
CHAPTER 7: FUTURE OF LABOUR MOVEMENT IN ICHALKARANJI

While considering the future of labour movement in Ichalkaranji, it is pertinent to remember that it is dependent on the capacity of the labourers to unite and try to be the most effective safeguard against exploitation. A strong labour movement run on democratic lines alone affords adequate protection against exploitation. Workers should realise that they cannot all the time depend upon the Government or other outside agencies to expose their cause. While at the initial stages of development of the movement such assistance was essential and useful, workers should gradually become self-reliant.

The present position in Ichalkaranji compels one to agree that conditions of labourer are still very backward here. Wages are low, hours of work are still long, especially in powerloom units, housing conditions are primitive and facilities for education, recreation and welfare very meagre. Workers should be assured freedom of association and their working conditions should be such as to ensure protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment. Good housing, shorter number of hours of work, provision for health safety and all other necessities for decent living should also be ensured to them.

A strong trade union movement is, therefore, necessary both to safeguard the interest of labourer and to help him in

achieving the targets of production. If the trade union movement is not united and strong enough to achieve these objectives, the industrial structure to be built in Ichalkaranji would not have firm foundations.

Though there has been progress in the labour movement in the last decade, labour movement in Ichalkaranji is still in its formative stage. If industrial democracy is to work effectively, a strong and sound labour movement has to be built up. The situation in this regard leaves much to be desired. Political rivalries, which often come in the way of settlement of disputes, lack of resources, disunity among the ranks, multiplicity of trade unions and lack of bargaining strength, are the major ills that afflict labour movement in Ichalkaranji today.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that a strong labour movement cannot be built up solely on the basis of legislation. Legislation can only help in developing the setting which would give scope to efforts for improvement coming from within the movement itself. Unity in the movement can facilitate the achievement of this objective. Efforts, therefore, are needed in this direction. It should be possible for labour movement, the trade unions with different affiliations to come together on the basis of a common programme, covering methods, objectives and procedure.

All workers who believe in the democratic ideals of the labour movement should, therefore, join hands to form a single union to be represented in an authoritative manner in all their demands. If such a united body could be brought into existence, it would be to the everlasting benefit of workers and employees and, finally, ensure the maintenance of real industrial peace. Hence, an attempt should be made to unify the labour movement under one union in Ichalkaranji.

Today, to a large extent labour movement leadership is in the hands of politicians. The various political parties having an immediate interest in the working class, at times getting exploited for political purposes, has resulted in the absence of genuine leadership. It is time that workers realise that party politics are completely out of place in labour movement, and that they should not play the role of pawns in the game of party politics. Trade union leaders and party leaders should also take active steps to ensure that workers are weaned from disruptive political leanings, so that genuine labour movement may grow in Ichalkaranji. In fact, politicians here have played a greater part in organising trade unions for the labour movement.

Unions in Ichalkaranji were mostly on the basis of one union in one industrial unit. All the same, the ideal of one union for the industry has not yet been achieved in Ichalkaranji.

Multiplicity of unions in the same establishment leads to inter-union rivalries which ultimately cut at the root of the movement. It weakens the power for a collective bargaining, and reduces the effectiveness of workers in securing their legitimate rights. If one union agrees with the employer on a particular issue, another union disagrees, and also raises a new issue. Hence, there should be only one union in one industry.

The employers and Government should fully realise that labour movements have come to stay as part and parcel of the economic system and are necessary for the progress. It is labour movement alone that represents the grievances and demands of workers, and if industrial peace is to be secured, it can only be through an understanding between employers' and workers' organisations.

The lack of finance is a cause of great weakness of the labour movement. In their anxiety to build up membership of a large magnitude, unions fix membership fees extremely low and fail to collect even this meagre amount. Rarely is any attempt made to terminate the membership of a person for having fallen into arrears of payment of dues. For sound labour movement, it is essential that there should be adequate funds available with unions, and improving finance from internal resources is an important aspect of strengthening the movement.

In regard to the strengthening of the labour movement, the foremost duty of the workers is to realise that, in their factory, they should aim at securing cent per cent membership for their trade union. But in Ichalkaranji we find that nearly 20% of the workers have not joined the unions.

The labour movement should not be confined merely to the workers' demands, but should include the inculcation in the workers of a sense of discipline and responsibility, an appreciation of their moral responsibility to do a fair day's work for a fair day's wages. It should make every worker understand fully, first, his duties and responsibilities and, then his rights and privileges. This means that the objects of labour movement should be such as to instil in the individual worker a spirit of self-reliance, toleration and cooperation. In the present study it was found that, in Ichalkaranji the labour movement was only interested in getting higher wages to the workers. Without industrial democracy it is totally difficult to establish socialism in our country.

The textile workers, in Ichalkaranji must realise that they have to place duties and responsibilities in the forefront. At the same time, they also need be considered as equal partners in the industrial system and not mere wage earners. They should have the higher satisfaction that, by doing their duty well,

they are rendering distinct service to the community. It is necessary in this context that worker should be made to feel that he is building up in his own humble way a progressive state.

Public support is essential for labour movement not only in the narrow context of an individual dispute with an individual employer, but also in the wider context of democratic living. In a democracy, owing to its institutional shortcomings, particularly in the economic field, the worker may suffer from exploitation, low wages, unsatisfactory working conditions and insecurity of employment. But the democratic system also makes it possible for the workers to seek, through organisation and collective action, the removal of these grave inequalities. Having won the right to associate and organise, to bargain collectively, with their employers and to go on strike in extreme circumstances, they can bring effective pressure upon the economic system so as to gradually modify it in their favour.

Trade union leaders also acquire a full understanding of constitutional and legal rights, and should try to make use of them to secure and promote workers' interests. They should be fully conversant with the privileges and rights conferred by labour laws. But, some leaders in Ichalkaranji do not fulfil the conditions of a suitable leader for the labour movement. They were appointed by the politicians who controlled the industry.

The strength of labour movement lies in its bargaining power not in mere numbers. That power can come only when a close and well-united organisation with good leadership, adequate finance, adherence to genuine and, above all, the grit and determination on the part of those directing the movement, personal integrity, love of liberty, patience, understanding, industry and courage are some other qualities which labour movement leaders have. Some of these are, no doubt, elementary and perennial human virtues, but there is no doubt that training of workers in labour movement philosophy and methods is necessary if the workers are to be made self-reliant in this respect.

For the achievement of these goals of progressively speeding up production in Ichalkaranji, in textile industry it is necessary that workers should completely eschew indiscipline, stoppage of production and indifferent equality of work, and for this, it is necessary that they should built strong democratic labour movement.

Lastly, workers must understand fully, that if they desire to secure their due place in the industrial economy of the country, they must think more in terms of responsibilities and duties and not interpret independence and impertinence and liberty as licence. Sabotage and violence of all kinds and bitterness in thought, word and deed must be eschewed. Then

alone will a socialist democracy become possible in the country,
with industrial relations of ^hgher order maintained for the
benefit of the country and the working community.