
CHAPTER 5: VARIOUS TRADE UNIONS IN ICHALKARANJI

Trade Union means an association of individuals formed with the intention of safeguarding the interests of its members and of giving certain rights and benefits to them. It is commonly understood that a trade union is formed by the workers and their employers in respect of any trade or business.

The Indian Trade Unions Act was passed in the year 1926. The Act deals with the registration of trade unions and the rights and liabilities of registered trade unions. But it is not compulsory that trade union must be registered under this Act. Registration gives protection to office bearers and members of the unions in respect of civil and criminal liabilities. Besides registration gives a legal status to a trade union. In Ichalkaranji, we find that every trade union is registered union. These unions are registered under the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1938.

The credit of starting trade unions goes to the Communists and the Congress leaders. The Lal Bavata Union (CITU) and INTUC have been pioneers of these unions in Ichalkaranji, and have ultimately remained as the powerful force among the workers.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to cover the following unions - Lal Bavata Union, Processing Union (INTUC) and Sizing Workers' Union in Ichalkaranji.

(1) Lal Bavata Union¹

The Lal Bavata Union, a subsidiary of CITU was established in Ichalkaranji on 23rd December, 1967. The main intention behind forming the union was to make the power-loom workers aware of their rights and privileges. There was no security for them in their jobs nor did they enjoy the privileges like leave, overtime allowance etc. It was the primary purpose of this union to get these rights. Some paltry gifts like Dhotees, sweets etc. were offered to the workers on the occasion of Diwali, as bonus. It was necessary for them to have the security of job wages and surity of wages commensurate with the labour put in coupled with other rights. So, Com. S.P. Patil, Com. Shantarambapu Garud and Com. K.L. Malabade made incessant efforts to pioneer the union under the Chairmanship of Com. S.P. Patil.

The Union's membership is open to any worker in textile industry who pays one rupee and ten paise as membership fees. Out of this amount five paise are paid to the CITU of Maharashtra, five paise are sent to its Delhi office and one rupee is used for local office purpose. With one thousand members, this union started in Ichalkaranji and it rose to twenty thousand in 1984.

According to the present president of the union, this is the real representative union of the powerloom workers. Because a majority of the power-loom workers streamed to this Union, as

is obvious from the rising number of members.

The annual general meeting of this union is held either in January or February to elect the officials in the direct election. The office-bearers of this Union are as under:

- 1 President
- 2 Four Vice-Presidents
- 3 General Secretary
- 4 Four Joint Secretaries
- 5 Treasurer
- 6 Auditor

Generally, these office-bearers belong to the labourers of the industry. The General Secretary submits the reports of the previous year in the General Meeting for the approval of the body. All these authorities are accountable for their work and they have to face the annual general meeting.

Every official of this union is basically a labourer and is actually working in the powerloom unit. The members of the union are increasing rapidly, so it is essential to appoint a full time worker to look after day to day business of the union. The full time officials include President, Organiser, three Joint secretaries. All these officials are paid Rs. 500/- as honorarium. One of the full time officials advocates for the labourers in the Labour Courts. This work is done without any fees.

As stated above, this union is affiliated to CITU. Its main office is in Delhi. All the motives of CITU are the guidelines of these unions. But the constitution differs from each other. Like CITU, it has Marxist philosophy in the core of its intentions. Revolution is their goal to establish workers' dictatorship. The capitalists do not allow them their own liberty and throw them into slavery. The Unions, therefore, consider it most important to fight against these capitalists for financial security and welfare of the labours. This is the prime purpose of this union. The Marxist Party of India supports this union since its inception. But they are altogether different. The labourers who believe in other political parties are also the members of this union. This union does not get financial assistance from any political party. Some of the comrades of this union work for the Marxist Party, but basically the Marxist party and Lal Bavata Union are different. This union treats Indian democracy as capitalist democracy. Therefore, it is open that India so long as the country continues to rule democratically, the labour will remain in slavery and will have no chance in this system. The basic problems of the labours will never be solved in this system. This system has given many facilities to the worker, but now it has reached its high water-mark and will not solve the basic labour problems. This union appeals the labours to fight against this system itself. It does not believe in Military dictatorship. Democracy is superior to dictatorship, but they prefer dictatorship of

workers as stated by Karl Marx. The union dreams for establishing this type of a system.

There were five lakh workers in Maharashtra 15 years ago, who were working in textile industry. 1.5 lakh out of them were working in textile mills and the remaining in handloom and powerloom industries. In those days handloom workers were smaller in number than the textile workers. But the present situation shows the diminishing number of textile workers. Powerloom workers have increased enormously over the textile mill workers. But these handloom and powerloom labourers is defected and not united. So, they do not get security in jobs in their factories. It is, therefore, essential to bring them together and unite them to make them aware of their rights. It is the major challenge before this union. The present Government machinery did not solve the basic problem of the labours. Therefore, in Ichalkaranji as well as in Maharashtra as a whole, like other industrial townships, this Union confronted with these problems and succeeded to a little extent. The following are the main activities undertaken by the 'Lal Bavata Union' during the past decade.

Under the leadership of this Union a strike was called in 1968 against minimum wages and for 8 hours' work. The Union's demand was of Rs. 150 minimum wage to the powerloom workers. About 10 thousand labourers were on strike for a period of one

month. The Government appointed a committee against the minimum wages. In 1971 wage scales were not fixed but this committee increased 1.5 paise per metre cloth. But the workers were not satisfied with this rate, so this union again called for indefinite strike in 1971 but with the breaking of Indo-Pak War the strike had to be called off.

In 1974, this Union again organised a strike to demand an increase in per metre rate, but did not achieve success. During the emergency period in 1975 this Union once again declared strike but the Government suggested a sum of Rs. 10/- as overall increase. In 1978 this union fought again for the same demand and secured a rise of 2 paise per metre of cloth. The bonus problem started in 1978-79 continues to be undecided even to this day.

The powerloom owners in Ichalkaranji trapped and cheated the loom workers. They started as many looms as possible in sheds and pointed out different owners to enjoy various exemptions, benefits under the Shop Act. They made a unit of four looms which absolved them of the responsibility of giving bonus to the labourers. Further, they were exempted from the various taxes also. This Union in 1978-79 tried to fight and find a solution to this problem. They demanded bonus but the loom owners were not ready to pay it. The loom owners offered Rs. 25 to

Rs. 500 as reward gift as bonus in the ratio of their working days in the year.

A majority of labourers are members of this union; still there are some workers who are not the members of any union. Even if a worker is not member of this union, and if he complains about his problems to this union, the union tries to solve such problems of the worker. The workers solve their minor problems in factory with consultation and discussion with the owner. If there is a serious problem in certain factory, the same problem is solved with the help of the union. The union has appointed a Special Committee which looks after the complaints of such labours.

This union has also done some welfare works of the labourers. The labourers are offered books, seminars are held for their knowledge. But due to the lack of funds and financial assistance, the welfare work has not made much head-way. A common contribution is collected at the time of crucial incidents. This union has done effective work in Ichalkaranji and represents the labour problems. At the beginning the labourers were scared about becoming members of the union but the situation has changed. The strength of workers and trust in the union have made them confident and fearless. Ultimately it has resulted in the increase of the member strength of the union. But it is limited within powerloom industry; if other workers join it, it will be more

powerful and influential.

(2) Rashtriya Processing Workers' Union²

Rashtriya Processing Workers' Union, a subsidiary of INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) was established in Ichalkaranji in July 1967. On 3rd May, 1947, a conference of leading Congress and Trade Union workers met at New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the President of the Central Board of the 'Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh', in which trade unions in nearly all the trades and occupations were represented. Many Pradesh Congress Committees had also sent their representatives. This conference passed a resolution pointing out the necessity of forming a central organisation which would look after the wellbeing of the class and which would take concerted action to safeguard and promote its interest. Thus, the Indian National Trade Union Congress was formed.

Processing unit is one of the important units in the textile industry in Ichalkaranji. It divides itself into two parts - hand processing and power processing. More than 2,500 workers are engaged in this Unit. Upto 1967, the 'Lal Bavata Union' had the control on processing workers. But in July 1967, INTUC which is locally named as 'Rashtriya Processing Workers' Union' took the lead in this unit. Presently, this union is one

of the important unions in Processing Unit.

The aims of this union are as follows:

- 1) To establish just industrial relations,
- 2) To secure redressal of grievances without stoppage of work, by means of negotiation of conciliation and failing these, by arbitration or adjudication.
- 3) To take recourse to other legitimate methods, including strikes or any suitable form of 'Satyagraha' where adjudication is not applied and settlement of disputes within a reasonable time by arbitration is not available for the redress of grievances.
- 4) To develop in the workers a sense of responsibility towards industry and the community.
- 5) To raise the workers' standard of efficiency and discipline.

Any processing worker may become member of this union. There were 350 workers out of 500 in Processing Unit of Ichalkaranji in 1967. At present, out of 2,500 workers in Ichalkaranji, 1,600 are members of this Union. 'Lal Bavata Union' was dominant till 1967 but INTUC has successfully managed to remain at the top now-a-days.

There are 16 office-bearers of this union. They are:

- 1) President,
- 2) Vice-President,
- 3) General Secretary,
- 4) Joint Secretary (two) ,
- 5) Treasurer,
- 6) Unitwise Secretary (ten) .

The General Body is called annually. The officials submit their reports before the House. Executive Committee meets once in every month. These bodies are liable for the responsibilities of the functioning. The office bearers are elected by the General Body for three years. A member who has paid the subscription for the year can contest the election. It is noteworthy that till this day the bodies are unanimously elected.

The union collects one rupee each from the members every month. It is disbursed as under:

- 5 Paise for Central and State Body,
- 15 Paise for Management expenses,
- 25 Paise for Court fees,
- 5 Paise for publicity,
- 50 Paise balance.

This balance amount is used for the welfare of the workers.

This union, founded under the banner of INTUC, naturally, has

been inspired and dominated by the Congress Party. So this Union is committed to Congress Party.

Rashtriya Processing Workers' Union is established to solve the problems of workers in processing unit, following parliamentary methods. Though it is not against the strikes, strike is the final weapon of the workers. It is considered wrong to use it indiscriminately. They believe in Parliamentary democracy and advocate for various reforms in the functioning of Unions.

The union faces various problems. The workers are made aware of national integrity. Some workers come together in the interest of their own profit, with selfish motives. They do not think of the interest of union or otherwise. Naturally problems arise out of this. Some of the youth workers are trying to awaken national spirit among labours, which is well responded.

The union has accepted various methods to train the worker to make the union activity more effective. It arranges symposia, women rallies, one day seminars etc. About 10% women are members of the union. Similarly 3 day and three month training camps are arranged. Educational tours of the labourers are also arranged by the union. These are arranged to study Statewise industrial centres. Even some of the managements have provided financial assistance to conduct such study tours.

This union has given every sort of cooperation to the management to run the textile business smoothly. Whenever management is in crucial position, the union has supported it well in advance. During the Janata Government in 1977, hand processing was permitted and it was exempted from all the taxes. Naturally the power processors were financially in depression and were about to close. The Union went to the extent of providing its own funds and Provident Fund to management. This is the only Union which works as bargaining agent with the management; it has always tried to maintain cordial relations with the management. Such an atmosphere in the field of workers' union is a rarity.

This union has consistently tried to increase the standard of living and wages of the labourers. It was instrumental in raising minimum wage to Rs. 650/-; libraries are also made available for the workers. The fees for 'Apte Wahan Mandir' are also paid by the union. It helps the children of the workers who secure admission to medical or engineering colleges. About 16 students are getting the benefit of this scheme. Workers are given medical help for major diseases. Housing society looks after their living problems. About 350 members are benefitted out of that. Educational funds are provided to poor students by this union. 'Arun Dalia Trust' is working for this. This union has helped the national programme for family planning. They arranged family planning camps and shared the expenses. The union

has started canteens at every processing unit, which provide refreshments at a reasonable rates. 'Labour Insurance Scheme' is in operation and doctors are helping at every unit by this union. With the help of this union, the bonus rate has gone up to 22.51%.

Though the union firmly believes in Parliamentary ways, it has to fight with the managements. In 1973, such a strike for wages was declared but the management wiped it out. Even labour leaders were manhandled. The leaders were in jail for a period of one year. But it was the unity of the workers which won this and wages got increased in 1975. This points out that they cast aside their differences and unite whenever demanded by the situation.

The management tried to divide the union. There were two groups among workers but finally the rival union collapsed. Thus, the 'Processing Union' functions and represents the labourers through democratic methods. It is financially a strong union and works for workers in every walk of life. They assure that, if time permits, they can run the entire textile industry in Ichalkaranji, which must be a reason why the union has been given the required stability by the capitalists themselves.

(3) Sizing and Warping Union

The important stages for the textile production are spinning, weaving, sizing, warping and processing. Sizing, spinning and processing units started very late in Ichalkaranji

Mr. Datar introduced powerlooms as well as weaving process in the beginning and later on sizing and warping units were introduced by him.

For weaving of a fabric the length and width of threads are joined together. It is called 'filament' instead of threads. Sizing completes the wining on the warping machine. The angles which come out of spinning are shaped according to the necessity. They are roled and would up on the machine which is called warping machine and the labourer is known as warper.

To strengthen the filament assembled on the warping machine processing is needed. It is called sizing. The yarn-roles are put together and bleached in chemicals and starched. They are soared on the steam roler and once again roled on the beam. This process is called sizing. A labourer who is technically expert to work with this machine, who can bleech in a proper method is called sizer. The assistant of a sizer is called back sizer. A boiler is essential to provide steam for this process. An expert who controls this machine is called boiler attendant. A sizeman looks after the continuity of the boiler. Other sundry labourers such as wood cutters and clerks are also busy in this unit.

The powerloom workers united for the first time in this city. Marathe Vanktesh Rangtantu, Balaji and Hariprasad Mills are registered under Bombay Industrial Regulations Act. INTUC is

is prominent in such Mills. The workers were getting benefits because of the membership of union. Later on sizing and warping units began in these mills. These labourers did not unite. Many leaders made efforts to bring them together. Ultimately they had to work on lower wages. There was no uniformity in wages, working hours, weekly holidays etc. Without any leadership the warpers established their union in 1927. This was totally new for Ichalkaranji. Babasaheb Khanjire tried to increase the wages from 44 Paise to 50 Paise. In this way the labourers on their own leadership won the victory.

In the later period Bhupal Nipane, Vijay Jagtap played important role in the sizing union. There was a political change in 1978, and under the guidance of Kallappa Awade, Vijay Jagtap a new union was started with rapid action. Nana Joshi, a labour leader and Ganapatrao Jog supported him and with the patronage of Congress Party these fearless labourers came together and established 'Sizing Warping Labour Union'. It was registered as per Government rules and actually began its work in December 1980. The union was registered as per the Bharatiya Shramik Regulations 1926. It constitutes an executive committee of eleven members inclusive of sizing and warping representatives. Shri Vijay Jagtap was the first President of this union. The membership was limited to the workers belonging to sizing and warping industry. Some other honorary members who are not actually labourers, are

also eligible for the representation. The office bearers are as follows:

1. President,
2. Vice-President (two),
3. General Secretary

Membership, executive committee, annual general meeting, cancellation of membership, etc. are governed by the Constitution.

Since sizing and warping processes are of high importance in textile industry, the disputes among loomowners and workers are to be settled with intensive care. This affects the whole textile community of the city as this is the heart of the units. So, many a time justice is rewarded among such disputes. The loomowners have cooperated excellently with them so far. Above all, 'The Ichalkaranji Sizing Association' - an association of the owners - also looks after the deals with these disputes successfully. The union necessarily tries to settle it by means of arbitration. In rare cases they have to go to labour officer or labour courts. Once a loom-owner attended a labour as back sizer, in fact he was shown as coolie in the muster and was terminated. So, the President of this union led the case to the Court and won it. This union never resorts to extreme steps by which conflicting trends develop. It always tries to find out amicable solutions by democratic and peaceful means.

Generally, unions function as a pawn in the hands of political parties. This union has always remained aloof from such political glamour. Many workers of the union are political party workers but the union has eschewed alliance with any political party allowing members to join any political party. Neither it was affiliated to any national labour union. This is a salient feature of this union.

As soon as it came into existence, the union had to declare a strike in 1980, for a rise in wages. The historical strike of ten days from 11 to 21 October, 1980, was activated by the union, which affected the whole city. But some political leaders tried to settle the things successfully. Both workers and owners accepted the offer of allowance, public holidays to back sizer, foreman. The wages were fixed to Rs. 185/- as initial pay and 56 paise for 1,000 yards. It was the first triumphant victory of the union. The pact brought uniformity in the wages. The second strike of two days in April 1983 resulted in raising the wage to Rs. 250/- as the basic pay and 80 paise for 1,000 yards. In September 1984, once again the strike was called on for minimum wages. This matter has been referred to the court. The Government appointed a Committee and the decision was accepted by both the parties. The norms were fixed from 1.8.1984. The owners were considerate enough during this time and avoided a serious controversy.

The union has maintained law and order. The workers get regular wages, overtime, fixed working hours. The Government of Maharashtra by notification has categorised sizing units under Factory Act. But warping units in the same do not get these facilities as they are registered under Shop Act. The union is at its best to get the legitimate rights. This union has achieved some major demands such as wages, bonus etc. which are implemented in all the units of Ichalkaranji. The owners and their association also extend cooperation from time to time. The union never functions with a conflicting attitude. It is no doubt interested in safeguarding the rights and welfare of the workers, which it has been doing successfully. This has ultimately created peaceful atmosphere in the town. Obviously, it has won the faith of the labourers and owners and the public at large.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1

Interview with Com. Suryaji Salunkhe on 16th November, 1984, who is the President of Lal Bavata Union in Ichalkaranji.

2

Interview with Shri Shamrao Kulkarni on December 1984, who is the General Secretary of Rashtriya Processing Workers' Union.

3

Interview with Shri Vijay Jagtap on 14th January, 1985, who is the President of Sizing and Warping Union.