last twenty years, trained officers are brought to deal with the workers in a sophisticated way. Thus the treatment with the workers has undergone a total change.

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