

ROLE OF THE D.M.K. IN
TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
OF TAMILNADU

G. VENKATARAMAN

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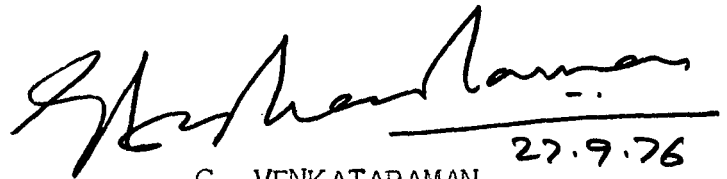
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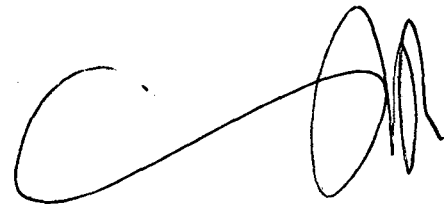
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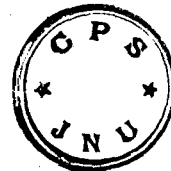
G. VENKATARAMAN
CANDIDATE


27/9/76

DR. BALVEER ARORA
SUPERVISOR



PROFESSOR C.P. BHAMBHRI
CHAIRMAN



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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------|--|
| A.D.M.K. | Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam |
| A.I.R.F. | All-India Railwaymen's Federation |
| A.I.T.U.C. | All-India Trade Union Congress |
| B.M.S. | Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh |
| C.I.T.U. | Centre of Indian Trade Unions |
| C.P.I. | Communist Party of India |
| C.P.I.(M) | Communist Party of India (Marxist) |
| D.I.R. | Defence of India Rules |
| D.K. | Dravida Kazhagam |
| D.M.K. | Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam |
| D.R.E.U. | Dakshin Railway Employees' Union |
| H.M.S. | Hindu Mazdoor Sabha |
| I.N.T.U.C. | Indian National Trade Union Congress |
| I.P.C. | Indian Penal Code |
| L.P.F. | Labour Progressive Federation |
| N.F.I.R. | National Federation of Indian Railwaymen |
| P.S.P. | Praja Socialist Party |
| R.E.P.U. | Railway Employees' Progressive Union |
| S.R.E.A. | Southern Railway Employees' Association |
| S.R.E.U. | Southern Railway Employees' Union |
| S.R.U. | Southern Railway Union |
| W.P.C. | Working People's Council |

INTRODUCTION

Trade unions are essentially the product of modern large-scale industrialization. The growth and promotion of organised industries paved the way for the establishment of a factory system. The widespread use of machinery, the establishment of new modes of production and the concentration of industries in large towns created a new class of wage earners. While the increased pace of industrial development created a demand for labour on an expanding scale, the machines, apart from diminishing the value of labour, started displacing large number of workers, which resulted in unemployment of industrial workers. In order to protect the interests of the workers, trade unions were formed as interest organisations.

With the growth of industries, labour has assumed a role which is becoming increasingly important. Organised labour, in the form of trade unions, occupy more strategic position in developing nations. These countries have been experiencing increased economic activity, and the labour unions can significantly affect their economic development of the country by conditioning the attitudes of the workers. Trade unions can also influence the process of economic development in a number of other ways. They help in recruiting and disciplining the work force. With the help of the union, the work force becomes 'committed' to industrial life. The existence of unions enables industrial disputes to be settled in a rational rather than an erratic and chaotic manner.

Trade unions, being one of the largest organised groups, can play a significant role in influencing the growth of democratic institutions and in changing the values and norms in a society. In addition, they also act as an important pressure group in the formulation and implementation of the public labour relations policy and generally in the interplay of political forces. Moreover, as an integral part of the present industrial system, trade unions have established themselves in the modern society in such a way that industrial relations today are regarded as relations between the management and the trade unions rather than between the former and its workers. For all these reasons it is important to carefully analyse the character, nature, ideology and activities of trade unions.

The trade union movement in the modern sense was started in India in the early twenties by the leaders of nationalist movement for the political emancipation of the country from British colonialism. The first trade union centre, the All India Trade Union Congress, was organised by the Indian National Congress in 1920 and its first president was the veteran freedom fighter, Lala Lajpat Rai. The Communists entered the trade union movement with the primary objective of building up the unions as instruments of class struggle for Communist revolution. These ideological differences split the movement and rival trade unions were formed by political leaders before and after independence. These leaders formed new unions primarily to suit the goals and needs of their political parties. It may be emphasised here that the decisions on these splits of the trade union movement were made and implemented by politicians owing allegiance to different political

parties and the splits were caused either by clashes of personalities or by adherence to different ideologies. Crucial decisions like organisation of new trade unions, splitting and merging them affiliating them with All India Trade Union centres etc. were made exclusively by the political leadership of the labour unions. The constituent membership, which provided the motivating force for the organisation and development of trade unions, was never consulted while taking these decisions. The decisions to split the labour movement and organise new unions were also not motivated by considerations of promoting the interests of the working class. Pattabhi Raman is of the view that "the new organisations that were sponsored by the dissidents, therefore, represented attempts by outside leaders to initiate unions or union centres with the penumbra of their respective ideologies, political programmes and actions".¹

Political parties, in their search for levers of power, sought to control and dominate the trade unions. In doing so, they unleashed divisive tendencies in the union structure by setting up rival unions at the plant and industry at regional and national levels. The result has been a multiplicity of unions at all levels. This has also led to intense inter and intra-union rivalries which in turn results in weakening of the union strength. This, in turn, has affected union potential for protecting and promoting the interests of the working class. Existence of multiple unions at the plant level also provides an opportunity to the management to pursue the policy of 'divide and rule' which affects the labour relations in the plant.

1. N. PATTABHI RAMAN, Political Involvement of India's Trade Unions, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1967, pp.30-31.

External Leadership and Control

The Indian trade union movement has, since its very inception, been dominated by outsider leadership. In the beginning these leaders were mainly social reformers, and philanthropists. From the beginning of the national movement in the second decade of this century, the leaders have been drawn mainly from political parties. During the post-independence period, the hold of outsider leadership on unionism has only increased. Myron Weiner has observed that "the leading trade union workers, with few exceptions, come from political parties and do their trade union work as part of their political work".²

One of the most important reasons for continuous dominance of the labour movement by outside leadership is that the unions have not been able to develop their internal leadership. Moreover, the finances of the union are far too inadequate to have paid whole-time leaders. So, they have had to depend on honorary outside leaders. In addition to this, the management is reluctant to deal with the worker leader on an equal footing, but has no such problem in dealing with the outside leader. The management yields more easily to political pressures brought to bear on it by politician leaders, who have high connections with the party and the State machinery. These reasons forced the unions to seek outsiders as their leaders "so much so that even unions that are in fact run by competent insider leaders insist on having at least one publicly known outside figure as an officer".³ The Trade Union Act also permits half the union office-bearers of a registered union to be outsiders.

2. MYRON WEINER, Party Politics in India, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 43-45.

3. VAN D. KENNEDY, Unions, Employers and Government, Bombay, Manaktalas, 1966, p. 87.

Political parties have thus continuously maintained their hold on trade unions through common leadership which has served as the link between the two. Most of the politician leaders of trade unions pay only secondary attention to trade union work. They also work for the achievement of trade union goals, but only as far as they are congruent with the goals of the political party to which they belong. The goals of the union are often formulated by them, and generally congruence is ensured at this stage itself.

The above discussion clearly shows that the political parties have played a decisive role in origins and development of trade unions. They have also been responsible for the division of the labour movement on ideological lines. In addition to this, the strategy of trade union centres and through them of individual unions, has largely been determined by political parties. Moreover, organised labour is viewed now not only as a mass-base for political movements but also as a support-base for the achievement of party goals. Political parties now believe that it is easier for them to win urban seats than the seats from tradition-bound rural areas. They, perhaps, want to have a permanent support-base in the urban working class, because this section of the population is on the increase as the industrialisation process is gaining momentum. In addition to this, trade unions have also been used by political parties as an instrument for strengthening their own relative position.

Politicization of trade unionism in a democracy is however quite understandable and the interest of political parties in large scale organised groups such as trade unions as also the latter's involvement in the country's political life are to a large extent

legitimate and inevitable. This perspective will help us to understand the complex problem of unionism as a whole and the political interactions which are taking place in the labour organisations of specific regions.

After this brief introductory background, let us now analyse at a general level the relationship between trade unions and political parties.

Union-Party Relationship

The union-party relationship is of a varying nature. The relationship between the two could be examined and explored from three different angles:

- (1) by viewing it as a link between the central trade union organisation and the political party, and further by analysing the party's control over plant level unions through central trade union organisation;
- (2) by studying where and how the decisions are made and implemented within the trade union set-up;
- (3) by analysing the pattern of flow of funds between the union and the party.

In India, there are four trade union centres which project labour interest at national level. They are: the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). In addition, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) which enjoys the support of Bharatiya Jan Sangh has also appeared

on the national labour scene. The four national trade union centres are known to be closely associated with national parties such as the Communist Party of India, the Indian National Congress, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) respectively. In addition to this, there are "a number of industry federations of employees engaged in banking, insurance, ordnance factories, ports and docks and various government services, that are not actually affiliated to any trade union centre or political party even though some of these federations are known to have political leanings through their leaders".⁴

Pattabhi Raman says that "the four national trade union centres are all independent organisations which remain unaffiliated to any of the political parties. They are neither affiliated to nor bound formally by the ideology or the program of any political party". According to their own constitutions, these organisations elect their own executive bodies, which are directly responsible only to their respective members. Even though this is the formal organisational structure, the links between the political parties and the trade unions "are supplied, as they have always been chiefly by the leadership drawn from the political ranks, by the non-labour leadership. These are indeed informal yet strong links".⁵ This outside leadership in the trade union centres influences the decisions on labour interest at the national level in accordance with party lines. It also controls plant level unions and financial resources. The trade union centres express labour's interest and

4. Ibid., p. 183.

5. N. PATTABHI RAMAN, op.cit., pp. 39-40.

view-point on the national horizon, exercise influence on the programmes of political parties and participate in tripartite forums, wage boards and other organs involved in policy formulation on matters relating to labour.

On the other hand, plant level unions are engaged in securing benefits for their members like wage rise, improving work standards etc. from the employers. They also deal with plant level problems. The plant level unions pay affiliation fee to the trade union centres also and follow broad policy outlines given by their national federations.

The trade union centre develops national strategies for securing economic gains for workers, thus channelising these gains for party ends. The plant unions are willing to participate in political activity in return for real economic gains.

Secondly, the connection between the union and the party could be viewed on the basis of the decision-making processes within the union. K.N. Vaid identifies two broad patterns under which the union-party connections can be studied in detail.

(1) There are unions that are dependent on political parties in matters of policy, finance and union leadership. In fact these unions "function as the labour wing of the party that dominates them". Such dependent unions are organised directly by the political parties and the leaders are "on deputation from the party to the labour front". Political workers hold key positions in such unions and exercise the control over administration and finances of the union. A worker may be elected as the president

of the union, but the real power is vested with union secretary who is a partyman. The role of the political workers in these unions is to push through the decisions taken by the party on union matters and implement them. K.N. Vaid says, "the goals of 'dominated' unions far transcend the narrow occupational interests of workers, and are identical with those of the parent political party".

(2) There are unions which seek guidance of the political parties in all important matters. Here, political leaders hold prestigious positions and key positions are manned by internal leadership. K.N. Vaid says that these unions exist "within the 'sphere of influence' of a particular political party". All the decisions taken by the inside leadership reflects the party views. K.N. Vaid is of the view that the unions which are within the 'sphere of influence' of a political party will have union leaders who are "attuned to the 'party line' which ultimately reflected in union decisions". This type of unions will receive moral and material support from the political parties. In turn, these unions support them when required.⁶

Finally, from the pattern of flow of funds between the trade union and the political party one can also study the relationship between the two. There are instances when political parties have raised funds for party treasuries from members of trade unions under their control or influence. In most of the

6. K.N. VAID, "Union-Party Relationship" - paper presented at the National Seminar on Industrial Relations in a Developing Economy, Chandigarh, 1967.

cases, in the beginning the party extends its financial support to the trade union in the form of maintenance of office bearers, paying organisational expenses, etc. until the unions gain a firm foothold in the areas chosen by the parties. Some unions in the country have also availed themselves of the legal provision to constitute separate funds for political and civic activities. These political funds are spent on political meetings organised by trade unions, addressed by the political leaders of the party with which the union is associated.

While studying the relationship between the unions and the parties, Harold Crouch has focussed on the extent of party control over the unions. He emphasises that it depends upon the circumstances and the needs of the situation. Crouch has analysed the resolutions, actions and activities of four trade union centres (AITUC, INTUC, HMS and UTUC) and he arrives at the conclusion that in the case of AITUC, the unions remained disciplined throughout when the Communist Party was in power in Kerala. Party's relationship with the government is a very important factor while analysing this relationship. In the case of the INTUC, Crouch feels that generalisation is difficult. In some cases the INTUC supported the government through thick and thin. Crouch adds: "when parties are in opposition, there is less need to control their trade unions. The best service the unions can perform for their respective parties is to build up their own popularity, which is expected to overflow into the party's stream of support. They reflect workers demand and take action which

normally does not satisfy their demands. With no responsibility toward the government unions associated with opposition parties undertake this role willingly".⁷

The intimate links that prevail between trade unions and political parties are largely due to the presence of party activists as 'outsiders' in the leadership positions of unions. The role which parties have played in establishing and assisting unions has also contributed towards this close relationship.

The Present Study

In the literature on trade unionism in the Indian context, there are few studies based on detailed information of the growth of the movement in specific geographical areas. A good deal has been written about Indian trade union movement in general. Many of the works on the subject deal mostly with the origin, growth and practice of unionism in the country. Studies already conducted in the field focus mainly on four trade union centres, namely, AITUC, INTUC, HMS and CITU which are controlled by national parties. So far, not much work has been done to examine trade unions in the regional context encompassing regional peculiarities like culture, language etc.

The origin, emergence, growth and character of a trade union movement is determined by a complex set of factors. In a

7. HAROLD CROUCH, "Party Control Over Unions" - Paper presented at the National Seminar on Industrial Relations in a Developing Economy, Chandigarh, 1967.

country as large and diverse as India, trade unions are likely to have local as well as industrial variations. All-India studies of the movement, however, tend to ignore such variations. An analysis of events at a regional level, therefore, becomes necessary to compare and contrast with the trade union issues at the national level. Moreover, the emergence of DMK, a regional party, as a viable political force and its capacity to challenge a national party such as the Congress in Tamil Nadu renders it necessary to make a deep analysis of its political base and its ability to mobilise strong forces like unorganised agricultural labour and the students and the organised industrial labour.

The purpose of this study is to provide a systematic profile of the emergence of the DMK labour movement and to identify the various political and institutional factors that have moulded this nascent movement into a strong force. Also, it is an attempt to illustrate how a regional party, i.e., the DMK, tried its best to mobilise the support of the working class by overthrowing existing trade union leadership in order to use labour organisations as instruments to achieve its party goals. We shall examine here how far, in the field of labour relations, the DMK unions protect the workers' rights and represent the interest of labour. We will also examine whether the DMK unions are anti-labour or pro-establishment.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter reviews the origin and growth of DMK trade unions. DMK's founder-leader, the late C.N. Annadurai's views on trade

unionism are also discussed in detail. The second chapter analyses the ideology of the DMK labour movement and its relation to party ideology. It also deals with organisational structure of the Labour Progressive Federation, a central trade union organisation of the DMK. The methods, techniques and tactics used by DMK unions to attract workers are also discussed in this chapter. In the third and final chapter, the activities and role of DMK trade unions in the labour movement of Tamil Nadu is examined by taking a case study. The Simpson Group Companies - a private enterprise - which is located in and around Madras, has been selected for the study. An attempt has been made to analyse the events which led to the Simpson workers' struggle which resulted in removal of the DMK leadership in the Simpson union. This study also helps us prove our point that the DMK union is anti-labour and pro-establishment.

Sources of Data

The study is mainly based on unpublished materials such as trade union records, pamphlets, memoranda, booklets, souvenirs issued by trade unions, etc. Further, this has been supplemented by interviews with prominent trade union leaders in Tamil Nadu.⁸ Official documents such as Tamil Nadu Assembly Debates, Tamil Nadu Labour Gazette and the original document of the agreement entered by the DMK union with the Simpson management have been consulted. Newspaper reports and regional party papers have also been consulted.⁹

8. The list of persons interviewed is given in Appendix-I. No fixed questionnaire was used during these discussions.

9. The materials which are in Tamil have been translated by the author.

CHAPTER I

GENESIS AND GROWTH OF DMK TRADE UNIONS

The Early Period

The Dravidian Liberation Movement of Tamil Nadu in which the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Federation) had its origin, was a rebellion of the non-Brahmin majority against the Brahmin minority. It was alleged that at the turn of the century, Brahmins formed only two per cent of Madras Presidency's population. However, they controlled most of the top administrative positions. In 1917, some affluent non-Brahmins founded the South Indian Liberal Federation, which later came to be known as the 'Justice Party'. It stood for the emancipation of non-Brahmins from Brahmin tyranny, especially in the realm of education, public services and so on. The leaders of the Justice Party were predominantly the non-Brahmin elite such as princes, landlords, businessmen and professionals. The elitist elements were active in every aspect of non-Brahmin upliftment of those days. One such was the involvement of these people in the labour movement in the Presidency.

Rangoon Pakkirisamy Pillai, a rich landlord who was associated with Dravidian Movement from the beginning, headed the first Railway Workers' Union, which was established at

Nagapattinam, Thanjavur District, in 1918. This union was formed in order to check the exploitation of Railway workers by the British investors, who owned the South Indian Railway. Thiru V. Kalyana Sundaranar Singaravelu, Dr. Varadarajilu Naidu and others brought some awakening among railway workers, apart from propagating self-respect movement among them through Kudiyarasu (The Republic), a Tamil daily.¹

The management of South Indian Railway which was not favourably disposed to a united labour force on the Railway, resorted to retrenchment, when the South Indian Railway Workers' Union attempted to organise the workers. The trouble in the South Indian Railway started on June 29, 1928. The workshop staff at Golden Rock (near Tiruchirappalli), Nagapattinam and Podanpur downed their tools when the Agent announced his intention of reducing the number of workshop staff. The workers resented this and refused to work. As a sequel the workshops were closed. The South Indian Railway Workers' Union formed a strike committee. The strikers intimidated the station staff and brought about a general strike on July 19, 1928. This spread throughout the metre gauge section of the railways. During the short period of the strike, there was a great dislocation of traffic. There was considerable rioting and the Police opened fire on the crowd at Kattupakkam and Kodaikanal Road for two days, i.e., July 21 and July 23, 1928. Owing to malacious tampering of the railway

1. G. PARANGUSAM, "Thozhir Sanga Evakkathil Naam" (Our Role in Trade Union Movement), The Uzhaiappaali (Madras), Vol.1, No.1, April 14, 1974, Inaugural Issue.

tracks, two passenger trains were derailed, three passengers were killed and forty-two injured. The strike leaders were arrested for rioting and conspiracy.²

The workers agitation which lasted for more than two months was led by Singaravelar, Mugundhalal Sarkar, Sulendranath Arya, Krishnasamy Pillai, Pattukottai Alagirisamy, S.V. Lingam, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Mayavaram Natarajan, Nagai Mani and others. The Tamil dailies like Kudiyarasu, Dravidan, which were propagating the philosophy of the Dravidian movement supported the railway workers' agitation. The British Administration took action against the paper Kudiyarasu and fined its editor, E.V. Ramasamy Naicker³ to a tune of Rs.2,000 for instigating the workers. This apart, Singaravelar, Mukundhalal Sarkar, Pattukottai Alagirisamy and others were sentenced to ten years' rigorous imprisonment. From then on, the leaders of both Self-Respect Movement and Dravidian Movement supported and actually participated in workers' struggles irrespective of the leadership aspect of the agitation, in order to further working class interests.⁴

2. Royal Commission on Labour in India, Evidence, Vol.VIII, Part I, p. 173, as quoted by M.K. MAST, Trade Union Movement in Indian Railways, Meerut, Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969.

3. E.V. Ramasamy Naicker was popularly known as E.Ve.Ra or Periyar (Periyar means great man or elderly person), Thandhai Periyar. Naicker was the stormy petrel of Tamil Nadu politics, a daring non-conformist, atheist, iconoclast, social reformer who sought to propagate rationalist thinking among Tamil masses.

4. G. PARANGUSAM, art.cit., The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.1, April 14, 1974, Inaugural Issue.

At this juncture, C.N. Annadurai,⁵ an ambitious young man, was attracted by the programmes and policies of the Justice Party. After completing his post-collegiate education, Annadurai was associated with one of the leaders of the Justice Party, C. Vasudev and started participating in workers' meetings along with his mentor. Vasudev used to speak in English and the young student leader Annadurai used to translate his speeches into Tamil. This association brought Anna in direct contact with other labour leaders like Albert Jesudasan, Jannadas Mehta and E.Ve.Ra. Periyar, then President of the Justice Party. Annadurai actually participated in trade union activities along with these leaders. While this happened, N.V. Natarajan, a Congress labour leader, who was attracted by Annadurai's suave manners got in touch with him and remained actively associated with him ever since. When the All India Trade Union Congress met at Lucknow in 1937, under the leadership of Jannadas Mehta, Annadurai took part as one of the representatives from Madras, along with leaders like Albert Jesudasan and others. Further, in the same conference, he was elevated to the AITUC Working Committee's membership. Through AITUC, he involved himself in the labour movement in uplifting the living standards of workers and trying to bring unity among them. Moreover, A.P. Nathan, who belonged to the "Justice", the mouth-piece of the Justice Party, and

5. C.N. Annadurai, founder-leader of the DMK, was closely associated with Dravidian Movement. After the 1967 general elections, he became the first DMK Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. With his oratorical capacity, he carried masses along with him. He was popularly known as 'Anna' meaning elder brother.

Balasubramaniam of "Sunday Observer", a powerful English daily, influenced Annadurai and led him to get directly involved in politics.⁶

The Justice Party, which had become a party of the favoured few among the privileged classes of society, was converted into a 'mass movement' by Annadurai under the leadership of E.Ve.Ra. Periyar. The party was renamed as the "Dravida Kazhagam", which was in striking contrast to its earlier organisation dominated by the elitist leadership.

It seemed that not all was well with the Dravida Kazhagam (DK). Annadurai's differences with E.V.R. surfaced due to the latter's authoritarian attitude, when a large chunk broke from the DK. The coup was successfully brought about by Annadurai, when he founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) on September 17, 1949. About the new party Anna proclaimed: "the DMK was interested in 'social reconstruction and intellectual resurrection' and not in politics".⁷ As a reform movement, the DMK had brought the poorer sections within its fold and to sustain their support, it was forced to articulate their aspirations. Even in its non-electoral days, it criticised the existing economic inequalities in society. The party became politicised when it decided to contest the elections in 1956. Because of these developments, the DMK was forced to offer more concrete socio-economic alternatives such as attainment of Dravida Nadu and "Scientific Socialism".

6. A. KULOOTHUNGAN, "Pattaligalai Pattri Anna" (Anna's View on Working Class), The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.7, May 31, 1974.

7. MYTHILI SIVARAMAN, "The DMK", The Radical Review, Vol.1, No.2, January 1970, p.5.

The DMK trade union history can be divided into two phases: (i) pre-1967, i.e., the period before the party came to power; and (ii) post-1967, i.e., the period during which the party was in power.

Pre-1967 Period

During the late forties and early fifties, DMK sympathisers were functioning in some industries as small groups within the well organised recognised trade unions, which were affiliated to central labour federations. These unions were mostly under the control of the Communists and the Congress parties. Some DMK leaders feel that these unions resorted to ill-treatment of the DMK workers because they were the main prop of the Dravidian Movement. They felt that the Communist and the Congress dominated unions and their members enjoyed certain advantages which were not accessible to DMK sympathisers. Moreover, these dominant unions got more economic and political benefits at the cost of DMK workers. Due to political prejudice, these unions started victimising DMK workers even though they were officially members of the union. This attitude of the Communist and the Congress dominated unions led the DMK labour leaders to approach the party leadership for help, in order to protect the interests of their workers.

8. KATTUR GOPAL, "Thozhir Sanga Paravai--Nangu Aandugal Mudiyu" (Fourth Anniversary of Labour Progressive Federation), The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.4, May 10, 1974.

The DMK leadership responded to these appeals, by adopting a resolution at its General Council meeting held at Arakkonam on May 31, 1953. Further, the DMK General Council, which met at Perur, emphasised the need for having a labour wing of the party to look after trade union work. The resolution passed at the meeting reads as follows:

"As per the Arakkonam General Council resolution dated May 31, 1953, the DMK volunteers should involve themselves directly in trade union formation and party branches are directed to concentrate in labour areas and mobilise the workers under the party banner."⁹

The Perur convention also formed a labour wing at the party level to look after trade union affairs.¹⁰

Certain blind superstitions and traditional views which were widely prevalent led the workers to accept their fate passively and fear of God made them afraid of organising themselves against their own employers. The social reform movement and self-respect movement initiated by E.Ve.Ra. Periyar awakened to some extent the unorganised working class. Some DMK leaders claim that the social reconstructional attempts and rationalist propaganda helped the workers gain self-confidence, which paved the way for their involvement in trade union activities. These

9. Nam Nadu, April 30, 1955, as quoted in The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.3, May 3, 1974.

10. Labour Progressive Federation: A Note on Formation of the L.P.F., Madras, 1975.



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awakened workers who were emotionally attached to the Dravidian Movement, started forming groups in their own establishments under the Communist and the Congress led unions. They felt that these two unions harrassed the workers in some areas and they even forced them to join their respective parties. Apart from this, DMK leaders allege that the unions neglected the economic demands of the workers and used them for party purposes. The Communist and Congress dominated unions used their money power and organisational strength to oppose and denounce the DMK, and started victimising the DMK sympathisers using union's official facilities. Moreover, the day-to-day affairs of the unions were mismanaged and workers also realised that they were being used for political purposes.¹¹

Annadurai pointed out in an article that trade unions should not be a political party's instrument and there should not be differences in the labour movement. On the basis of their party affiliations, workers should not be differentiated and discriminated against. Workers' welfare should be the ideal goal for all trade unions. In some unions, he said, "where the DMK sympathisers are members of the union and when they are affected, concerned union leadership, apart from ill-treating the DMK members, does not even look into the genuine problems of DMK workers and does not consider them as part of the working class as a whole. Here, the party differences creep in, and, as a result, the DMK workers are victimised. To protect their

11. KATTUR GOPAL, "Thayar Dhana" (Are You Prepared?), The Railway Progressive Employees' Union Souvenir, 1973,

pp. 41-45.



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interests, they insisted upon a separate union for them. The party high command received the request from the DMK workers about inevitability of forming a union".

Moreover, Annadurai said: "the union leadership is wedded to an ideology opposed to that of the DMK's; if it does not follow the general policy of workers welfare, it is impossible for our group to continue as members in the same union. DMK workers are members of the opposition union in order to protect their welfare and economic benefits. If that is not assured, there is no point in continuing their membership in that union. So they are forced to leave the union and form a separate union". In the same article Annadurai expressed the view that the trade union movement had already been split along party lines. By organising DMK trade unions, he said, "we do not want to split the movement further". He meant that such a step would weaken the labour movement.

In a warning tone Annadurai added: "in case the trade unions in Tamil Nadu deviate from the general principle of protecting workers' welfare and give priority to narrow party interests, with the intention of taking revenge against DMK sympathisers, the DMK will start its own labour front in the area of labour movement in order to protect party workers".¹²

12. C.N. ANNADURAI, "Thozhir Sanga Eyakkathil Kazhagathin Pangu" (DMK's Role in Trade Union Movement), Nam Nadu, 1957, as reproduced in The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.2, May 3, 1974.

Some DMK leaders say that, as there was continued harrassment of DMK sympathisers by the Communist and Congress dominated unions, the DMK workers pressurised the party leadership to start a separate union for them. Due to increased pressures from all sides, the DMK decided to start its own union. Annadurai gave a call to his party workers that they should start DMK unions forthwith. He specified that this could be done in those areas where others (the Communist and the Congress) were unsuccessful in mobilising the working force.¹³

The disillusioned, victimised workers, who had lost confidence in the existing trade union leadership, started joining the DMK sponsored unions, which were organised in some industries in accordance with the directive of the Perur General Council resolution.

The DMK 'pocket unions', which existed in the form of groups earlier, started taking shape in the form of organised unions during the period 1956-57. The start towards an organised labour front was made by forming MANDRAMS - a sort of Council - which undertook a detailed survey of the strength of DMK workers and sympathisers in various industries such as textiles, electricity, automobile, engineering, sugar and business enterprises. It also collected relevant information regarding the role of DMK workers in different unions, their problems and the methods

13. Ibid., p.8.

followed to solve them. Apart from this it also observed how the party workers were affected under dominant unions and examined the need for forming separate unions and taking other steps required to protect the workers' interests. To this effect, a comprehensive report was submitted to the DMK committee at district level.

The first Mandram of this type named Kovai Mavatta Podhu Thezhilalargal Mandram, i.e., Coimbatore District General Workers' Council, was formed in the year 1957, at Coimbatore under the leadership of Kattur Gopal.¹⁴ Prior to the formation of these councils, the late K.V.K. Sany in Tuticorin, M.S. Mani in Tiruchirappalli and others had formed DMK unions in their respective industries.

The DMK workers, who were working in Coimbatore, Singanallur, Puliakulam and Udumalpet cotton textile mills, took the initiative under the leadership of Kattur Gopal and formed Dravida Cotton Textile Workers' Union in 1957, with 500 members. In order to co-ordinate the workers demands from different textile mills in the district and also to organise workers properly, a district level union called Coimbatore District

14. Kattur Gopal, a veteran DMK labour leader, who organised a number of DMK unions mostly in Coimbatore and Madras. Till 14th March 1976, he was the General Secretary of the Labour Progressive Federation Central Executive Committee of L.P.F. which met on 14th March 1976, and removed Kattur Gopal from General Secretaryship and S.V. Angappan was appointed to that post. Makkal Kural (Madras), March 22, 1976.

Dravida Textile Workers' Progressive Union was formed in 1960. It is interesting to note that the DMK followers who started these unions named the unions after the industry to which they belonged, inscribing the words 'Dravida' and 'Progressive' to identify the union. In 1960, the Coimbatore District General Workers' Progressive Union which included, among others, workers from the engineering industry, laundry and small shop employees, was formed. Later in 1962, on the initiative of Lateef (a former MLA), Govindasamy and Ponnambalam, the first union was started in Rajendra Mills at Salem. Slowly, in Madurai, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and other places, where textile industry flourished, unions were started. S. Ramachandran, who later became Transport Minister in the DMK Government, and K. Rajaram, who became DMK Labour Minister, started Neyveli Workers' Progressive Union in 1962 at Neyveli, South Arcot District. Because of the mass support the DMK enjoyed during that time especially among the depressed classes, the party's trade union network slowly spread throughout Tamil Nadu. It was not yet, however, a viable force capable of challenging the well-entrenched dominant Communist and Congress unions.¹⁵

Circumstances which led to the Formation of R.E.P.U.

It may be observed from the historical developments narrated earlier that some of the Justice Party leaders associated

15. Author's interview with Kattur Gopal, General Secretary of L.P.F., Madras, December 1975.

themselves with the labour movement in the Railways, from which it was claimed that the Dravidian Movement also associated itself with the labour movement of the country. Let us, therefore, also make a brief study of DMK labour movement in the Railways.

Most of the unions which existed in the South Indian Railway were interested mainly in raising the living standards of the workers and promising for them other economic benefits to further their upliftment. But, they never showed a keen interest in the social progress of the workers. In order to educate the workers about their rights and the necessity for their social advancement on par with other sections of the society, E.Ve.Ra Periyar started Southern Railway Men's Union (S.R.M.U.) in 1953. But it was a sort of closed union, where only those workers who had faith in the Dravida Kazhagam's policies were allowed to join.¹⁶ With the permission of the party leadership, DMK sympathisers were also allowed to join the union. The ideological differences which were prevailing in the political sphere between the DMK and the DK came to the surface in labour movement also during the Tiruvannamalai General Council meeting of S.R.M.U. in 1955. The Southern Railway Men's Union, which held its meeting at Mandapam in 1956, decided to expel all DMK workers from the Union. As a protest against this action, DMK workers formed another union called Southern Railway Union (S.R.U.) at Thanjavur.

16. Author's interview with S. Raghavanandam, Labour Secretary, Anna DMK, formerly a DMK labour leader, Madras, December 1975.

In 1957, efforts were made to bring about a merger of the two recognised unions - the All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF), a CPI-controlled organisation, and the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen (NFIR), a Congress-controlled Federation - on the basis of having 'one union for one industry' in Railways. In order to bring about the merger, unions affiliated to these two federations approached Southern Railway Union for co-operation. On the basis of the advice given by Annadurai, SRU merged with Southern Railway Employees' Union (SREU) headed by late S. Gurusamy, a veteran trade union leader. SREU itself was affiliated to AIRF, which was considered to be a progressive union by the DMK people.

By and large, railwaymen wanted unity between the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen and the All India Railwaymen's Federation at that time. A very eloquent example of this unity mood was the merger of the unions in the Southern Railway - the Southern Railway Employees' Association (SREA) affiliated to the NFIR and the Southern Railway Employees' Union (SREU) affiliated to the All India Railwaymen's Federation. S. Gurusamy, who opposed to the merger, was himself the President of the Southern Railway Employees' Union (SREU). In spite of his opposition, the General Body of the Union held by an overwhelming majority that unity was the prime need of the hour. Further, they decided to merge with the Southern Railway Employees Association under the banner of the NFIR.¹⁷

17. M.S. MAST, op.cit., p. 154.

After the merger of the DMK union with the SREU, a need for an organisation to have communication link among the workers in Railways was felt. Some DMK leaders say that opinions prevalent at that time wanted a sort of forum to be established, so that it could be of some help to propagate the idea of social progress for the advancement of the workers in the social sphere. It was also stated that the social progress for the advancement of workers should go hand in hand with economic benefits, which could be obtained through trade union efforts. In pursuance of this goal, a 'Rationalist Forum' was formed by the DMK sympathisers.¹⁸

Steps were taken to consolidate the merger of Southern Railway Employees' Association and Southern Railway Employees' Union. Efforts were also made to elect representatives on the basis of membership of different unions, affiliated to the above two unions, in order to form zonal unions. When formed, these zonal unions would elect representatives to a proposed single all-India federation which, in turn, would look after the labour interests of the railwaymen. To implement this decision in the Southern Railway, the trade union workers met at Hubli in 1958 and formed the Southern Railway Employees' Sangh (SRES).¹⁹

18. S. KUPPUSAMY, "Railway Thozhilalar Munnetra Sangam-Yaan?" (Circumstances which led to the Formation of Railway Employees' Progressive Union), Railway Employees' Progressive Union Souvenir, 1973, pp. 55-57.

19. Ibid., p. 58.

Because of several objections raised concerning the locus standi of two or three unions affiliated to the NFIR and the AIRF, in the joint committee meeting which was formed under the 'unity understanding', the proposed unity based on 'one union for one industry' between the two all-India federations did not materialise.²⁰

As far as the Southern Railway was concerned, those who were not able to get any position in SREA, SREU and the merged SRES formed another union called 'Dakshin Railway Employees Union' (DREU) at Vijayawada in early 1959 under the leadership of S. Gurusamy. Meanwhile, SRES broke the merger conditions earlier given to the DMK union (SRU) and decided to merge its union with the NFIR, an affiliate of the INTUC. Moreover, a difference of opinion between the NFIR and AIRF arose on the question of Central Government employees' strike in July 1960. The NFIR opposed the proposal on the ground that it was uncalled for and was "capable of doing utmost harm to the interests of the country".²¹ On the other hand, the AIRF (an affiliate of the AITUC) sponsored the strike. Even though till that date the SRES was not affiliated to the NFIR, because of its decision to oppose the strike, the DMK workers, who functioned within the SRES, decided to leave the union because of its anti-working class policy, and decided to support the AIRF-sponsored strike.

20. M.S. MAST, op.cit., pp. 156-58. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of S.R. Vasavada, NFIR President.

21. Ibid., pp. 159-65.

The Central Government employees' strike failed for different reasons. This resulted in a split in the labour movement in Southern Railway. The erstwhile PSP followers in AIRF expelled S. Gurusamy from the Federation. At this juncture, another labour union called the 'Railway Labour Union' (RLU) under Anandan Nambiar and the DMK railway workers, joined together to form the 'Dakshin Railway Employees Union' at Madras in 1961, again under the leadership of S. Gurusamy.

During 1962, Chinese aggression, Nambiar and his followers were arrested under D.I.R. So, the union virtually came under the direct control of DMK workers and S. Gurusamy. At the Mysore conference, held in 1963, Gurusamy and his followers were expelled from the Union, on the plea that 'workers alone should be the leaders of the union'. This decision led the DMK workers to pressurise the party leadership for forming a separate DMK union, which was resisted by the party leadership. DMK labour leaders became operationally ineffective as far as DREU was concerned, even though they held many important positions in the union.

When in 1964 the national Communist movement split into two, it had obviously an effect on the labour movement also. As a result, DREU under Nambiar went to the CPI(M) fold with change in headquarters from Madras to Ponmalai, i.e., Golden Rock near Tiruchirappalli.

On the eve of the 1967 general elections, the DMK formed an election front in which the CPI(M) was one of the

parties. The CPI(M) expressed the desire through DREU leader Nambiar that the DMK workers in the Railways should extend their support to DREU and join the union in order to save it from a CPI take-over. At that time, Annadurai expressed the view that as a progressive party, the DMK should extend all possible support to DREU, so that the union remained under the control of progressive Marxists.²² But it was stated that Annadurai's view was opposed by DMK trade unionists. They held that as an organised powerful opposition party in Tamil Nadu, the DMK workers should not waste their energy and resources in some other trade unions opposed to the DMK ideology. Thus, the DMK trade unionists expressed their desire to form a DMK union in Southern Railway.

For this, Annadurai said, "after the elections, let us explore the possibilities of having a separate organisation".²³

After the elections, DMK workers decided to form a separate organisation, which was blessed by the party chairman, Karunanidhi, who took over the helms of affairs after the death of Annadurai, who had opposed a division in the labour movement.²⁴ Thus, the Railway Employees' Progressive Union came into existence in May 1970.

22. S. KUPPUSWAMY, op.cit., p.61.

23. Ibid., p.61.

24. Annadurai died on February 3, 1969. After his death, M. Karunanidhi took over the Chief Ministership as well as the party leadership.

Annadurai's Concept of Social Classes and Trade Unions

Annadurai's concept of social classes helps us to understand the party's role in labour-management conflicts. His writings imply three classes, the capitalists, the labourers and the consumers. This enabled him to give an average citizen's orientation to his party, by identifying it not with capitalists or with labour wholly, but with the 'public' as consumers and to campaign for consumer power. It was the price that the consumer paid that was shared as reward between the capitalist and the worker; hence the consumer had the right to criticise and change this system of sharing. In Annadurai's conception, the ideal consumer stood between the capitalist and the worker, generally leaning to the side of the latter out of humanitarian motives. That is, the DMK, like the ideal consumer, stood between capital and labour, thus effecting an equilibrium. Its role was to create a bond of affection between labour and the 'public', especially in times of strikes. Annadurai seems to have conceded that his party was not exactly the labourers' party, that privilege he had given to the Communists. When the labourers' party and the capitalists' party clashed with each other, there was no one to bring the issue to the 'public'. His party alone tried to establish a firm contact between the labour and the 'public' by asking the latter to act as a 'court of law' and its verdict Annadurai claimed to have followed. In short, the DMK would be a kind of lobby for labour, but not a lobby in the conventional sense for that would imply full support to labour at all times.

The DMK would retain an element of 'objectivity' basing itself on the principle that "much might be said on both sides".²⁵

Annadurai was of the view that trade unions should not be under the dominance of any political party. He said, "if trade unions are under the control of political parties, the 'unity and strength' of the union is shattered into different shades according to the ideologies represented by the parties". This does not mean that the workers should not take active part in politics. In fact, he said, "they should be involved in the country's political life, but political connotations and party differences should not infiltrate into the trade union movement and split it". While approaching labour issues, Annadurai said, "political angles should not be allowed to creep in, which may in totality shatter the 'oneness' of the union movement".

The basic approach of a trade union should be a slow and steady one, with an object of getting significant gains rather than a rash approach, which attracts much publicity but which later lands up in smaller gains. When the struggle for workers' rights is going on, the basic duty of a trade unionist should lie in achieving it on behalf of the working class rather than adopting any other means.

25. Annadurai's concept of social classes is developed in his book Panathottam. Madras, Dravida Pannai, Second Printing, 1969, pp. 72-88.

While expressing his views on the labour movement, Annadurai said, "trade union movement is not a stepping stone for labour leaders to uplift themselves, but it is a movement for achieving the just demands of the workers. Further, it is a sort of bridge between the management and the workers, and it should be free from any sort of violence".

Annadurai's advice to his partymen was: "duty, dignity and discipline", which was applicable to the working class as well. Annadurai implied in his writings that the worker gets respect and glory in the society, when he does his duty properly and in an orderly fashion. He said, "his duty lies in giving more benefits to the society than what was expected of him. The worker gets his dignity and position in the society as long as he restrains himself from indulging in anti-social activities. If the worker shows united resistance to all forces which try to weaken working class unity, in a disciplined way, he gets the recognition which is usually due to a disciplined citizen". In sum, the workers' duty, dignity and discipline, Annadurai's maxim, lies in giving more benefits to the masses, not indulging in anti-people activities and exhibiting united resistance against disruptive forces.

While making a passing reference to over-politicisation of the labour movement, Annadurai said, "a stage should be attained where a union functions only in the interest of workers and not for party interests. There should be only one workers'

union in one industry and not a union for every political party in that industry. In other words, multiplicity of unions should be avoided. Political parties should use their capacities and resources for the growth of labour movement and it should not be the other way round like political parties thriving on trade union strength". Further, Annadurai added, "due to high politicization of labour in the country, irrespective of the political connection that the worker may have, when he involves himself in trade union movement, he should be treated 'apolitical' by giving him the only status of the worker. This should be the main consideration of a trade unionist, when he approaches the problem of industrial labour". As an advice to the labour, Anna said, "after their union work, workers can involve themselves in party activities, but it is their main duty to safeguard their union, to prevent labour organisations from becoming a pawn in the hands of political bosses".²⁶

Efforts made by Political Parties to Consolidate the Mass-base

In the first general elections in 1952, if the Communist Party obtained a large number of seats at the expense of the Congress in the composite Madras State, it was due mainly to their strength amongst the industrial and agricultural labourers. Apart from that, the Kazhagams - DK and DMK - gave full support to the Communist Party with their 'mass base', which gave the

26. The entire discussion is based on the articles written by Annadurai in Dravida Nadu. These articles were reproduced in parts in a number of issues of The Uzhaiippaali.

CPI a somewhat inflated appearance of strength. From that time onwards, political parties - particularly the party in power - began to mobilise the support of the working class, but the Communists, with their ideology and anti-employer policy, had an edge over other parties for some time.

Rajaji, who headed the Congress Ministry at that time (1950-54), put an end to the Communist stronghold over the peasants by implementing vigorous measures during his tenure immediately after the first general elections. During Kamaraj's stewardship, attempts were made to capture the industrial workers.

These measures served a dual purpose for the ruling party. As a majority of industrialists supported the Congress it was felt that if the workers were also brought into INTUC fold, it would, in addition to political advantages, help maintain industrial peace, thereby enabling growth. So, after fifteen years of hard work both Kamaraj and R. Venkataraman, (then Industries and Labour Minister and later member of the Planning Commission) built up a strong labour force for the Congress. The Congress did have an edge over the CPI, but the latter was not, however, insignificant.

While the two national parties concentrated on the industrial and agricultural labour force, both neglected a third force, namely the student community. This was perhaps in accordance with the orthodox idea of not bringing politics to educational institutions. But, the emerging DMK concentrated on this left-out

force and easily won them over to its fold. They captured most of the student unions in colleges and even in high schools. This was evident from the 1967 general election results. In that, no less a personage than Kamaraj, the then President of Indian National Congress, was defeated by a twenty-eight year old DMK student leader, Srinivasan, in his home constituency. Thus, the consolidation of student power by DMK helped the party considerably to come to power apart from other reasons, which are discussed below.

People's opposition to corrupt and inefficient Congress rule, drought conditions, high prices of foodgrains, bitter memories of anti-Hindi riots that took place during 1965, and the rigorous suppression of the students' demonstrations which had destroyed the popularity of the Congress in Madras - probably all these things turned the public strongly against the ruling party. Even though the achievements of the successive Congress governments in Madras were considerable, the prominent Congress leader C. Subramaniam admitted that those who had benefited during Congress rule were only a minority.²⁷ Despite considerable expansion of industry, the unemployment problem rose to such a gigantic proportion that it directly affected the student community. This generated a sort of hatred towards the ruling party and the students started supporting the DMK ever since.

27. P. SPRATT, DMK In Power, Bombay, Nachiketa Publications, 1970, p.59.

The strides made in agriculture too did not benefit the rural peasantry uniformly. Though the supplies of agricultural inputs were larger than in other States, at that time they were not as much as promised, and were often irregular and went by favour. The rural administration was so corrupt that people without special influence could not always get the full amount of a sanctioned loan or other benefits to which they were entitled.²⁸

The DMK came to power in 1967 against this background. It cashed in on these negative factors, such as anti-Congressism, but not by projecting any positive programme. From the beginning the party showed a penchant for negative slogans rather than for evolving any meaningful positive ideology of its own. Moreover, Rajaji supported the DMK whole-heartedly due to his hatred for Kamaraj and the Congress in Tamil Nadu.

Post-1967 Period

The DMK capture of power brought about a qualitative change in the general atmosphere as well as in the mood of the workers. The DMK projected itself as a pro-labour party and this attitude of the new ruling party made the workers think that the time had come for them to get their grievances redressed, and also for the achievement of rights, economic upliftment and

28. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

other fringe benefits. So, the workers expected governmental support in their struggle because their leaders who had been with them all along were now in power. Moreover, on several occasions, Annadurai openly said, "workers are part and parcel of the society and their problems should not be viewed separately under the industrial garb. The privileges enjoyed by every section of the society should also be extended to the workers community. If the standard of living of the people goes up, workers' living standard should also go up".²⁹ Having this in mind, Annadurai proclaimed in a public meeting that the Tamil Nadu Government is a Pattaligal Sarkar, that means a Government for the workers, by the workers and of the workers.³⁰

On 11th July 1967, S. Madhavan, the then Labour Minister, issued a well thought-out but somewhat ambitious and idealistic statement of the labour policy he proposed to follow. The Government, he said, "is committed to the welfare of labour. This in essence is the policy of the Government ... to create conditions so that in the factory, the worker is able to assume a more responsible relationship to the employer, and outside the factory, is less subject to those social pressures which prevent him from growing to the full stature of a human being".³¹ These pronouncements made the workers militant and the employers suspicious of the bonafides of the Government.

29. P. KARUPPAIAH, "Thozhir Sanga Varalattril Thi.Mu.Ka", (Role of DMK in Trade Union History), Railway Employees' Progressive Union Souvenir, 1973, p. 123.

30. Statesman (Calcutta), February 12, 1968.

31. Patriot (New Delhi), July 12, 1967.

One of the DMK's electoral allies, the CPI(M), sponsored a number of strikes hoping that they would get the support of DMK, as they had helped the DMK to come to power. Taking its cue from the CITU, the CPI(M)'s labour wing, the CPI-controlled AITUC also sponsored a number of strikes. In later stages, HMS (erstwhile PSP's labour wing) and the Congress-controlled INTUC were also driven into the battle field.

In July 1967, a strike was organised in the Neyveli Lignite Corporation, a Government of India undertaking. The union, which was led by the CPI(M), struck work and compelled the other workers to follow the suit. Later, the management was compelled to grant the union's demands.³² In August and September of the same year, workers performed a number of gheraos and the police arrested many workers. In October 1967, many disputes arose over Deepavali Bonus and there were so many strikes on this and other matters. Due to this, production went down considerably and there was a sign of increasing industrial unrest in Tamil Nadu. It was said at that time that "capital" would leave Madras as it was leaving West Bengal. On January 8, 1968, at Tiruvottiyur, near Madras, some 50 strikers were injured due to lathi charges and bullet injuries during a clash with the Police. Two days later, CPI(M) organised a demonstration of these workers, who went in procession shouting denunciations of the Labour Minister, S. Madhavan, who replied to this attack by issuing a strongly worded statement next day. But, on

32. P. SPRATT, op.cit., pp. 104-5.

the 18th of the same month, at a DMK leaders' conference, the Chief Minister asked the other ministers not to get involved in public controversies with the CPI(M).³³

Industrialists blamed the left Communists for the wave of strikes. Marxists were stated to be exploiting their electoral alliance partners, the DMK, to consolidate their foothold in the trade union movement. In some cases, leftists encouraged and even supported the DMK to set up rival trade unions in some establishments, thus making it difficult for the DMK government to take any action against wild-cat strikes sponsored by such unions. It appeared at that time that there was some basis for the industrialist complaint that the DMK was 'mothering' the Marxists, notwithstanding the fact that the Labour Minister, Madhavan, pledged adequate protection to industrialists and their establishments. The Standard Motors, a leading automobile industry in the country, was closed due to frequent wild-cat strikes and picketing. Its director, K.V. Srinivasan, said, "unless this was checked, Tamil Nadu will soon witness a repetition of labour unrest, which prevailed in West Bengal".³⁴

Student-Busmen Clash

During the busmen-students clash in Madras city in March 1968, it appeared that government had supported the busmen and students complained that their appeals for protection had

33. Ibid., pp. 105-6.

34. Statesman (New Delhi), October 26, 1967.

not been answered. They denounced the ministry and burnt effigies of the ministers, which resulted in a judicial enquiry.

It was suspected at that time that the CPI(M) leaders of the Bus Workers' Union had decided, for some reason, on a show of strength. There was a general belief that the Communists, especially the CPI(M), organised most of the strikes in the State during the year. They were known to control many of the trade unions including that of the Transport employees. From time to time, some DMK ministers publicly condemned them for their part in causing strikes and disorder, but the government for tactical reasons did not take a public stand.³⁵

Annadurai found it necessary to tell his cadres to go slow, less militantly on the labour front, in order to avoid central intervention in Madras on the grounds of deterioration in the law and order situation in the State. This attitude of Annadurai encouraged the CPI(M) to repeat its earlier tactics, which resulted in a further series of strikes.

As a result of strikes, industrial production went down and many small firms were forced to close down. C. Subramaniam declared that twice as many man-hours were lost than in the previous year. The figures quoted by Spratt are:³⁶

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Strikes & lock-outs</u> | <u>Workers involved</u> | <u>Man-hours lost</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1966 | 176 | 69,310 | 754,612 |
| 1967 | 305 | 117,000 | 1,120,000 |

35. P. SPRATT, op.cit., p.107.

36. Ibid., p.107.

Students spent much of their time in strikes, demonstrations and meetings during busmen-students clash in March 1968. Because of this, the DMK slowly started losing its grip over students who had been its torch-bearers. Moreover, compulsory introduction of Tamil medium in colleges made a section of the student community hostile to the DMK ministry. This measure antagonised a large number of students and consequently the government withdrew it, even though it had made large concessions to attract students to the Tamil medium courses.

Congressmen complained that the government failed to maintain law and order because it was unwilling to deal firmly with the Communists, especially the CPI(M) which had been a partner in the electoral alliance with the DMK. While defending the government's labour policy, during the discussion on labour demands in the Assembly, the Labour Minister, Madhavan, said, "our policy is aimed at safeguarding the interests of the workers who form the weaker sections of the society".³⁷ Intervening in the debate, K. Ramamurthi (Congress) said, "many DMK unions have been started in several factories, in order to promote party interests, after the present government came into power and this runs counter to its policy that it favours 'one union for one industry' ".³⁸ While quoting the report on the Neyveli Lignite Corporation, he asserted that "the State Government has brought

37. The Hindu (Madras), March 20, 1968.

38. The Hindu, March 20, 1968.

pressure on the management to reinstate dismissed workers without going into the merits of individual cases". The minister replied, "Government is only interested in championing the cause of labour and rendering justice to them".³⁹ It was also reported that the government desired that nobody should be dismissed even if guilty of gross indiscipline. The minister retorted, "it is a sweeping statement".⁴⁰ But this was generally held to be true.

The greatest defect of the DMK labour policy was its adverse effect on discipline. A report by the National Commission on Labour, published on June 23, 1968, says that "in addition to interfering too much, the DMK government has erred by delaying decisions, failing to suppress violence, opposing the dismissal of workers guilty of gross indiscipline, pressing managers to reinstate dismissed workers without regard to the merits of the case, reopening closed cases and supporting union leaders who violated the code of discipline; the result was a worsening of labour relations".⁴¹ While announcing the eight-point labour policy the Labour Minister, Madhavan, said that he did not attach much sanctity to the so-called code of discipline unless it became a part of political life, which remained the major influence on labour movement.⁴² The Labour Minister's reply, in

39. The Hindu, March 20, 1968.

40. National Herald (Delhi), May 23, 1968.

41. P. SPRATT, op.cit., pp. 127-28.

42. Patriot, July 12, 1967.

a statement to the Press on July 10, 1968, was a partial admission of the charges. He claimed the right to re-open closed cases and admitted that he had requested, "but not pressed, employers to reinstate discharged employees".⁴³

The government's labour policy is reflected in its industrial and labour legislations, in its stand on labour-management disputes and in its response to trade union activities and to other forms of labour struggles. Soon after coming to power, the DMK promised to introduce a comprehensive industrial relations bill, which the party deliberately evaded. On the question of labour-management disputes, the DMK's policy seemed to have undergone a distinct change, from a mildly sympathetic attitude to stances extremely harmful to working class struggle.⁴⁴ The DMK government slowly started supporting the management against the interest of the workers. Its intervention in industrial disputes delayed arriving at a settlement. On many occasions a settlement which was harmful to the workers was forced upon them. The government preferred to delay the decision on a dispute rather than to settle it. Consequently, workers suffered both monetarily and psychologically. The labour minister once claimed that "unlike the previous Congress government, the DMK depends on the good-will and support of the working class and

43. P. SPRATT, op.cit., p.128.

44. Labour leaders agree that initially the government expressed its labour sympathies, if not pressurising the management to make settlements favouring labour, at least restraining the police from rushing to the help of the management at their call.

will not interfere in industrial disputes unless a law and order situation arises".⁴⁵ Statements supporting labour and its interests no longer appeared either in the press or in the legislature. This clearly showed the change in government's attitude towards the labour. However, it appears that the labour minister's remark did not represent the official DMK position. There were apparently differences of opinion between Madhavan and Annadurai over the labour policy. Madhavan's 'policy statement' says that the government was committed to the welfare of labour. On the contrary, C.N. Annadurai warned the labour organisations that they should not put forward the demands which both the management and the government could not fulfil. Anna even went to the extent of saying that the government would put down firmly any workers' struggle.⁴⁶ This conflict of views between the Chief Minister and the Labour Minister shows that the DMK did not make any serious attempt to formulate a definite labour policy. In spite of the difference of opinion Madhavan was allowed to continue in the government because he commanded much respect among urban population.

Anti-Peasant Policy of the DMK

Let us now analyse how the DMK government handled the agricultural labourers' agitations in Thanjavur district, which were said to be sponsored by CPI(M).

45. The Hindu, March 20, 1968.

46. The Hindu, January 21, 1968.

In Thanjavur, the fertile rice bowl district of the State, the relationship between the agricultural labourers and the landlords was troubled. The agricultural labour was militantly organised. Agitations for wage increase were increasing since 1967. For seven months in a year, the labourers existed at a level far below subsistence, alternatively starving and doing odd jobs. A family, man and woman, working in the field made about Rs. 500 a year.⁴⁷ As labourers persisted in demanding wage increase year after year, due to increase in successive harvests the landlords exercised their right to hire labour wherever they liked. The landlords attempted to import outside labour to depress wage levels and break labour unions. Consequently, local labour attacked their competitors - the outside labour or blacklegs. Thus the whole district was ridden with struggles between local and imported labour and also direct clashes between local agricultural labourers and the landed gentry over the wage issue. The landlords even mobilised the support of lesser 'mirasdars' for the 'paddy producers association' which they formed to counter the attack of organised agricultural labourers' union. The organised landlords stepped up terrorism after the Thiruvarur wage agreement of 1968, under which labourers got 10% rise, unleashed punitive action against the Harijan

47. Data given in the report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Agrarian Labour Problems of East Thanjavur District, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1969, as quoted in Radical Review, Vol.1, No.2, January 1970, p.11.

labourers. In this incident, two CPI(M) workers were killed and several huts were set on fire and police raided a number of slums.⁴⁸

In December 1968, agricultural labourers led by the CPI(M) demanded higher wages and obstructed harvesting in the Thanjavur district and the dispute led to a gruesome affair at the village of Kilvenmani on December 25, 1968. According to the press reports, Communists killed a labourer who was opposed to them, and later their opponents retaliated by setting fire to a house, in which 42 Harijans, supporters of the Communists, including 28 women and children were burnt to death.⁴⁹ But, CPI(M) claimed that one by name Chinna Pillai, an agricultural labour leader belonging to the CPI(M), was killed before the Kilvenmani tragedy.⁵⁰ It was for asserting their trade union rights - the basic right to form a union of their choice - that the labourers of Kilvenmani were burnt to ashes. It was for using their bargaining power - the right to withhold the labour power - that the labourers were arrested en masse and harrassed. After the incident, a tripartite meeting consisting of District Collector, landlords and agricultural labourers was convened, which decided on an interim wage agreement.⁵¹

48. Ibid., p.12. See also, Theekkadir (Madurai), a Tamil Weekly, 2nd November - 16th November, 1968.

49. P. SPRATT, op.cit., p.151. See also, Radical Review, Vol.1, No.2, January 1970, p.11.

50. "Venmani Massacre" - A booklet issued by CPI(M)'s Tamil Nadu office. This booklet says: total killed in that incident was 44 and not 42 as reported in the press. See also, Times of India, Times Weekly, July 15, 1973.

51. MYTHILI SIVARAMAN, "Thanjavur Agricultural Workers in Struggle", The Radical Review, Vol.3, No.3, November 1972, p.25. See also, Janasakthi (Madras), a Tamil Weekly, January-February, 1969.

The issue of outside labour, the principal weapon of the landlords trying to destroy the organised labour movement and to provoke violence was not even recognised by the DMK government, but it promptly despatched the police force to protect the landlords and their fields, without bothering for the victimised agricultural labourers. The DMK which had shown its sympathy to the working class in the beginning started protecting the landed interests of their partymen, who tried to shatter the organised labour movement in Tamil Nadu.

The landlords, who skillfully exploited the lukewarm policies of Annadurai government, in collusion with local DMK men, began terrorising and harrassing the agricultural labourers. The CPI(M) led these struggles against the landed interests and the DMK government. The government was so ineffective that it was not even able to launch a proper case against those who were involved in the harrassment of the agricultural labourers. This was the first time that the rumblings started between the CPI(M) and the DMK at the State level.

The DMK had adapted a 'drift policy' as far as agrarian relations were concerned. This helped the party to adopt itself to the situation that prevailed that time. Most of the time, the DMK sided with landed interests who tortured the agricultural labourers. Moreover, the government took a hostile attitude towards agrarian problems because the peasants' struggles were sponsored by the CPI(M). Lack of consistent and well-defined policy was one of the reasons for tense agrarian relations that existed at that time in Tamil Nadu, especially in Thanjavur district.

DMK's Trade Union Move

Since the DMK party came to power in 1967, it utilised every opportunity which came its way and used the administrative facilities under its control to mobilise agricultural labourers. The party took a number of steps in its initial enthusiasm to better their lot, such as monthly district conferences, free distribution of pattas to the landless, further reduction of land ceiling from 30 acres to 15 acres,⁵² large amount of loans on easy instalments through co-operative land development banks, credit facilities to buy fertilizers, large number of tubewells and extension of power supply to remote villages. These measures helped the party to win over agricultural workers and peasants. Slowly they gained considerable influence over this section, which helped the party make a big dent in the Marxists' hold among them. This was evident, even after the ghastly Kilvenmani

52. The DMK government claimed that, unlike in other States, there was no serious agrarian problem in the State because of land reform legislation, which it claimed was implemented in a revolutionary way. DMK considered that the three major areas in which it had substantially accomplished a legislative revolution were the Land Ceiling Act of 1970; the Record of Tenancy Rights Act of 1969; and the Act of 1971 conferring ownership rights for 'kudiyiruppu' or homestead. (For selected data on implementation of these Acts, see The Radical Review, Vol.3, No.3, November 1972, pp. 25-28). Actually, 1970 Land Reforms Act was nothing but filling old wine in a new bottle. Thus, it was replica of the 1961 Act passed during Congress regime in all its essentials. Under the old Act, the ceiling for every person and in case of a family consisting of not more than 5 members was 30 standard acres; for every additional member 5 acres were permitted. In the new Act, the only change was from 30 to 15; the rest remained the same. In effect, this means that a family of not more than five will have to declare surplus only holdings above 60 standard acres or 240 ordinary acres - exactly the same limit as before. The Hindu, April 12, 1970, and The Radical Review, Vol.1, No.3, April-June, 1970, p.1).

incident, as the DMK won majority of seats in Panchayat and Municipal elections and also in 1971 Assembly elections in which the DMK returned to power with a massive majority, capturing 184 out of 234 total number of seats.

But on the industrial relations front the lack of a concrete industrial and labour policy resulted in industrial unrest. A number of strikes and lock-outs which took place during Annadurai's time resulted in labour unrest. Agitated workers slowly started revolting against the DMK government. The DMK leadership felt that the workers were slowly slipping from their control. In addition to this, top industrial magnets in the State brought pressures to bear on the DMK Ministry to suppress the rising tide of trade union movement. In order to stem the withering support of the workers and also to increase their own political influence over industry, the DMK leadership thought that it would be advantageous to have its own labour organisation. Moreover, DMK leaders felt that a party without a trade union influence would not have the status of a full-fledged political party. Industrial base for a party is considered as ready-made political base which could be used and controlled in times of crises and need. So the DMK thought of having its own trade union which would support government policies. The organisation could also be used to break the workers' struggles sponsored by opposition unions. Their first and foremost aim was to disrupt and shatter the Communist monopoly over trade unions in the State.

Slowly and systematically, the DMK leadership with the help of its local support in the industry, started "pocket unions". DMK ministers including the Chief Minister, attended the labour meetings and utilised these opportunities to mobilise the workers on their side through their forceful speeches, denouncing the Communist-led unions, wherever it was possible to do so. The party leaders justified through their public speeches the involvement of the DMK in labour movement. They said that the DMK itself was a party of workers and peasants. So the founder leader, Annadurai, thought there was no need to have a labour wing separately for the party, which was foemed only to protect labour interests in general. As the party grew like a Banyan tree, workers from different sectors and fields started joining the party. Thereupon, the leadership took a decision to have a separate labour wing for the party and appointed an assistant general secretary. First to be appointed for this post was the late A. Govindasamy, one time DMK Minister for Agriculture.⁵³

On one occasion Chief Minister, Annadurai, while addressing Simpson Group companies' workers meeting at Napier Park in Madras said, "the labour movement is like a flowery garden which I have leased to other parties because of my pre-occupation in other fields. I will take over the garden again

53. Thillai Villalan, "Kazhaga Thozhilalar Ani Vazhga",
The Uzhaippaali, Vol.1, No.1, April 14, 1974.

whenever it is necessary. But, they misunderstood my intention and now they think that the leased property is their own".⁵⁴ He added further that "we told our friends - the Communists, the Congress and the Socialists - that we welcome their efforts for the upliftment of workers. Let them fight for the economic upliftment of labour and we continue our fight for their political freedom and social advancement. Now we are compelled to enter the labour arena even though our political base lies in the workers and the down-trodden, weaker sections of the society, because the parties which dominate the trade union movement in the State used the trade unions as a stepping stone to further their party interests using unlawful tactics such as coercion and violence to strengthen their mass-base. Apart from that, they ill-treated and victimised the workers, who refused to support them and fall in their trap. Moreover, they forgot the general principle of workers welfare and party politics penetrated so deeply inside the labour movement that the workers were split on party lines, thus weakening the movement."⁵⁵

Kattur Gopal, general secretary of Labour Progressive Federation, said, "as far as the DMK is concerned, there is no need to develop the party by running the trade unions like other parties. Further, there is no intention whatsoever to use the

54. Nam Nadu, April 1955, as reproduced in The Uzhalppaali, Vol.1, No.2, April 26, 1974.

55. V.S. Govindarajan, "Thamizhaga Maginiyum Garibaldiyum" (Tamil Nadu's Mazzini & Garibaldi), The Uzhalppaali, Vol.1, No.1, April 14, 1974.

trade union strength for raising the party's status. If we had that intention, the party would have started trade unions in a planned way in every nook and corner of the State, when it was at the stage of emerging as a powerful Dravidian force with the help of growing support to the party especially from the down-trodden. Whereas, other political parties from the day of inception - like a support branch - have their own unions, as a reservoir of their strength".⁵⁶

Kattur Gopal further added, "the DMK uses its well-organised party support for the development of trade unions and its participation in the movement is not to develop the party, which had already grown to the stature of an all-India party".⁵⁷ This view was also endorsed by the president of Tamil Nadu unit of All India Trade Union Congress, K.M. Sundaram, who said, "even though they got a mass base among the down-trodden and poorest in the society, they did not use their mass base for organising workers. Like the Communists they did not want to use the workers through trade unions to capture power. To reduce the CPI's and the CPI(M)'s influence in trade union field, they formed their own trade unions".

The trade union wings were sought to be established as subordinate organisations of the political party that founded them. A subordinate role for the trade union institutions necessarily means control and influence of the trade union institution

56. Author's interview with Kattur Gopal (Madras, December 1975)

57. Author's interview with K.M. Sundaram, President of Tamil Nadu unit of AITUC (Madras, December 1975).

by the political party that sponsored the union. Control of unions to serve political interests of parties has been traditionally and uniformly exercised by all political parties in India, through the political cadre deployed by the party on the trade union front.

Like other political parties DMK also wanted to have a central trade union organisation on the lines of other national trade union centres, in order to have effective control over unions scattered in different industries, throughout the State. Apart from co-ordinating and exercising administrative control over these unions through a central organisation, the other motive was also to reduce the influence of the labour leaders within the party and also to curb the hostile attitude of some of the labour leaders towards the leadership.⁵⁸ Thus it was decided to form a central federation. The DMK General Council, which met at Tiruchirappalli on February 20, 1970, adopted a resolution to this effect and set up a 13-member committee to draw up a constitution and other related matters. The Council also expressed concern over the attempts made by some political leaders to exploit the students and labour.⁵⁹ After the meeting the DMK President, Karunanidhi, said, "the members of DMK

58. There was a split in Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation Union over the issue of direct recruitment to the post of checking inspectors. Karunanidhi ousted his opponent, S. Raghavanandam, MLC, and appointed V.S. Govindarajan as President of the Union. Author's interview with S. Raghavanandam (Madras, December 1975).

59. Patriot, February 2, 1970.

General Council stressed the need to activate the trade union wing of the party". He said, "the members referred to the activities of some of the electoral allies of the DMK on the labour front. They alleged that these parties exploited industrial labour for their own political ends. Therefore, the members stressed the need to devote attention on the trade union wing of the party".⁶⁰

Mannai Narayanaswamy, Food and Co-operatives Minister, was appointed as convenor of the 13-member committee. While participating in DMK General Council meeting he said, "Annadurai advised us not to organise labour separately for DMK. He entrusted that job to the Communists and said, 'let them organise the labour, we will support it from outside'". Narayanaswamy further quoted Annadurai, who said, "we can be reasonably sure of labour voting for us and not for the Communists because politically the Communists are weak in this State". Narayanaswamy asserted that in spite of this, "we are organising labour because the split in the Communist party divided the labour movement as well. The tussle was 'who is progressive among the two Communist parties after the split'. This baffled the progressive labour as there was some sort of a confusion. The landed interests and the capitalists tried to exploit the working class. In order to save the labour from the clutches of the

60. The Hindu, February 22, 1970.

exploiters, this Council decided to form a central labour organisation".⁶¹

The DMK General Council which appointed a 13-member committee⁶² to draft the constitution of the proposed labour progressive federation, a central trade union organisation of DMK, divided itself into three groups,⁶³ which toured the whole of the State to collect information regarding the number of existing DMK unions, its strength and nature of its affiliation, unions sympathising with DMK. After consolidating the reports of the teams, a final report was prepared by the committee, which was submitted to the General Secretary of the party on April 28, 1970. The Labour Progressive Federation was formally inaugurated on May Day in the year 1970.

61. MANNAI P. NARAYANASWAMY, "Thozhilalargalin Nalam Sirakattum", (Let the Labour Prosper), The Uzhaiippaali, Vol.1, No.1, April 14, 1974.

62. The members of the committee were: Mannai P. Narayanaswamy (Convenor), Kattur Gopal, S.G. Krishnan, V.S. Govindarajan, S. Ramachandran, G. Parangusam, M. Selvaraj, M.V. Narayanaswamy, S. Duraisamy, M. Madhusuthan, S. Raghavanandam, Manickavachagam, A. Babu.

63. These three groups were headed by: Kattur Gopal, S. Raghavanandam and G. Parangusam.

CHAPTER II

THE LABOUR PROGRESSIVE FEDERATION

The Labour Progressive Federation (L.P.F.) was formally inaugurated at Madras on May Day, 1970, by Nedunchezian, Minister for Education, and General Secretary of the DMK. In his inaugural speech, Nedunchezian made it clear that the L.P.F. 'Thozhilalar Munnetra Sanga Peravai' was the labour wing of the DMK and its leadership therefore should be drawn only from the DMK's organisational wing.¹ On September 17th, 1970, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi appointed the first office-bearers of the L.P.F. A prominent DMK labour leader Kattur Gopal headed the list announced by Karunanidhi. In a subsequent General Body meeting, K. Manoharan, leader of the DMK group in Parliament (now in Anna DMK) was elected the first President of the L.P.F., and Kattur Gopal was elected the General Secretary. The Central Labour Organisation of the DMK was started with great ambitions. Kattur Gopal once claimed that it would be an all-India 'central trade union' like the AITUC, INTUC, HMS, CITU. He stated that the new federation would follow an "independent and constructive labour policy."²

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1. Nedunchezian's speech at White Memorial Hall, Egmore, Madras, The Hindustan Times, Nov. 22, 1971, and the Hindu, May 3, 1970.
 2. The Hindustan Times, (New Delhi), November 22, 1971.

There is some uncertainty regarding the number of unions affiliated to the LPF when it began. Kattur Gopal claims that about a hundred unions were affiliated to it at the time of its inception.³ However, other trade union leaders are of the view that this figure is highly exaggerated.⁴ Five months after the inauguration of the Federation the office-bearers and prominent partymen toured the districts in order to activate and strengthen the existing DMK unions and to organise new unions to be affiliated to the Federation. Conveners were appointed at the local levels, to organise unions of peasants, workers and other sections, in an effort to build up a massive labour front. Disregarding the accepted policy of the Government to discourage formation of new unions, in order to avoid bitter inter-union clashes, the DMK started rival unions at plant and factory levels in the textile, light engineering and automobile industries, besides plantation and tannery factories.

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3. Author's interview with Kattur Gopal, the General Secretary of the LPF (Madras, December 1975).
 4. This was stated among others, by the labour leader S.C.C. Anthony Pillai who feels that there were only 30 to 40 unions affiliated to the LPF at that time. The leaders even go to the extent of characterising these unions as 'Group Unions' and not as Trade Unions.

Tactics Adopted to Establish DMK Unions

It was after Annadurai's death in 1969 when Karunanidhi took over the reins of power that the party seriously turned its attention towards the industrial workers. A small number of DMK supporters in different industries gave Karunanidhi a helping hand to convert the disgruntled elements in every industry into DMK men and when the number of DMK workers touched ten per cent of the total labour force in the establishment, then a DMK union was started and recognised.

The administrative apparatus helped the DMK to a great extent in consolidating its position in the labour arena. Vacancies in the State Government controlled offices and factories such as Electricity Board and Transport Corporations were filled with DMK men who gave the assurance that they would form a DMK union if none existed already or to join the already existing DMK union.⁵ After stabilising their hold in State Government undertakings, systematic attempts were made to infiltrate large Central Government undertakings such as, Neyveli Lignite Corporation, Port Trust, Bharat Heavy Electricals, and production oriented Defence establishments. The DMK workers in these establishments were shown some favours,

5. Author's interview with S. Raghavanandan, Labour Secretary, Anna DMK (Madras, December 1975).

Purambokku land distribution, allotment of houses and job opportunities for relatives were the main baits.⁶

Abuse of powers and misuse of administration were the pattern of DMK operation in capturing trade unions. Strong-arm methods and hooliganism, violence, intimidation, terrorism, were also encouraged wherever necessary, unmindful of loss of Government property. The party also used the executive powers given under labour laws and agreements, initially subtly and gradually blatantly, for replacing leaders of other unions with their own men. These places were strong-holds of the AITUC, INTUC and HMS, and slowly the DMK made inroads into the labour field.

After making the grass-root level arrangements and strengthening the labour base, the DMK labour leaders diverted their attention to key sectors like Textiles, Engineering, Plantations, etc. The ever-existing bonus disputes brought the people in power to the scene. The never-ending financial crisis in several sick mills made the DMK government give assurances of 'take-over' which ultimately would not be implemented for want of funds and clearance of Central Government.⁷

6. Ibid.

7. Under Tamil Nadu Relief Undertakings (Special Provisions) Act 1969, some sick mills were taken over by the State Government in Coimbatore District.

'Take-over' assurances helped the party bring a large number of workers into its fold, thus setting its foot firmly in textile unions. The emergence of the DMK union with full governmental support in the textile sector, eroded marginally the stronghold of the CITU, HMS and INTUC unions. Thus, the DMK, the new comer to the trade union field antagonised the long standing four unions and became their trade union enemy.

After gaining a foothold in the key industries, the DMK turned its attention to prestigious private industries, to extend its arm of control in this area also. It was not easy for the party to penetrate into this well-knit sector because the minimum bonus scale of pay and other service conditions were governed by industrial regulations. Here the party adopted different tactics of ousting some of the veteran trade unionists who controlled these unions for decades together. They sought the help of the frustrated management, who were unhappy with bad industrial relations in their establishments due to the extremist activities of the Communist unions. The active DMK workers, who formed 'group unions' in a number of small scale and medium sized industries in the suburbs of Madras city, contested for union posts at factory level union elections, along with veteran trade union leaders like S.C.C. Anthony Pillai, who controlled fifteen unions in and around Madras city.⁸

8. S.C.C. Anthony Pillai is the Vice-President of All-India Port Workers' Union.

DMK workers became office-bearers in these unions and they slowly ousted the veteran leaders by back door methods and started capturing unions. The DMK activists, who had connections with the party High Command brought ministerial and governmental pressures to bear on the existing union leadership in order to remove them from their positions. Hooliganism and terrorism were also encouraged to assault trade union leaders who were opposed to DMK policies,⁹ thus creating a sort of violent atmosphere and making the smooth functioning of democratic unions impossible.

The management helped DMK men establish unions as a price for the preferential treatment extended to them. Some trade union leaders belonging to opposition groups complain that the DMK unions were patronized by the management in many enterprises. The existing unions, irrespective of their membership and strength were bypassed and in a large number of cases, the employers preferred wage agreements with the new DMK unions, in order to get official patronage.¹⁰

9. K. Gurumurthy, President of Simpson and Group companies workers and staff union was forced to resign because of terrorism and intimidation tactics used by DMK activists. Similarly, S.C.C. Anthony Pillai, another labour leader, was forcibly removed from the Presidentship of Madras Labour Union which he held for several years. Later, this Union also fell into the hands of the DMK.

10. Author's interview with K.M. Sundaram (AITUC), S.C.C. Anthony Pillai, R. Kuchelor (Working People's Council) and V.P. Chintan (CITU), (Madras, December 1975).

The DMK unions were the first to accept the settlements proposed by the management.¹¹ To implement the wrong agreements concluded by DMK unions, police forces were used to suppress the workers' resentment over concluded agreements.

If the workers resorted to a strike, it was allowed to drag on until they were not in a position to carry on the strike further. At this juncture, the Government would intervene in favour of the management and arrive at settlements, which were harmful to the workers.¹² To pacify the workers, the government made false promises which remained unimplemented. The DMK unions split the solidarity of the workers to make inroads in every industry.

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11. In the Britania Biscuit Factory at Ambattur, near Madras, under the initiative of DMK leaders and the labour welfare officer, a new union was registered. The new union promptly settled a dispute which was pending with the management, ignoring CPI(M) Union which existed there. The majority of the workers opposed the settlement concluded by new union and declared it as illegal agreement. Mythili Sivaraman, 'The DMK' - The Radical Review, Vol. 1, No.2, January 1970, p. 10.
 12. During 1968, in Western India Match Company (WIMCO), near Madras, the workers refused to shift the finished products in protest against the management's attitude towards workers' problems. But the Government intervened and the goods were transferred as desired by the management with the help of the police. When the workers resisted, the police fired at them. (Source: Author's interview with Padmanabhan, CITU leaders, Madras, December 1975).

Thus, the DMK unions in private industries became the pro-establishment unions because they came into existence with managerial support. So they fell to the baits of the management, proving a complete blank from workers point of view as far as these industries were concerned.

In cases of industrial disputes and in the matters of adjudications, the State Government used its administrative and governmental powers to favour DMK unions. As there was no accepted criterion for recognising unions, the DMK government used the power of recognition, to build up its own party unions.¹³

The DMK unions attracted the workers by giving incentives and soft loans, provided they became members of the newly started union. Along with other rival unions, they also formed co-operative credit societies in the industry with the help of the management. It is interesting to note that some of the trade unions run the co-operative credit societies just to attract the workers to their fold and also to mobilise resources for the union. This tactic was widely followed by the DMK to attract the workers to join its union, thus exploiting the

13. A remarkable example is the State Transport Union recognition dispute. Before the formation of Pallavan Transport Corporation (PTC), the State Transport employed about 18,000 workers. In that, the Transport Employees and General Workers' Union sponsored by the DMK had about 1500 members, when compared to CPI(M) controlled union which had a strength of about 5,000. This minority DMK union, which failed to submit its membership register, was promptly recognised. (Source: Author's interview with PTC union leaders and The Radical Review, Vol.1, No.2, January 1970, p.11).

financial requirements of needy workers. They also helped the party to break the backbone strength of the established unions.¹⁴

Organisation and Objectives:

According to an official LPF publication¹⁵, "the general principle of the Federation is to adhere to the party's founder leader Annadurai's maxim: Duty, Dignity and Discipline. By adopting rationalist ways and means, the Federation hopes to establish a society free from exploitation and banish poverty by peaceful means." Its political objective is "to establish scientific socialism by bringing means of production and distribution under social control and then nationalising them."

14. Under the initiative of Kattur Gopal, the LPF started a DMK union in Transformer and Switchgear Ltd., Adayar, Madras, which was a rival union to the established union under the leadership of R. Kuchelor. The DMK union was started in February 1975. Side by side, it also started a co-operative credit society. The workers were informed that if they joined the DMK union, the next day they would get Rs.1000/- as loan from the co-operative society. A majority of the workers joined the newly started DMK union and the other union headed by Kuchelor was dissolved. K. Suppu, President of Madras Labour Union, a former DMK MLA, is now heading this union. (Source: Author's discussion with an official of the Working People's Council (Madras, December 1975).

The Madras Port and Dock Workers' Progressive Union mobilises the workers by giving large sum as credit. (At a time about Rs.3000 is given as loan). While distributing the loan to the workers, 5% of the loan amount goes to union fund as donations. (Author's discussion with some of the union members. This was confirmed by S. Raghavanandam, a former DMK labour leader. Madras, December 1975).

15. 'Thozhilalar Munnetra Sanga Peravai'- Vidhigal (Labour Progressive Federation - Rules and Regulations) - LPF Head Quarters - Anbagam-Madras.

Its social objective is "to remove socio-economic and political inequalities prevailing in the society on the basis of caste, creed and religion." Its labour objective is "to awaken the worker and educate him in such a way so that he becomes a model citizen and make him aware of his socio-economic rights. It will also strive to secure more rights and protect existing rights of the workers." As far as labour benefits are concerned, the Federation is to work for more benefits to labour such as old-age pension, social security, securing employment for those who lose their jobs and maternity benefits.

Apart from labouring to achieve these objectives, the Federation will also work for the unity of the working class and unite them under the banner of LPF. The Federation's motto is "Let Labour Prosper and Industry Flourish".

Flag: The party chairman, Karunanidhi, suggested the name of the Federation and designed its flag. Like that of the DMK party flag, the Federation's flag is also black and red with the figure of full sun. One-fourth of the flag in the left side is black, which represents sorrow and misery of the working class, who are yet to be emancipated from their ignorance and belief in superstitions. Three-fourth of the flag is red with the figure of full sun inscribed in the centre. The red colour represents the sacrifice of the labour, the public and the party. The sun symbol represents the theme, "The more the

sacrifice, the more the enlightenment". The party claims that due to its campaign through social reform movement, the ignorance of the workers is reduced, so the black portion is shown less. The increased portion of the red indicates the sacrifices that the party had made for the working class, which also represent the greater enlightenment of the labour and the public.¹⁶

Organisational Structure

The Federation is headed by a president, who is assisted by three vice-presidents, a general secretary and a treasurer. The Federation is composed of a central executive committee and a general council, which is the supreme body of the Federation. All the office-bearers of the Federation are elected by the general council.¹⁷ The general council is composed of the elected representatives of the affiliated unions.

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16. Author's interview with Tha. Kiruttinan, M.P., and President of Railway Employees Progressive Union (New Delhi, November 1975).
 17. So far four elections were held on the following dates: September 16, 1971; September 25, 1973; September 30, 1974, and December 12, 1975. The last two were the keenly contested ones under secret ballot system. On earlier occasions, though election dates were announced and office-bearers were appointed, there were no elections. (Source: LPF - Rules and Regulations and Author's interview with S. Raghavanandan, Madras, December, 1975).

Each affiliated union will send its elected representatives to the council on the basis of the union's strength.¹⁸ The central executive committee is also part of the council. The central executive committee consists of one president, 3 vice-presidents, one general secretary, 9 secretaries, one treasurer and 15 members.¹⁹

The DMK trade union administrative set-up can be divided into three levels:

(i) Federation level administration: The Federation, apart from co-ordinating the rendering all possible help to the affiliated unions directly, also exercises complete control over units through district trade union councils, whose conveners are either executive committee members or general council members of the Federation. It also lays down broad policies to be implemented by the units.

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18. (i) Up to 200 members one representative,
(ii) 300 - 400 members - two
(iii) 500 - 600 members - three, and so on.
But one union can send maximum 10 representatives to the council. The council meets twice in a year, mostly for elections. (Source: ibid. Rule XI, p.7).
19. In order to have the experiences and knowledge of the outside trade union leaders - a provision has been made in the bye-laws. 50% of the executive members will be outsiders, who are not members of affiliated unions. They will be elected by the general council. Apart from that general secretary of the Federation nominates 10 more members to the executive, thus, bringing the total number of executive members to 25. (Source ibid., Rule VIII, p.1.)

(ii) The district level administration of the LPF is being carried out by the trade union councils.²⁰ These councils co-ordinate the work of affiliated unions in the district and help take up their grievances and other matters to the Federation. It is a sort of both advisory and administrative body at the district level. The district trade union councils function as a link between the Federation and the local units. These councils were formed in order to consolidate unions at local level, to enable workers to safeguard their common interests by taking united action, to guide, help and control unions in their day-to-day activities. As per the Federation's directive, these councils are expected to implement the decisions of the Federation in letter and spirit.²¹

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20. The representatives of the affiliated unions in a district who are members of the Federation's general council, constitute the district trade union council. The executive member from that district to the Federation will be its convener and will look after the administrative and advisory functions of the council. If there is no executive member from a district, the central executive committee nominates a general council member to look after the affairs. If more than one executive member is there in a district, the executive committee nominates one among them. This council is not an elected body.
21. But all these objectives are only on paper. Whether these councils effectively function or not, is not clearly known. These councils were formed only very recently (Oct.20, 1975). It was stated that these councils were organised to satisfy some of the local trade union leaders, who were clamouring for a position in the Federation.

(iii) The Unit level administration: The local union forms the lowest rung of the organisation and it is the most important part of the set up. The local union looks after the interests of its members. It negotiates with the management to solve the day-to-day problems. It performs all trade union functions. The local unit also has a full-fledged office set up, headed by a president, assisted by a secretary and committee members.

In addition to this, there are industry-wise district level organisations also within the DMK trade union set-up. Some of these organisations are headed by the general secretary of the Federation. The position of these organisations in the set-up is not clearly known.²²

Financial Position

The organisational strength and areas of activities of trade unions depend, to a large extent, on their financial position. A financially strong union movement is expected to employ full-time administrative staff to make its organisational

22. For instance, the names of a few such organisations are as follows:

1. The Coimbatore District Textile Workers' Progressive Union;
2. North Arcot District Co-operative Sugar Mills Workers Progressive Union;
3. The Nilgiri District Plantations Workers' Progressive Union.

machinery function efficiently, to undertake constructive welfare programmes for its members and to attract larger membership and inspire in them confidence in unionism. On the contrary, a union which is characterized by financial debility is likely to suffer from inherent structural deficiencies and, hence, may find it difficult to carry out even the minimum programmes for its members.

(i) Income:

As far as Labour Progressive Federation is concerned, its most important source of income is from the affiliated unions based on memberships of unions, as affiliation fee to the Federation. Each affiliated union has to pay paise 25 per member per annum to the Federation as affiliation fee depending upon the membership of the union, minimum fee for a union being Rs.50/- per annum. Apart from that it is compulsory for an affiliated union to subscribe to the Federation's official weekly "Uzhaippaali". This annual subscription is required to be enclosed with affiliation fee. Moreover, 50% of the monthly subscriptions collected from the union members of each union goes to the Federation.²³ The Federation has also availed itself of the legal provision to constitute separate funds for political and civic activities.²⁴ It also receives some

23. Author's interview with S. Raghavanandam, former DMK labour leader, now the labour secretary of ADMK (Madras, December, 1975).

24. The Trade Union Act 1926, Section 16.

financial help from the party.²⁵ In addition to this, the Federation collects donations by organising district fairs, large scale meetings, publishing souvenirs on special occasions like Annadurai's and Karunanidhi's birth days, and through priced publications of the Federation. It also collects donations from the members, through its affiliated units, at the time of disbursement of bonus.²⁶

(ii) Expenditure:

The LPF has a full-fledged office. A large proportion of its revenue is being spent on establishment. Soon after its inception, the Federation undertook a systematic drive to establish new unions and strengthen the existing ones. As most of the unions were formed as rival unions to the existing ones, it had to face a lot of legal problems. Because of this, it has to spend large amounts on legal expenses due to inter-union and intra-union rivalries and other legal matters. It also spends lavishly on organising rallies, district conferences and birth days of founder leaders.²⁷ The Federation gives rupees ten to

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25. During 1974-75, the LPF received Rs.1.5 to 2 lakhs from the party. This information was given by an official of the LPF office.
26. Author's interview with Kattur Gopal (Madras, December 1975).
27. An official of the LPF, who gave this information, refused to give the details of income-expenditure figures, but admitted that huge amounts are being spent on legal disputes and organising conferences and rallies.

those workers who undergo sterilisation. It also provides medical and resettlement facilities to the workers, apart from contributing some amount for workers' education in affiliated unions.²⁸ When compared to its lavish expenditure in other fields, the expenditure on labour welfare activities is very meagre. The Federation spends a lot of money on publicity activities. It also gives huge amounts as gift, apart from collecting funds from the workers for deceased DMK workers.²⁹

The financial position of the Federation is very sound.³⁰ Through its financial resources, the Federation manages to win over the workers, thus enlarging its trade union activities. This has created bitterness among other trade unions. It is interesting to note that within 5 years of its inception, the Federation is understood to have a total membership of half-a-million through its 475 affiliated unions.³¹

28. Author's interview with Kattur Gopal (Madras, December 1975).
29. Pratap Chandran, a DMK worker, who was killed during Simpson Workers' struggle, was given a status of a martyr and a huge amount to the tune of Rs.65,000 was collected from the workers and given to his family. The LPF contributed Rs.5,000. He was also vice-president of Simpson union, when it was under the control of the DMK. (Source: Inbadasan, "Ushaippallin Varalaru" (History of Uzhaiappali), The Uzhaiappali, Vol.2, No.1-4, May 16, 1975, p.73).
30. According to an official of the Federation, LPF's annual income is around rupees five to seven lakhs. But the expenditure is more or less equal, sometimes it crosses this level. The break-up figures and other details are not available.
31. An official statement of the Federation claims this figure. Such a high figure regarding the membership and affiliated unions could not be cross-checked for lack of official documents. Most of the prominent trade union leaders whom the author interviewed, said, DMK's membership claim is a tall claim, they do not even have one-tenth of the inflated figure.

A dependent Federation

K.N. Vaid has classified the relationships between the trade unions and the political parties broadly into two main groups. Firstly, there are the dependent unions that are completely dominated by political parties in matters of policy and function as labour wings of the parties concerned. The second type comprises of those unions that function within the "sphere of influence" of the political parties. Unions of this type are semi-independent, but they lean heavily on political parties for guidance in all important matters.³²

The DMK Federation is a dependent organisation of the party which functions as its labour wing. Moreover, the Federation was formed at the initiative of the DMK leadership. As stated earlier, the DMK unions were formed by active party workers, who held key positions in the Federation as well as in the unions; they also control the administration and finances of the Federation and the unions. Even the newly formed district trade union councils are controlled by the Executive or General council members of the Federation, who are mostly party workers; some even held key positions in the party. The elected general council of the Federation, which is

32. K.N. VAID, Growth & Practice of Trade Unionism - An Area Study (Delhi, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi, 1962), pp.140-45.

the supreme body, usually meets once or twice a year. The party-controlled administrative machinery of the Federation makes available to the members carefully screened information and only information approved by the party reaches the hands of the members. The policy decisions are taken beforehand by the top leaders of the party, at party headquarters, and a formal approval of the general council is obtained on these decisions by carefully manoeuvring them through the general body of the council. Most of the DMK unions are identified with the names of the leaders who head the unions, because they continue to hold the leadership of these unions for long periods of time.³³

Relationship between the Trade Union Ideology and Party Ideology

The three distinct aspects of the DMK's ideology are: social reforms, which the party espoused with vigour and apparent conviction; the issue of a sovereign 'Dravida Nadu', later reduced to a sovereign Tamil Nadu and now abandoned; and 'scientific socialism'. The party's professed 'socialism' seems to have reached a peak in 1962 before sliding down to a more

33. For instance, the names of a few such unions are: "Kattur Gopal Union", "Suppu Union", etc. Kattur Gopal is the president or general secretary of a number of unions in and around Madras and Coimbatore. Always he gets re-elected because of his party connections.

cautious note in 1967. In the election manifesto of 1962, it was stated: "The DMK will try to transfer industries in the private sector yielding fat profits to the public sector after providing just compensation through bonds."³⁴ Banks, big commercial institutions, cinema theatres and transport should be nationalised. A campaign promise was: "the government would progressively minimise the role of the private sector for the ultimate objective of the social ownership of all means of production and distribution."³⁵ The election manifesto of 1967 stated that: "Banks, Transport, and Cinema houses should be nationalised immediately."³⁶

In 1962, the nationalisation included commercial chains which were omitted in 1967. In the later year (1971), there was not even an oblique reference to the ultimate objective of 'social ownership of all means of production and distribution.' The party wanted to translate socialism into action without impairing the property rights and by raising the poor and the down-trodden to a state of well-being. More emphasis was given to social reform which alone, it was stated, can create a society suited to scientific age.

34. Election Manifesto, 1962, of the DMK.

35. ROBERT L. HARDGRAVE JR., "The Dravidian Movement" (Bombay: 1965), Popular Prakashan, 1965, p. 74.

36. Election Manifesto of the DMK, 1967.

The DMK is known for its chauvinistic stand in favour of Tamil nationalism; however, not a single word is mentioned about this in its labour ideology. It is interesting to note that in an industrial dispute, the party leadership sided with a non-Tamilian management against Tamil working class and even went to the extent of victimising Tamilian workers, in order to protect managerial interests.³⁷ The party maintains an effective control over its labour wing. General policies are broadly decided at the Party Headquarters and the labour wing is asked to implement them. However, some autonomy is given to the plant level unions to take decisions at local level. The decisions taken by local units will be later endorsed by the Federation and the party depending upon its merit. The political objective of the DMK labour movement is, "to establish 'scientific socialism', by bringing the means of production

37. The workers population in Madras Rubber Factory is approximately composed of 40% Malayalees and 60% Tamilians. (Earlier, in this factory, there were two unions representing the two communities, which later merged). In April 1971, workers went on strike demanding increase in wages, which was rejected by the management which was headed by Mamman Mappilai, a Malayalee. The DMK government intervened and strike was banned. The DMK faction which enjoyed the support of 1600 workers out of 40,000 broke the strike and went for work. (Source: Author's discussion with an official of the W.P.C. (Madras, December 1975) See also 'The Story of MRF', The Radical Review, Vol.3, No.1, Jan-Mar. 1972, pp.30-31.

and distribution under social control and then nationalising them." But the 1971 election manifesto does not clearly state anything about social control. However, the ideology of the labour wing continues to profess to attain this objective. There is some degree of correspondence between the party ideology and the labour wing ideology so far as political objectives are concerned, but there are also some variations on questions of strategy. There is also a similarity between the party ideology and labour ideology as far as routing of the poverty is concerned.

The Federation's objective is, "the establishment of a society, free from exploitation", but this concept is not made clear in terms of whether it refers to capitalist exploitation or exploitation by a caste. Although the DMK generally maintains an anti-capitalist tenor, it never allows ideological clarity or consistency to interfere with its strategy of building up support from all classes. When communist support was needed, it praised the Communists; when it wanted middle class support, it aligned itself with the Swatantra Party.

In this chapter, we have explained some of the tactics used by the LPF to establish new unions. We have also analysed the organisational structure and the labour ideology of DMK trade unions. Let us now study, how the DMK Federation implements its policies and strategies on a specific industry. In private industries, DMK unions are pro-establishment and their existence depends on the management's support. In the next chapter, we would illustrate the activities of a DMK union by taking a case study.

CHAPTER III

THE SIMPSON AND GROUP COMPANIES, WORKERS
AND STAFF UNIONS - A CASE STUDY

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to illustrate the activities of a DMK trade union in one of the major industrial concerns of Tamil Nadu. We shall try to explain how it, in collusion with the management and with the backing of the State apparatus, overthrew an established union. It also analyses in detail the anti-working class agreement concluded by the DMK leadership with the management which help us to prove our point that the DMK union is pro-establishment. The study also tries to throw some light on anti-labour activities of a DMK union.

The Simpson Group, a family holding¹, comprises twenty two companies² producing a variety of products from diesel engines

1. The Simpson and Company Limited was first established by the late Anantharamakrishnan, who was also its first Director. In due course, the Company expanded and a number of companies were started, which resulted in the formation of the Amalgamation Group. Till his death, Anantharamakrishnan was the Chairman of the Group. Now his sons are managing the affairs of the Group.
2. The names of the Simpson Group companies are as follows:
 - (1) M/s Addison & Co.Ltd. (2) Addison Paints & Chemicals Ltd.
 - (3) M/s Amalgamation Pvt.Ltd. (4) M/s Amco Batteries Ltd.
 - (5) M/s Associated Printers (Madras) Pvt.Ltd. (6) M/s Bimetal Bearings Ltd. (7) M/s George Oakes Ltd. (8) Higgbothams Ltd.
 - (9) India Pistons Ltd. (10) India Pistons-Repco Ltd.
 - (11) Madras Advertising Co.(P) Ltd. (12) Rechhold Chemicals India Ltd. (13) Shardlow India Ltd. (14) Simpson & Co. Ltd.
 - (15) Speed-A-Way (P) Ltd. (16) Sri Rama Vilas Service Ltd.
 - (17) Stanes Motor (South India) Ltd. (18) Stanes Tyre & Rubber Products Ltd. (19) The Mail (20) The Wheel & Rim Co. of India Ltd. (21) Tractors & Farm Equipment Ltd. (22) L.M. Van Moppes Diamond Tools India Ltd.

to farm equipments. It also includes non-engineering fields like an advertising agency, a newspaper and transport services. Most of the units are located at Sembium, about sixteen kilometres to the north of Madras. The other major unit is on Mount Road, in Madras city. Apart from these, there are also units located in Kumbakonam in the Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu and in Bangalore in Kamataka.

Many of the engineering units of the Simpson Group are defence-oriented and the company enjoys monopoly in respect of certain defence products. Some of the units of the Group manufacture key components of automobiles and also various types of strategic materials. If there is any slow down in the production of such material, various units of the automobile and allied industries all over the country would be considerably hit and the defence needs would be severely affected. Hence, it underlines the importance of the industry in the economic system of the country.

With an annual turn-over of rupees fifty to sixty crores, the Simpson Group, which employs more than sixteen thousand people, is one of the few major industries in Tamil Nadu.

Formation and early development of Simpson Union

The Simpson companies staff union was formed in the year 1948 and had initially as members the salaried staff. It

was in 1950 that R. Venkataraman organised the workers' union in the Simpson company and both unions had practically a common identity.³ When Venkataraman resigned from the presidentship of the union to become a minister in the State Government in 1954, he nominated K. Gurumurthi, an employee of the Simpson Company, as the president of the union. Venkataraman was of the view that 'unions should be free from outside control.'. Hence, he ensured the continuance of a domestic leadership that was totally opposed to outside political pressures or affiliation to any of the trade union centres. Both R. Venkataraman and K. Gurumurthi were Congressmen, but they insisted on keeping their union out of politics. They even refused to affiliate it to the INTUC, the labour wing of the Congress.

The growth of the Simpson union can be divided into two phases:

(a) the period from 1954 to 1970 which was one of continuity in leadership in the sense that the union functioned during this period under the leadership of K. Gurumurthi;

(b) the period from 1970 to 1975 which can be termed as the period of instability and disruption. During this period, the leadership was changed and attempts were made to further politicise the union.

3. R. Venkataraman was a former Industries Minister, who later became a member of the Planning Commission.

Period of Success for Simpson Union

The Simpson Group Companies Workers' and Staff Union (commonly known as the Simpson Union) is one of the strongest, independent⁴, self-sufficient and creative industrial unions in Tamil Nadu. Its creative capacity can be assessed from the fact that it runs a huge multi-purpose co-operative society in Madras, a Super Bazaar in Bangalore and has also established several housing colonies for the employees.

The Simpson Union is the only recognised union, which represents about 15,000 employees of the Group covering twenty companies.⁵ The administrative staff drawing a salary up to Rs.750/- per month and workers up to the level of supervisors are allowed to become members of the union.

In the initial stages of the development of the union, there was a bitter struggle between the workers and the management. The management saw to it that the workers did not organise themselves. Under these circumstances, the union came into being under a baptism of fire as Anantharamakrishnan⁶ took a very hostile attitude to the union in the early stages.⁷

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4. The independent nature of the union is now doubtful. In 1971-72, the union was affiliated to the Labour Progressive Federation, the labour wing of the DMK. After the removal of the DMK leadership, according to the President R. Kuchelor, the union is now not affiliated to any of the central trade union organisation.
 5. The employees of M/s Stanes Motor (South India) Ltd. and M/s Stanes Tyre and Rubber Products Ltd. are not members of the union. Source: Author's interview with union officials (Madras, December 1975)
 6. Anantharamakrishnan was the founder and first Director of Simpson & Company. He died in 1964.
 7. K. Gurusurthi, the union leader, was assaulted twice by henchmen of the management.

After an initial period of almost total and uncompromising hostility, Anantharamakrishnan developed the skills of dealing with a strong union in a positive manner and by 1956 he had established a meaningful working relationship. As a result of a change in the attitude of the management, the union was recognised and bipartite negotiations continued helping in establishing good industrial relations, which prevailed uptill 1967.

The Simpson companies grew and the Group, which consisted of only two companies at the beginning, was able to organise and build up the present twenty-two companies with the help of union co-operation. This was possible due to industrial peace which prevailed at that time. The workers also got some benefits out of this relationship in the matter of emoluments, bonus, etc.

As a result both the Groups of companies as well as the union prospered as strong institutions. This strength became useful not only in regard to industrial problems but in dealing with other constructive questions such as housing, reducing indebtedness, increasing employment opportunities, increasing productivity, controlling price-line through consumer co-operatives and so on. The strong entrepreneurship of Anantharamakrishnan and the strong unionist in Gurusurthi amalgamated to produce a very effective and lively productivity

movement, under the auspices of the Madras Productivity Council.⁸

After Anantharamakrishnan, M.V. Venkataraman took over the chairmanship of the Simpson Group.⁹ He also continued on the same lines which helped in maintaining good industrial relations.

Negation of Union Democracy

K. Gurumurthi, who controlled the Simpson union for about two decades was authoritarian in his manner of functioning. He suppressed the slightest dissent firmly. Apart from expelling the members who opposed him, with the help of the management, he punished those employees. Gurumurthy effectively used an agreement with the management under which the union enjoyed an effective consultative status on all discipline matters. Under this tradition before giving punishment under the rules to an accused employee, the management used to consult the union. This gave enormous opportunities to the union leader for control over the workers. Gurumurthy also used his personal relationship

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8. Anantharamakrishnan was the president and K. Gurumurthi was the vice-president of the Madras Productivity Council. After the death of Anantharamakrishnan, Gurumurthi became the President. Source: Author's discussion with a prominent trade unionist and with a supervisor of Simpson Group (Madras, December 1975).
9. M.V. Venkataraman, a close colleague of Anantharamakrishnan took over the chairmanship of the Simpson Group. His term expired in 1967.

with the management to crush opposition.¹⁰ To ensure continued support for the union and also to exercise effective control over the members and to strengthen the union, Gurumurthy inserted a peculiar rule in the workers co-operative society regulations. Under Section 5(1) by-law of the rules and regulations those who wanted to avail themselves of the facilities of the co-operative and credit societies had to become members of the Simpson union. In other words only union members could become members of the co-operative society.¹¹ In fact, this took away the right of the worker to become a member of any union of his choice. In addition to this, Gurumurthy's political prejudice was so blind that his union even debarred the Communists from becoming members of the union.¹² On some

10. During May 1968, the workers went on two days' strike demanding more incentives and wage rise, without the knowledge of Gurumurthy. Thirty six workers who were working in miscellaneous sections were dismissed for ten months. Victimised workers pleaded with the union leadership to negotiate for their reinstatement. Gurumurthy refused to help the workers. The victimised workers met the chairman of the Group, who told them that they were dismissed on the advice of the union. Finally, the workers were taken in. Source: THOZHAN, "Thozhir Sanga Eyakkathil Namadhu Pangu". (Our Role in Trade Union Movement). The Uzhaippalli (Madras) Vol.2, No.1 to 4, May 16, 1975, pp.122-23. First Anniversary issue, and author's discussion with an office-bearer of the union (Madras, 1975).
11. Non-members of the union filed a writ petition in Madras High Court to remove this 5(1) by-law. The High Court judgement quashed this rule. Source: THOZHAN, art. cit., pp.125-26).
12. Rule 25 of the Simpson union rules read as follows:
 "No member of the union shall be the member of the Communist Party of India. If any member of the union is found or suspected to be a member of the CPI, the president of the union is authorised to remove him without any notice."

occasions, Gurumurthy even instigated the management to throw the suspected Communists out of service.

Even though Gurumurthy was so powerful and independent, his union could not be sustained, as there was no internal democratic functioning.¹³ Gurumurthy followed an indirect method of election called 'tick-off system', under which, on the day of election, the members should come and tell the president for whom they want to vote, and accordingly the president will tick the name in the list.¹⁴ This helped him to have his own men in the elected office of the union.

Because of this dictatorial attitude, a section of the workers wanted to remove Gurumurthy from the presidentship. The workers, in practice, found it very difficult to oust him because in the union by-laws wherein it was not clearly stated that there should be elections every year through direct and secret ballot. Making use of this loophole, Gurumurthy declared himself to be the president of the union every year. If any one demanded an election by secret ballot, he would be

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13. Rule 10 of the Simpson union says: "The affairs of the union will be conducted by an executive committee comprising the president, two vice-presidents, one general secretary, joint secretary and a treasurer." However, there is no mention about the procedure of elections to the executive committee and how its members are elected.
 14. Gurumurthy used to tick the name of his choice even after the members told him the name of a different person for whom they wanted to vote. Source: Author's interview with office-bearers and members of the union (Madras, December 1975).

dismissed from service with the help of the management. The fear of losing the job made the workers afraid to challenge the union leadership.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that there is no provision in the union constitution to initiate a no-confidence motion against the union president, a provision which is so common in other trade unions' constitutions. To sum up, the approach of Gurumurthi was a negation of the concept of trade union democracy. Rather than building healthy unionism, he distorted and perverted it. However, Gurumurthi remained unchallengeable till A. Sivasailam took over chairmanship in 1968.¹⁶

Change in Management's attitude

When the new chairman assumed office in the holding company of the Simpson Group of companies, there was a sudden change in bipartite relationship between the management and the union, which had been built as a result of arduous struggle over a period of 14 years.

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15. Author's discussion with R. Kuchelor, a militant trade unionist and president of Simpson union. (Madras, December 1975).
 16. A. Sivasailam, the eldest son of the late Anantharama-krishnan, became the chairman of the Simpson Group Companies after M.V. Venkataraman.

After the death of Anantharamakrishnan, there seemed to have developed a 'crisis of confidence' between Gurumurthy and Sivasailam. The new chairman who was not in favour of a strong union movement in the Group, wanted to reduce the influence of Gurumurthy among the workers.¹⁷ Sivasailam did not like the union leader's personal influence in the management. He was totally opposed to the independent nature of the union which dared to contest the management and tried to dictate terms. Sivasailam was not prepared to part with the management's prerogatives and hated the guts of the union leader and wanted to cut him down to size. He was of the view that the workers at the most can petition for favours from the management and not demand them as rights.¹⁸

Having a new managerial philosophy, involving concepts such as 'management control system', 'initiative and decisions', the youthful chairman started 'process of annihilation' of the union led by Gurumurthy.¹⁹ The management launched a multi-pronged attack on the union in order to destroy its strength.

17. Hindustan Times, (New Delhi) July 1, 1971.

18. Author's discussion with a "Group Leader" (roughly equivalent to supervisor) of the Simpson Company, Madras (Madras, December, 1975).

19. "Labour Notes", Labour Chronicle, Vol.3, No.6, November 1970, p.16.

It also created inter-union rivalry by supporting minority groups. The most conspicuous attack was on creative services of the union - the co-operative consumer society, which provided sustenance to the union.

The management obtained a few letters from a handful of workers informing the management that their dues to the co-operative society should not be deducted from their wages by the management automatically. After obtaining these letters from some workers, the management then raised a policy question concerning the right of the co-operative society to obtain automatic deductions of the co-operative dues from the wages of the employees. This move was aimed at seriously hurting the union in its stronghold which provided it a lot of power viz. the consumer society. By this the management hoped to corrupt a majority of workers away from the disciplined co-operative society habits and dissipate their discipline into anarchic habits that would weaken them and make them victims of usurious money-lenders. In this way the management attempted to cut down a strong union. The union could counter these attempts only through costly litigation.²⁰

Simultaneously, the management started the second phase of its attack on the union by withdrawing a provision of prior consultation with the union on all disciplinary matters.

20. Ibid., p.18.

This system had made the workers develop a sense of self-discipline and had made them conscious that in case of proven misbehaviour the union would not bail them out, though union protection was available in cases of management oppression.

In the name of management prerogative over discipline matters, the management sought to take action under the law directly and curtailing the bipartite relationship that had existed for over fifteen years. The management sought the co-operation of the Tamil Nadu government and the latter, finding that an independent union is made subservient by the management itself to governmental influence and dominance, accepted the suggestion readily.²¹ Thus, the industrial relations in the Simpson Group came under direct control of the State Chief Minister.

Bonus Dispute

In October 1968, Sivasailam declared a lock-out of the companies for a period of 34 days beginning from 17th October over a bonus dispute, on the ground that workers indulged in acts of indiscipline. The workers went on a two-day strike demanding increase in incentives, wage rise and more bonus without giving prior notice. The management declared a

21. Author's discussion with Simpson Union officials (Madras, December 1975). See also 'Labour Notes', Labour Chronicle, Vol.3, No.6, Nov. 1970, p.16.

lock-out and dismissed 36 workers. According to some reports, the union compelled the workers to give witness against the dismissed workers, who were opposed to the union leadership.²²

The management took a legalistic stand on the question of bonus in view of the ruling of the Supreme Court at that time regarding allocable surplus under the Bonus Act. When the union made a demand for bonus, cursory negotiations took place on the quantum of the bonus and the new chairman thought it fit to declare a lock-out, obviously under the impression that when the matter went for adjudication, a court award could be obtained in terms of the Supreme Court ruling. In such trying circumstances, according to some reports, the DMK government was willing to oblige the management by referring the issue to a tribunal. Resisting political pressures, the union after prolonged negotiations, succeeded in persuading the management to accept a minimum of 8% bonus. Under the

22. THOZHAN, "Thozhir Sanga Eyakkathil Namadhu Pangu". (Our Role in Trade Union Movement). The Uzhaippalli, Vol.2 No.1 to 4, May 16, 1975, pp.124-25. In 1966, the Company made a total profit of Rs.358 lakhs and a bonus of Rs.116 lakhs was paid, which worked out to be more than 30% of the net profit. In 1967, for a profit of Rs.333 lakhs, Rs.133 lakhs was paid, i.e., 40% bonus. In the year 1968, the profit was Rs..276 lakhs and the union demanded a 35% bonus as in the past. But the management refused to pay and declared a lock-out. "The Struggle - Simpson Group Companies", Labour Chronicle, Vol.3, No.7, December 1970, p.16.

settlement bonus ranging from 8% to 32% was paid.²³

In 1970, the Simpson Group companies made huge profits to the tune of Rs.386 lakhs, i.e., 93 lakhs more than in the previous year.²⁴ If the management adopted same 30% criterion, the workers were entitled for a payment of Rs.115 lakhs, but the management was prepared for only Rs.77 lakhs, which was at variance with past practices and was not acceptable to the workers.

While the dispute was on, the management tried to split the workers and break the union with a view to weakening the bargaining capacity of the union. The management gave indirect support and encouraged a union affiliated to the INTUC²⁵ and another union belonging to the DMK. In both these unions, hardly 10% of the workers showed their loyalty but still the management backed these unions ignoring the majority union as part of the common managerial game, in the

23. "Settlement in Simpson Group", 1968 Bonus issue: Labour Chronicle, Vol.1, No.8, January 1969, p.16.
24. 1969 profit was Rs.289 lakhs and bonus paid was 87.28 lakhs, i.e., 30%. (Source: Labour Chronicle, Vol.3, No.7, December 1970, p.17.)
25. The name of the INTUC Union is "The Simpson and Associated Companies National Employees' Union". Details about the formation of the DMK union in Simpson is also discussed in this chapter.

hope of breaking the solidarity of the workers and also the union.²⁶

In regard to the bonus dispute, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu intervened and suggested to the parties that in view of the Deepavali Festival, a sum of Rs.50 lakhs may be paid as interim bonus and that in due course he would arrange to settle finally the bonus issue.²⁷ This proposal was agreed to by the concerned parties, but in the matter of distribution of the amount among the various companies of the Group, there was considerable difference of opinion. The union rejected the management proposal regarding the distribution of the amount and union proposals were not acceptable to the management.²⁸ So, the union decided to settle the issue at a later date.

26. During 1970 strike, the workers belonged to minority INTUC and DMK unions were paid wages for the strike period during which they did not work. These two unions openly played the management game asking their workers to accept the wage that the management offered to them to break the established union. Source: "Labour Notes", Labour Chronicle, Vol.3, No.6, November 1970, p.18.
27. "The Struggle - Simpson Group Companies", Labour Chronicle Vol.3, No.7, December 1970, p.17.
28. The management included Rs.7 to 8 lakhs to the highly paid officers from the sum of Rs.50 lakhs agreed to be paid to the workers. In addition, they intentionally wanted to pay higher quantum to certain companies in order to split the employees and break the solidarity of the union. The management allocated about Rs.26 lakhs for 6 companies and wanted the balance of Rs.24 lakhs to be distributed amongst sixteen companies. The union resisted this distribution as they even as an advance could not get an eight per cent bonus. The union proposed a payment of 8% for all companies and 12% for companies which made good profit and the total amount worked out to about Rs.48 lakhs excluding highly paid officers. (Source: Ibid., p.18).

Ignoring the union's protest, the management put up a notice, offering the bonus that they have proposed to the employees and thus created an unhealthy atmosphere.²⁹ After the holidays when the companies re-opened, there was considerable agitation amongst the workers and the police rounded up some of them for alleged acts of violence.³⁰

A large police contingent was kept in Sembium Estate in order to scare the workers and to spread the belief that the management would put down their trade union activities with the help of the police.³¹ From this it was evident that the ruling party was prepared to give maximum assistance to the management in its task of putting down firmly the potential workers' rebellion. The DMK even went to the extent of helping the management to curb the legitimate trade union rights of the workers to question the management and demand an amicable

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29. The money was paid to a handful of workers during Deepavali holidays, i.e., 28th, 29th October 1970, with police escort. The employees who required the amount were asked to report to the police station and they were escorted by the police to the company to receive the amount. Source: Author's discussion with an employee of the Simpson Company (Madras, December 1975).
30. The workers' agitation resulted in some damages to the company properties. Taking advantage of this, the management gave the names of the executive committee members and active union leaders to the police to arrest them. The bail was refused. The union had to move the Court to get the employees on bail. "Labour Notes", Labour Chronicle Vol.3, No.6, November 1970, p.19.
31. Rival union workers assaulted Gulumurthi's men. The office-bearers of the union were threatened and assaulted at the Egmore Presidency Magistrate's court by the same Group. The police did not take any action. Several representations were made to the government, with regard to the police excesses and no action was taken. The Hindu (Madras), November 2, 1970, and the Hindu, November 9, 1970.

settlement of the industrial dispute. Even though the DMK posed itself as a champion of the cause of labour, by this act of sending the police at management's call, it clearly exhibited how little it really cared for labour welfare. Apart from this, the State Chief Minister unwarrantedly intervened in an industrial dispute ignoring the recognized union's demands and forced an interim settlement on workers which was favourable to the management. To implement this unfavourable accord, a police force was kept at the management's disposal. In order to condemn the police atrocities and to force the government to amend the Indian Penal Code to take away the right of the police commissioner to remand accused persons a big Simpson workers' meeting was held on 7th November, 1970 in Madras.³²

The workers meeting also resolved to fight the management not only for the demands but for preserving the fundamental rights of the working class to organise trade union of their choice. The workers also decided to go on strike in order to show their determination to fight the issue to the bitter end.

32. The Act has been so amended in Bombay and Calcutta that no such power vests in the hands of the police. Even in the mofussil towns of Tamil Nadu remanding is only done by the magistrate. (The DMK when it was in opposition demanded an amendment to the Act to this effect. They did not take any action in this regard after they assumed the office). Source: Author's discussion with union officials (Madras, December 1975). See also: Labour Chronicle Vol.3, No.7, December 1970, pp. 18-19.

R. Kuchelor, while expressing his view on management's role in crushing the Simpson workers struggle, said: "As long as the Congress party was in power, the management made use of Gurumurthi, who was a Congressman³³, to fulfil its capitalistic objectives. In order to get the support of the ruling party - DMK, the management encouraged the DMK workers within the Gurumurthi union to form rival union. The DMK people fell a prey to the management baits - formed a splinter union - to which management extended full support. Using this union and the State power, they ousted Gurumurthy." ³⁴

Formation of a Rival Union

As already discussed in this chapter earlier, Gurumurthy's authoritarian control over the union and his undemocratic way of functioning led a section of the workers to oppose him and revolt against him. Even though he was successful in crushing the opposition in the beginning with the help of the management, he was not able later to do so after the change in management leadership. He was not able to get wage

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33. Even though Gurumurthi was a Congressman, he was not liked by them because he refused to affiliate his union to the INTUC.
34. R. Kuchelor, a former CPM(M-L) leader, now claims to be an independent trade union leader, has a big influence on a large section of the labour population in Madras and Chinglepet area. He is now the president of the Simpson union. Author's discussion with R. Kuchelor (Madras, December 1975).

rise, increase in Dearness Allowance and more incentives to the Company's workers. The DMK which came to power in 1967, capitalised upon the spontaneous discontent of the Simpson workers against Gurusurthy's leadership.

Apart from this, the Rule 5(1) of the co-operative society regulations, which prohibited the non-members of the Simpson union from availing of co-operative society facilities, made a section of non-members look to central trade unions for help in removing this clause.³⁵ DMK lent its helping hand to these discontented elements and formed a rival union called "The Simpson Group Staff and Workers' Progressive Union" under the leadership of Kattur Gopal.³⁶ The management of the Simpson Group companies also gave full support to this new union.

As part of its tactics to attract the workers to join the new Union, the DMK union took the initiative to form a new co-operative society with share amount of Rs.15,000 and registered the society. In April, 1971, the DMK union had about two thousand members.³⁷

35. This rule was later quashed by Madras High Court.

36. The union was first formed in India Piston Ltd. with 500 members.

37. Sanganadham (Madras) - an official paper of the Simpson Group companies workers' union. December 1, 1971.

In addition to the newly formed DMK union, there existed an INTUC union in the Simpson Group. Gurumurthy resisted all political pressures to affiliate his union with the INTUC. He did not pay heed to suggestions that as a man with sympathies for the Congress, he should affiliate his union with INTUC. The leadership of the INTUC was so much annoyed with Gurumurthi's independence that it even formed a rival union, called 'The Simpson and Associated Companies National Employees' Union'.³⁸ But for want of support, this union never became a threat to Gurumurthi's leadership.³⁹

The DMK caputres a Union

The Labour Progressive Federation started a systematic drive to bring more unions under its control. As part of its strategy, the LPF formed rival unions in every industry. The rich and powerful Simpson union was a natural target of the DMK's ambitions. The DMK leadership was only waiting for an opportunity to extend its strong arm methods to control this union.

38. This INTUC union is now having considerable support only in M/s Addison & Co., a unit of the Simpson Group, which employs about 1,600 workers.

39. Hindustan Times, July 1, 1971. Gurumurthi who was in the Congress, later aligned himself with the Congress (O) after the split.

As mentioned earlier, Gurumurthi had always maintained that party politics had no place in his union. In the eyes of the DMK this attitude constituted an inexcusable sin. Moreover, he allowed himself to be set up as a Congress candidate for South Madras Parliamentary Constituency against C.N. Annadurai. In that election, Gurumurthi was defeated.⁴⁰ The DMK treated him as a politician and started discrediting him. The Simpson union was branded as an old Congress outfit.

Rival union clashes began in the Group industries as a result of the penetration of party politics. The inactive INTUC union chose to support the newly formed DMK union and joined hands with it when clashes occurred.⁴¹ The situation in and around Simpson Group industries was very tense, in early 1971 due to an increase in inter-union rivalry, which resulted in violent clashes.⁴²

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40. Gurumurthi polled 1.5 lakh votes. The Hindustan Times, July 1, 1971.
41. The DMK encountered very little resistance when it formed rival unions with the connivance of the management. This was due to the fact that the major unions were controlled by the CPI and Congress, both were its electoral allies in the Parliamentary and State Assembly elections. Moreover, for its own political reasons, the INTUC chose to support the DMK union.
42. DMK men took initiative in intimidating Gurumurthi's men and both retaliated with deadly weapons. The police were the silent spectators.

For some time, Gurumurthi tried to pull on and decided to fight back. But he had to fight on two fronts, with an unfriendly government and a hostile management. He felt insecure as union president because of calculated attacks backed though indirectly, by the State police machinery. He tried to get over a sense of insecurity by consistent effort at pacifying the DMK. In fact, he went to the extent of inviting DMK ministers to the union functions and even managed to praise the DMK for its progressive outlook. But post-Annadurai leadership was not taken in by these friendly gestures. With the clear objective of overthrowing Gurumurthi, the DMK encouraged dissident elements.

In early April 1971, the scheme for take-over emerged clearly. Gurumurthi's supporters were intimidated and assaulted. The police were mere spectators and did nothing to check violence. When Gurumurthi appealed to the Chief Minister for his intervention, he was reportedly told "If he cannot run the union, the wise thing for him to do is to resign."⁴³ Gurumurthi took the hint and resigned.⁴⁴ Before

43. The Hindustan Times, November 22, 1971, and Alai Osai (Madras), a Tamil Evening Daily, April 25, 1971.

44. Gurumurthi resigned on 29th April 1971. The executive committee and general council members were not allowed to resign. They were threatened by DMK people and goondas and were told that they have to elect Kattur Gopal as president. Source: author's discussion with union officials (Madras, December 1975).

resigning, Gurumurthi distributed union funds among the members as union gratuity.⁴⁵

DMK quickly installed its man without elections in this prestigious union, and did this with style. At a public meeting, Karunanidhi nominated Kattur Gopal as president of the Simpson Group companies workers' and staff union.⁴⁶ Puzzled at the speed with which all this was done, the Simpson workers could only greet Kattur Gopal with garlands and a cautious cheer.

45. At that time, the Simpson union had about Rs.16 lakhs. Without dissolving the union, Gurumurthi distributed this amount to the members. He wanted that union should not go under the control of the Communists. Gurumurthi handed over the union to one R. Balasubramaniam. Source: Sanganadhiam, December 1, 1971 and interview with an employee of the Simpson Group, and Hindustan Times, July 1, 1971.
46. In May 1971, a public meeting was held under the auspices of the LPF at 'Kannapper Thidal' (Kannapper grounds) Madras. Karunanidhi announced the nomination of Kattur Gopal for presidentship of the Simpson union in presence of A. Sivasailam, chairman of the Simpson group and Krishnamurthy one of the directors of the same group. While addressing the meeting, Sathiavani Muthu, Harijan Welfare Minister said: "The Simpson union, a girl from a high class society, is being wedded to the LPF's Kattur Gopal". However, a formal meeting of the general council was held on 8.5.1971 under police protection and it was alleged that Kattur Gopal was elected by intimidation and threats of use of force. Source: Author's discussion with V.P. Chintan, the vice-president of the Simpson union; and the Hindustan Times, November 22, 1971.

The programme of action that the DMK union leader started to implement from the minute he was appointed was characteristic. He dismissed the members of the old committee and dissolved the elected general council which had elected him.⁴⁷ Kattur Gopal throwing every semblance of democratic functioning to the winds, then proceeded to nominate his own executive of picked men. Through this procedure, the DMK hoped to turn the minority support they had in this union into a majority and gain the political loyalty of the workers. This was open governmental interference in the functioning of a union.

For some time Kattur Gopal was heading two unions simultaneously in the same Group of companies; the rival union which was formed in 1970 and the union which he had captured. After a month, the rival union merged with the Simpson union, which was later affiliated to the Labour Progressive Federation.

47. Mrs. T.N. Ananthanaiky, a Congress (O) MLA, while participating in Simpson Affairs Debate in Tamil Nadu Assembly said: "Kattur Gopal dissolved the old committee members, which had elected him and appointed his own men as executive committee members". Tamil Nadu Assembly Debates, Vol. XII, No.2, dated Dec.6, 1971, p.186.

Anti-Labour Agreement

The Simpson and Group Companies Workers and Staff Unions had submitted to the management on 16th May 1970 a charter of demands, which included revision of wage scales, dearness allowance, increase in incentives, amenities to the workers and staff. After a series of discussions between the representatives of the union and the management an interim settlement was reached on 12th July 1970.

Kattur Gopal, the new president of the union, signed an agreement on this charter of demands with the Simpson management on 23rd August 1971, within four months of his becoming the leader of the union without consulting the workers. The terms of the agreement were kept a close secret.⁴⁸ The Simpson workers came to know about the agreement, when the management, by a notification, intimated to them that they would have to meet new work-loads as per the agreement.

Let us now analyse in some detail this important agreement concluded by Kattur Gopal with the management.

48. While participating in Simpson Affairs Debate in Tamil Nadu Assembly, Dr. H.V. Hande, then Swatantra Party MLA (now ADMK) said: "The union leader did not consult the workers with regard to the terms of agreement; on a particular day, he told a public meeting that he would discuss with them. But he had not told the workers what were the terms." Tamil Nadu Assembly Debates, Vol.XII, No.2, p. 185.

(1) The agreement signed by Kattur Gopal ostensibly gave the workers a rise in wages of 5% subject to a minimum of Rs.7 and a maximum of Rs.11. It also provided that the interim relief of Rs.11.50 recommended by the Engineering Wage Board was to be withdrawn. In addition, the clause relating to wages also states that, "if the arrears of payment towards dearness allowance or the special allowance, now payable in less than the amount already paid under these two heads (i.e., interim relief), the difference there would be adjusted against any other payment that may be due." The workers thus stood clearly to lose on this count rather than gain anything.⁴⁹

(2) A tremendous increase in work-load. Under the agreement, the optimum production required was at least 50% more than the present norms of production that prevailed at that time. For instance, instead of the 500 engines now rolled out by the assembling units, Kattur Gopal agreed that the workers would roll out around 1100 engines.

49. Clause (4) of the agreement reads as follows:

"The interim relief that is now being paid as per the recommendations of the Engineering Wage Board and the interim D.A. now paid as a result of settlement dated 12th July 1970, will be withdrawn from 1st June 1971 and the amount already paid under these two heads will be adjusted against the arrears of D.A. or special allowance. That would now become payable in terms of this settlement."

If the management felt that the levels were not reached, it could unilaterally withdraw all the increase and concession it had agreed to in the settlement. The work-load was more, but increase in wages was only 5%. This provision angered the workers, as they were called upon to give "consistent and optimum production as scheduled by the management". The management, under the agreement, was further given the powers under this clause to proceed against workers for misconduct under the standing order of the company.

(3) An illegal provision making over-time work compulsory. Clause (20) made over-time work either by way of extra hours or extra days compulsory. Failure to abide by this over-time code would amount to "misconduct".⁵⁰

(4) Another clause of the agreement related to a pending industrial dispute before the tribunal in regard to wages for a lockout that the management had declared for 34 days in 1968, over the bonus issue. The case was going on well, in a way favourable to the workers, but Kattur Gopal

50. Clause (2) of the agreement says: "It is the view of the management... when asked to do so, will work extra hours or extra days as the case may be, of over-time work, falling within statutory provisions. Refusal to do so will be deemed as refusal to carry out the reasonable orders within the provisions of the standing orders of this company."

agreed to withdraw the case. To 'compensate' the loss, the management agreed to 'allow the workmen' and the workmen 'agreed' to work for an additional 24 days for single wages. In other words, workers would do extra work on week days as well as holidays to make up loss of production during a previous dispute but would get no extra pay for the additional work.⁵¹

(5) Additional work-load meant surplus of existing workmen and staff and enormous scope for retrenchment described as "rationalisation". Kattur Gopal conceded to the management the right of "rationalisation of man-power" and "re-organisation of industry". This meant, to start with, that 125 workers with years of service in the SRVS - a transport unit of the Simpson Group - were thrown out of work.

(6) Kattur Gopal agreed at the management's insistence not to press for the revision of pay-scales⁵² which had remained unrevised for 12 years.⁵³

51. Clause (14-B) says: "In the interest of proper industrial relations climate the union agrees to withdraw the industrial dispute I.D.3/70 pending before the Tribunal... In consideration thereof the management... agrees to pay and the unions and workmen agree to accept single wages for these compensatory working days." (Emphasis added).

52. Clause (5) reads: "It is specially agreed by the unions and the workmen that they will not raise any demand for revision of basic salary or D.A. either directly or indirectly during the period of operation of this settlement."

53. The revision of wages took place in 1961. Author's discussion with union officials (Madras, December 1975). See also The Radical Review Vol.3, No.1, Jan-March 1972, p.2.

(7) A surrender to the management of all powers to "discipline" the workers. Section I of clause (10) of the agreement noted: "The union recognises the absolute right of the management to enforce discipline with particular reference to the various provisions of the standing orders", of the Company (Emphasis added). For a workers' union to give up its right to question the management's action against workers amounts to converting the worker into a slave.

(8) Whenever union submitted a charter of demands to the management, the demands would cover the entire working population of the Simpson Group and there would not be any distinction in companies such as Engineering units and non-engineering units. Demands concerning wage structure, dearness allowance and incentives and other service conditions would be uniform for all concerns. In the case of bonus, the total amount would be divided keeping the minimum rate of bonus to the companies which made good profits. The working population of the Simpson Group had never been divided into categories such as engineering group and non-engineering group.

For the first time in the history of Simpson Group companies, Kattur Gopal agreement introduced a disparity between the engineering units and non-engineering units. Such an attempt was made earlier by the management during the bonus dispute in 1970, in order to divide the workers

and weaken the union. The union under the leadership of Gurumurthi had rejected that proposal. By signing such an agreement, the DMK in collusion with management divided the workers.

Under the agreement signed by Kattur Gopal, the benefit of revision of dearness allowance was given to engineering units only. Instead of increasing the dearness allowance and the basic pay to the same extent as that of engineering units, the non-engineering units got only ad-hoc allowance from Rs. 6 to Rs. 9, which was paid in three months' interval.

(9) The Simpson Group companies had the distinction of paying bonus equal to 12 months' salary in some years and never less than 6 months' salary any year. As per the new agreement, bonus was drastically reduced to less than 50% of the usual quantum over the years. Now the workers got in all only Rs. 55 lakhs as against nearly double the amount in previous year.⁵⁴

The workers started their struggle against this anti-working class agreement and demanded the scrapping of this agreement and removal of the DMK leader, Kattur Gopal.

54. 'The Strike in the Simpson Group', Capital Vol. 168 (4198) January 27, 1972, p.136.

In sum, the workers said: that the agreement was a "Sell-out" of the precious rights and privileges won by the workers after bitter struggles in the last two decades.⁵⁵

The Struggle

The Simpson Group companies made huge profits to the tune of Rs. 386 lakhs in 1970 and the union under the leadership of Gurumurthi demanded Rs. 115 lakhs as workers' share in the profit. But the management was prepared to pay only up to Rs. 77 lakhs. Due to differences of opinion between the management and the union, the latter decided not to take any decision on the issue for the time being. The quantum of bonus for the Group companies was the nominal issue which led to the unrest. The union's claim for higher bonus was in fact opposed by the State government also. The ministers of the State government constituted themselves as self-appointed mediators and pressurised the union to accept a lesser quantum of bonus.⁵⁶ This pressure was resisted by the union and became the starting point for interference by the State government in the internal affairs of the union. Clashes

55. Patriot (New Delhi), January 4, 1972.

56. Author's discussion with V.P. Chintan, vice-president of the Simpson Union (Madras, December 1975).

were provoked inside and outside the factories and hundreds of union activists were beaten up by some workers whose political orientation was that of the ruling party in the State and also by goonda elements. The victims of such assaults were not given any police protection, but on the other hand, were prosecuted. Under these circumstances, Kattur Gopal seized control of the union leadership and signed the controversial agreement in August 1971.

It was when the management started implementing the agreement in the last week of October 1971 asking the workers to come for duty on a holiday for extra work to compensate the loss due to previous dispute as per the agreement, that the workers came to know about the agreement. The management retrenched more than one hundred workers in a transport unit of the Simpson Group and demanded increased work-load from a unit of the Group⁵⁷ The workers of Shardlow India Ltd. resisted the implementation of such grossly unfair terms and went on strike.⁵⁸ The management and the union leadership tried various methods of intimidation and once again the attack on the workers inspired by the management on one side

57. SRVS (Sri Rama Vilas Service), a transport unit of the Group which enjoys huge contracts from Central government and Defence establishments.

58. In this Simpson Group unit, DMK workers tried to implement the increased work-load, and assaulted those workers who refused. This incident took place on 30.10.1971. Source: Author's discussion with union officials and also with an employee of this unit. (Madras, December 1975).

and the ruling party on the other, commenced. Workers were denied police protection but were arrested and cases registered against them. According to some union officials there were instances of very serious assaults and police did not even register cases against the assailants who enjoyed the active support and patronage of the ruling party and the management.⁵⁹

After 1st November 1971, when a serious violent incident took place in front of Mout Road unit of the Company, the police commissioner promulgated an order under section 41 of the City Police Act banning assembly of more than 5 persons. Kuchelor, who was assisting the workers, at their own request to lead the struggle, was taken into custody.⁶⁰ The struggle of the workers was taken up by other sections of the trade union movement and also by various political parties.⁶¹ This brought in an Action Committee composed of trade union leaders of various shades, which organised protest against the Commissioner's order.⁶²

59. Author's interview (Madras, December 1975).

60. Kuchelor was arrested on a charge of violating the prohibitory order in force.

61. The only political party that stood out of the struggle and opposed it was the DMK for obvious reasons.

62. The seven-member Action Committee consisted of: N.M. Maniverma (Cong-O) - Convener, S.C.C. Anthony Pillai (HMS), S.M. Narayanan (INTUC), K.M. Sundaram (AITUC), V.P.Chintan (CITU), R. Kuchelor (WPC), and Apan Raj (Tamil Nadu Workers' Congress, a labour wing of Congress-O). The Action Committee comprising leaders of non-DMK trade unions was formed "to launch a sustain agitation to defend the democratic rights of trade union movement". N.M.Maniverma, Convener of the Committee, said: "One of the objectives of the agitation is to get a judicial enquiry ordered into the circumstances which compelled the Simpson workers to stay away from work". The Hindu, November 9, 1971.

All the trade union leaders and about 1500 workers were arrested for defying the ban order. There was one day's token strike of more than one lakh workers in the city, protesting against the arrest of trade union leaders.⁶³

The struggle of the workers was for scrapping the agreement signed by Kattur Gopal and for holding elections democratically to the various positions to the union. The agitation intensified with strikes and lock-outs. Ultimately there was temporary truce on the assurance given by the Labour Minister that he would call all leaders and discuss the issues involved in this agitation.

Because of the continued violence and police inactiveness over the calculated assaults, the Simpson workers struck work. The Action Committee of the non-DMK trade union leaders gave a call for an indefinite strike to press their demands.⁶⁴

63. The token strike was on 3.11.1971. The Labour leaders also condemned "the spread of violence in industrial relations and inter-union rivalry in the State" and they also demanded the release of trade union leaders and workers arrested during last 2 days and withdrawal of section 41 which was being used to curb the legitimate activities of labour. The Hindu, November 11, 1971.
64. Earlier, on 22.11.1971, at Napier Park, Simpson workers held a meeting demanding a change in the union leadership and for scrapping the agreement. In response to a call given by the Action Committee, the workers went on indefinite strike from 23.11.1971. The Hindu, November 24, 1971.

The DMK government threw its official weight behind Kattur Gopal's attempts to convert the microscopic minority behind him into a working majority. This was sought to be achieved through unfair means. Workers were beaten up with cycle chains and rods in their houses. They were involved in court cases and subjected to intimidation.⁶⁵ Workers stood unitedly against the brutality of the DMK regime and demonstrated their solidarity by paralysing the work.

During the Indo-Pak war in December, 1971, the dispute entered a crucial stage. It was realised by the workers and their leadership that the dispute should be resolved on some basis or other so that defence efforts would not be impaired.⁶⁶ At this stage, Kalyanasundaram, a CPI leader and the Secretary of CPI's Tamil Nadu Council, offered to mediate a settlement. He met the State Chief Minister and Labour Minister and negotiated terms which though not totally satisfactory to the workers, were accepted by them. Under the formula, workers should resume duty immediately accepting Chief Minister's assurances regarding full protection against violence both inside and outside the factory and non-victimisation of workers by the management.

65. Author's interview with union officials (Madras, December 1975).

66. Many of the engineering units of the Simpson Group are engaged in production of Defence products.

The election to the office-bearers of the union would not be postponed and the election would be held as per the provisions of the union by-laws.⁶⁷ On the basis of the Chief Minister's assurances conveyed through Kalyanasundaram, workers resumed duty after 24 days' strike.⁶⁸

On the re-opening day, non-DMK workers were set upon and beaten up inside the Sembium factory. The police did not intervene to stop this wanton violence. The workers retaliated by staying away from the work spot, where protection was not forthcoming in spite of the Chief Minister's assurances.⁶⁹

Karunanidhi, in an angry mood reacted to the new situation and said: "since the workers had not 'honoured' the terms offered to them through Kalyanasundaram, the matter had 'slipped' out of his hands."⁷⁰

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68. The workers were on strike from 22.11.1971 and resumed duty on 16.12.1971 by accepting the terms in good faith. Even though Chintan and Kuchelor accepted the decision, they warned the workers not to have too much faith in the assurances as there was no guarantee for the implementation of the Chief Minister's assurances except their own strength. This was proved by the later events. Source: Alai Osai (Madras, December 11, 1971)
69. On 16th December 1971, under the leadership of Pratap Chandran, the vice-president of Simpson union and some DMK workers assaulted non-DMK workers. The police apparently watched the violence as silent spectators. 50 to 60 trained hirelings entered the factory premises at Sembium and they were allowed to do so, three hours before the shift to mount an attack on workers. The Hindu, December 17, 1971; Alai Osai, December 17, 1971; Patriot, January 4, 1972.
70. Patriot, January 4, 1972.

At this point, the management registered its presence, by terminating the services of 325 workers on charges of continuous abstention without proper notice and sufficient reasons.⁷¹ The Action Committee considered this development as a challenge to the very principle of inner democracy in a trade union. It called for an indefinite strike reviving its initial demand for the removal of Kattur Gopal and for scrapping the agreement, which he had signed with the management.

It was under these circumstances that the Tamil Nadu government invoked section 119 of the Defence of India Rules, which makes Simpson Group companies an essential service and the strike becomes illegal and workers would be liable for punishment for abstaining. The workers, however, continued their struggle even after the invocation of the provisions of DIR.

Public pronouncements were made by Central ministers, supporting the workers struggle and demanding that justice be done.⁷² The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu,

71. The Hindu, December 28, 1971. The CPI leader Kalyanasundaram, said: "The unilateral withdrawal of assurances by the Chief Minister has given strength to the fears of the workers and the management is trying to take advantage of the situation for mass victimisation." The Hindu, December 28, 1971.

72. Speeches of late Mohan Kumaramangalam, Minister for Steel, and C. Subramaniam, Minister for Planning. The Hindu, January 3, 1972.

when requested to send the State Labour Minister to Delhi, in a bid to solve the Simpson issue, refused to do so, after getting the 'consent of the people' at a public meeting. He alleged the gross interference by the Centre in the affairs of the State.⁷³ The Union Labour Minister R. Khadilkar went to Madras and tried to facilitate a settlement, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the non-DMK trade union leaders decided to call for a State-wide hartal in order to protest against what they called the "anti-labour policy" of the Tamil Nadu government.⁷⁴

Six-Member Committee

The leaders of the four trade union centres, INTUC, AITUC, HMS and CITU, met the Chief Minister on 10th January 1972, a day before the proposed State-wide action, and arrived at a settlement. This settlement incorporated earlier assurances given by the Chief Minister to the workers:

- there would be no victimisation;
- all cases pending against the workers would be withdrawn;
- 123 workers, who were retrenched by the management after redistribution of work-load in SRVS would be absorbed in alternative jobs in the Group;
- safety of workers was assured by the government.

73. The Hindu, January 7, 1972.

74. The Hindu, January 8, 1972.

A six-member committee⁷⁵ was formed to run the Simpson union till the election and conduct an early election as per the constitution of the union. The committee was also empowered to negotiate with the management all the disputed items of the settlement and the union led by Kattur Gopal was kept under "suspended animation" until the election of new office-bearers. The proposed State-wide hartal was also withdrawn as a result of the settlement and the Action Committee of the non-DMK trade unions, which was formed to conduct the agitation was dissolved by its Convener due to the agreement.

After reaching this agreement, the workers resumed their duties after the 8-week-old strike. A tense situation prevailed in the Sembium plant of the Simpson Group. Kattur Gopal authorised some members of the General Council, whom he had nominated, to negotiate with the management on pending matters. This was done without reference to the six member committee which had been entrusted with the job of negotiations

75. The following were the committee members:

R. Rangaswami (INTUC)
 P.K. Ramaswami (SITUC)
 R. Umanath (CITU)
 K. Manoharan (LPF)
 M.V. Narayanasamy (LPF)
 G. Balaram (HMS)
 T.N. Ananthaiaiky (Cong-O) - Convener

The previous union leadership headed by Kattur Gopal remained simultaneously in office during this period. The Simpson companies opened on January 12, 1972, after the 8-week old strike. The Hindu, January 11, 1972.

on such matters with the management. This amounted to an open violation of the agreement arrived at.⁷⁶ In addition to this, pro-DMK group leaders 'took-off' after signing the muster role. This provoked the workers who resorted to sit-in-strike and they refused to come out of the plant for fear of murderous attacks on them. The DMK labour leaders also indulged in provoking the workers and members of the six-member committee. The committee expressed its concern over the statements of these leaders.⁷⁷

Kattur Gopal and other office-bearers of the Simpson union resigned on 22nd January 1972. The Simpson workers had been demanding the removal of Kattur Gopal from the leadership for some time and it was a major demand of the dissolved Action Committee, which was spear-heading the agitation. Commenting on Kattur Gopal's resignation, the

76. The Labour Minister, N.V. Natarajan, said in Madurai that "duly authorised representatives of a union in any factory had a right to attend the negotiations with the management even while on duty. Curbing this right would be a bad precedent and would hamper trade union activities. Even though the six-member committee was there, it would not mean that the union has been dissolved or superseded by the committee", he added. The Hindu, January 22, 1972. (Emphasis added).

77. T.N. Ananthanaiky, Convener of the committee, expressed grave concern over the reported statement of Kattur Gopal, that the elections of the union will be held on 1st March. Kattur Gopal made this announcement in the presence of the State Labour Minister at Perambur near Madras on January 16, 1972. Ananthanaiky said: "Kattur Gopal has no locus standi" for the conduct of said elections and the announcement amounted to open defiance of the agreement arrived at. The Hindu, January 17, 1972.

CITU leader, P. Ramamurthi, said, "He was forced to do so, as the deliberate design on the part of the government and the DMK leadership to engineer clashes among workers with a view to getting out of the agreement entered into with the leaders of the trade unions on January 10, had foiled."⁷⁸

In spite of these developments, the DMK men started terrorising the workers with the help of 400 to 500 trained hirelings armed with deadly weapons in and around Sembium plant. The rival workers clashes were very common resulting in serious injuries to the workers, in some case resulting in death. These incidents took place with the connivance of the police. Rowdy gangs from other parts of the city were mobilised to terrorise the workers and to create panic in labour colonies near Sembium.

All these showed that the DMK leadership was "encouraging goondaism in its own ranks", while all the time, the Chief Minister was denouncing this. P. Ramamurthy, the CITU leader, said: "Such goonda attacks organised by ruling party with a view to imposing its own will, will be resisted unitedly by the workers" and he called upon the State Chief Minister to punish his partymen who indulged in organised violence."⁷⁹

78. The Hindu, January 23, 1972.

79. The Hindu, January 23, 1972.

The Leadership Struggle

After the resignation of Kattur Gopal, the de-facto leadership of the Simpson union passed on to the six-member committee which had been formed as a result of 10th January 1972 agreement reached between the leaders of the four trade union centres and the State Chief Minister. The committee whose members had come together with the limited objective of fighting the policy of the DMK government, began attempting to push forward their own leaders in the union and tried to exploit the prevailing explosive situation to their advantage. They tried to influence the workers to accept their own candidate and elect him as leader of the union. This effort was going on at an individual level and finally resulted in differences of opinion among the committee members which affected the effective functioning of the committee. Slowly, the committee members started dissociating themselves with the functions of the committee which dissolved itself without the knowledge of the State government.⁸⁰

80. The first shot towards non-cooperation in the functioning of the six-member committee was fired by the DMK nominee, M.V. Narayanasamy. The DMK nominee absented himself from attending a meeting, which was called to express concern over violent developments which took place at Sembium. In a letter to committee members he alleged that All India Trade Union Congress leaders had complicated the problem of Simpson workers by statements they had issued. (The trade union leaders condemned the violence and charged the DMK government that it was responsible for such acts). The Hindu, January 25, 1971.

On 26.2.1972, R. Rangaswamy, INTUC general secretary of Tamil Nadu Unit, resigned his membership from the six-member committee. He gave the reason that the workers were not following the directives of the committee, so no useful purpose would be served by continuing it. The Hindu, February 27, 1972. T.N. Ananthaiaiky convener of the committee, said: "Since all the trade union leaders threatened to withdraw their representatives from the committee, there was no alternative except to dissolve it." The committee was dissolved in last week of February 1972. The Hindu, March 11, 1972.

Moreover, Kuchelor, who provided the leadership at the time of the crisis, was disliked by the constituents of the committee as well as by the DMK government. When Gurumurthi resigned from the union leadership, none of the political groups in the committee showed any interest in the affairs of the union. At that time it was Kuchelor who provided the required militant leadership to the workers in their struggle for equity and also Kuchelor and V.P. Chintam educated the workers about the details of the agreement. The constituents of the committee, the State government and the management, took all possible steps to prevent Kuchelr becoming president of the union.

After the dissolution of the six member committee, there was a leadership vacuum. Workers later met Kamaraj and asked him for help in the matter.⁸¹ Kamaraj was prepared to help the workers provided they accepted the leadership of either Gurumurthi or N.M. Maniverma.⁸² Workers rejected Kamaraj suggestion and finally nominated Kuchelor and V.P. Chintam, who were later elected as president and vice-president of the union to plead their case with Union Labour Minister, R.K. Khadilkar, who visited Madras at that time.

81. An eleven-member committee met K. Kamaraj. Source: Author's interview with union officials (Madras, December 1975).

82. K. Gurumurthi, ex-president of the union, who was forced to resign and N.M. Maniverma, District committee president of Cong-O and was the convener of the dissolved Action Committee, which spearheaded the agitation. Source: Author's interview with an office-bearer of the union. (Madras, December 1975).

In the absence of the six-member committee, the State government deputed three labour officers to Simpson Group in order to provide a channel of communication of workers' grievances. The labour officers would in turn negotiate with the management on day-to-day grievances of the workers. This stop-gap arrangement lasted till the elections were held as per the constitution of the union.⁸³ Under the accord reached before the Chief Minister, workers resumed their work on 22nd March 1972 and the management also agreed to scrap controversial settlement entered into with Kattur Gopal enslaving the workmen.

Post-Election Period

In April 1972, the elections were conducted by the Deputy Commissioner of Labour deputed by the State government

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83. In order to resolve the deadlock on the Simpson issue, the Chief Minister held talks on 16th March 1972 with the management and trade union leaders, which included G. Ramanujam (INTUC), K.M. Sundaram (AITUC), V.P. Chintan (CITU), S.C.C. Anthony Pillai (HMS), R. Kuchelor (WPC), Kattur Gopal (LPF), T.N. Ananthanaiky (Cong-O). As a result of these talks, an accord was reached before the Chief Minister in regard to resumption of work in the Simpson Group companies. As per the accord, labour officers were deputed to negotiate the day-to-day grievances of the workers with the management. Production levels brought back to those prevailing prior to the settlement of 23rd August 1971. Assurances to conduct the union elections within four weeks of resumption of work were given. S. Rajasubramaniam, Assistant Labour Commissioner, was appointed as officer in-charge of holding elections as per the by-laws of the union. Management also agreed to absorb all the retrenched workers of SRVS. The Hindu, March 17, 1972.

to elect office-bearers to the union. It is interesting to note that for the first time in the history of this union, elections were held by secret-ballot and that too conducted by the government.⁸⁴ R. Kuchelor was elected president of both unions and the uneasy truce was maintained for a few weeks.

In May 1972 and the first week of June 1972, violence inspired by the management in the Ashok Leyland Factory in Ennore, Madras, resulted in the break-up of the democratic set up of the trade union there.⁸⁵ The management of the Simpsons Group obviously encouraged and emboldened by the events in Ashok Leyland again started a series of provocative acts against the union and the workmen.⁸⁶ On 15th June 1972, two workmen were killed in a clash⁸⁷ and a case under

84. Kattur Gopal did not even come forward to contest the election which was conducted by the DMK government. S.M. Narayanan (INTUC) filed his nomination, later withdrew. R. Kuchelor, former CPI(M) leader, V.P.Chintan, and C.K. Madhavan, both CITU were elected as president and vice-president. Out of 125 general council seats, non-DMK workers won 121 seats and DMK supporters got only 4 seats that too with narrow margin. All the four were from one company M/s Wheel & Rim Co.

85. The Union here was also led by R. Kuchelor, who had been elected in 1971.

86. Author's interview with R. Kuchelor (Madras, December, 1975).

87. One was Kannan Iyengar, a non-DMK employee and the other was Pratap Chandran, former vice-president of the DMK controlled Simpson union, against whom a number of police cases were registered including a case under Section 307 IPC. It is noteworthy that even though cases were registered due to public pressure, the same were put in cold storage.

section 302 IPC was registered against R. Kuchelor, C.K. Madhavan, assistant secretary of the union, and also against several office-bearers and or committee members of the union and union activists.⁸⁸ These events once again resulted in further unrest and a lock-out of most of the Simpson Group companies by the management.

Immediately after the incident of 15th June 1972, the management launched a frontal attack on workers with the help of the State apparatus, it started implementing its earlier plan to victimise 400 workmen and issued orders of suspension.⁸⁹ The management with the help of the State government tried their best to destroy the trade union movement of the workers and to create conditions once again to make the workers submit to the take-over of the union by the nominees of the management. Earlier, the State government had also helped the management by not taking any action in respect of incidents of deliberate and planned confrontation

88. The matter is still pending before the Supreme Court. Source: 'Note on Simpson issue' - An official statement issued by the Simpson union, Madras. On 16th June 1972, Alai Osai, an evening Tamil daily, which gave much publicity to Simpson incidents, was attacked by a mob and the press offices were ransacked completely. Economic Times (Bombay), June 17, 1972.
89. Nearly 185 workmen were suspended pending an enquiry and around 250 were also suspended pending the disposal of criminal proceedings and domestic enquiries. Author's interview with union officials (Madras, December 1975).

with the workers. The DMK government even opened police outposts in the Simpson factories. In order to break the union, the company moved several units outside Madras⁹⁰ and management initiated a series of actions which resulted in final victimisation of the workers in several units.⁹¹ It also accorded recognition to a minority union in respect of one of the Group companies, even though the issue was pending for a very long time. The timing of recognition was intended to spark off further industrial unrest.⁹²

Under an agreement reached before the State Minister for Labour, between the management and the union, the Simpson Group companies workers resumed their work on 25th September 1972, with a lot of labour problems still unsolved.

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90. The three companies which were moved out of Madras are: (1) M/s Bi-Metal Bearings Ltd. to Coimbatore, (2) M/s India Piston Repco Ltd. - to Tiruvellore near Madras, (3) M/s L.M. Van Moppes Diamond Tool Ltd. - to Coonur (Ooty).
91. The management of the AMCO Batteries dismissed 16 workers, three of whom were office-bearers of the union. They were dismissed with a view to destroying the trade union movement at Bangalore, where the Company is situated. Source: 'Note on Simpson issue' - An official statement issued by the Simpson and Group Workers' Union, Madras.
92. In Addison & Co. Ltd., there existed an INTUC union, the management accorded recognition to this minority union. At the time when the union was accorded recognition, it ceased to have any claim as to the majority of the membership. Source: 'Note on Simpson issue' - An official statement issued by the Simpson Union, Madras.

The Outcome of the Struggles

The Simpson struggle emerged against the background of the wide-spread working class and other democratic struggles which were taking place in Tamil Nadu and in other parts of the country. During the DMK regime, industrial unrest reached its zenith due to State government's "collaborationist" policy with the management and bad handling of industrial relations. Moreover, there was no clear-cut labour policy, and the State Chief Minister who personally intervened, in the industrial disputes to favour the pro DMK unions. This complicated the whole issue, which led to a series of struggles.

The Simpson workers struggle was a struggle for trade union democracy to defend their rights to manage their own affairs without the intervention of the State power. The struggle raised two main questions: (a) who should decide who should be the leader of a workers' union - the workers or the Chief Minister of a State; (b) can the State power force the workers to accept an agreement which was concluded behind their backs, which affected the entire working community in an establishment? In answering these two questions, the Simpson workers' united strength made those in power in the State climb down from a haughty refusal and compelled them to recognise the workers' demands and finally to accepting them. Even a last warning, the imposition of the Defence of India Rules could not break the united strength of the workers.

The struggle which was carried out in a principled way brought in all the political forces and trade union organisations (except the DMK) and forged a sort of a 'political unity' to take the struggle forward. This was the first time in the history of the labour movement that all the major labour organisations in the country joined together, sinking their political differences, to fight against anti-labour policies of the DMK government. They also acted in a concerted way to resist the aggressive policy of forcible take-over of industrial unions by DMK trade unions. However, this political unity was not based on protecting their own or workers rights but more as a lever to establish themselves in new areas or protecting themselves against further inroads.

The Simpson struggle gave a deadly blow to the ruling party's industrial labour policy. This was due to its policy of open collusion with the management and a short-sighted policy in imposing by strong-arm methods and violence a DMK union on every industry with the help of management.

In this struggle, the State government from the very beginning equated interests of the workers with those of an individual who was not liked by the majority of the workers. It is interesting to note that throughout the struggle period, Karunanidhi all along spoke for himself, for the management and for the president of the union.

Except on one or two occasions, the president of the union did not even open his mouth, even though the whole problem centred around him. The Simpson management collaborated closely with the government, moving carefully in step at every stage without making any public pronouncements.

At one stage, the DMK tried to give an anti-Brahmin colour to the whole struggle.⁹³ It is not out of place to mention here that the Sembium unit of the Simpson Group employs about 7500 employees out of which about 4000 are Brahmins.⁹⁴ Deliberate and wanton attacks were made against these employees.

The Simpson case provides a contrast and helps to bring into focus the dangers inherent in a law such as the Industrial Disputes Act which provides for sweeping powers for the government. This law also helps to accentuate differences among politicians and could be used for settling political

93. The non-DMK trade union leaders conference which met at Madras viewed with great concern the "deliberate attempt made by the DMK government to 'malign' the democratic struggle of Simpson workers by giving it a communal colour and fanning communal passions against workers struggle to mislead the people of the State". The Hindu, January 8, 1972.

94. An employee and an office-bearer of the union gave this information.

scores.⁹⁵ The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu was very much involved in Simpson affairs from the outset and was always willing to use or refrain from using, when it suited him, the powers vested in the State government under the Act.

The intervention of the Central government which became inevitable arising out of the economic consequences of the trouble in Simpsons in other sectors, was considered to be unwarranted and the Chief Minister refused to send his Labour Minister to Delhi for discussions because he viewed this as Central intervention in State affairs. Some formula was arrived at, as a result of Union Labour Minister's efforts, but it was not acceptable to the Chief Minister as his prestige was involved and the solution had to be found by him. So, the struggle was allowed to continue. The Simpson issue also brought in Centre-State relationship in the picture, which also gave 'one more weapon' to Karunanidhi's State autonomy demand.

95. Many trade unionists say that the law gave room for political patronage and friction. They suggested abolition of conciliation by the government machinery and removal of government's right to refer disputes to adjudication. Source: "Industrial Disputes Act and Centre-State Relations" - editorial, Labour Chronicle, Vol.4, No.11, April 1972, p.2, and The Hindu, August 28, 1972.

The Simpson dispute is a good example of the 'crisis of confidence' which can develop between union leadership and management and pave the way for degeneration of good industrial relationship. The management's refusal to accept the position of the union and its belief in unilateralism had adverse effects on unionism as a whole.

The strategies and methods followed by the Simpson management to break the powerful union and to divide the workers clearly illustrated its close association with the State government. Creation of majority and minority groups within a union, which was considered to be a model of constructive trade unionism, and the support extended by the management to the minority group clearly shows the extent to which the management had become an effective partner with the ruling party in resisting legitimate workers demands.

The Simpson workers struggle was a struggle for trade union democracy. It was also a movement to protect the precious rights won by the workers after decades of struggle to manage the affairs of the union without any outside intervention. The DMK flouted the labour ethics and discipline and was prepared even to sacrifice the legitimate trade union rights of the workers in order to protect the managerial interests. It even went to the

extent of curbing the legitimate trade union rights of the workers to question the management and demand amicable settlement in case of an industrial dispute. The activities of the DMK controlled Simpson union as illustrated in this case study clearly proves that DMK unions have not worked for the protection of labour interests and rights. Their activities even go against their own labour objective that the DMK unions would strive to secure more rights and protect existing rights of the workers. Apart from this, they are afraid to face any union elections because of the fear that they will be routed completely. They exist in most industries with the managerial support and survive there only through violence and the backing of the police force and not with the support of the workers. This would tend to show that the DMK unions are pro-establishment and do not represent the interests of labour.

CONCLUSION

A trade union movement should take into account the national interest in the matter of socio-economic advancement while organising the labour and working class movement. A responsible trade union movement must try to suggest an alternative policy to the one followed by government in order to achieve self-sufficiency in all sectors. To solve the problems which are of national magnitude, a national perspective is required. Therefore, the problems faced by the workers cannot be solved by sectoral party politics and region based parochial trade union movements. To combat the problems which are of national character, the trade union movement should have a national outlook.

The DMK trade unions have neither an alternative policy to propose to national problems nor can they conduct politics on an all-India basis. The fulcrum of the DMK trade union lies in its pro-management, pro-government attitude and makes the workers abstain from strikes, struggles against the government, because the party controls the government and mobilises the workers for its separatist goals.

The DMK in its initial years was known for the radical style in which it organised mass actions. Its best known agitations, notably the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, considerably helped the party to mobilise discontent against the Congress regime. On the agrarian front the party does not seem to have organised any significant struggle in the interest of agricultural labour. In industry, the only struggle for which the DMK is remembered came during the handloom crisis in the early fifties, when there was a glut of handloom products, the party organised a State-wide campaign to popularise handloom products. In recent years, the DMK has organised demonstrations to protest against the soaring prices of essential commodities.

The main technique used in DMK agitations was to describe the plight of the victims in the most evocative literary style and to appeal for sympathy. For a time this paid remarkable dividends, in terms of winning the loyalty of the working people. However, it could be no substitute for a positive labour policy designed to benefit the working class.

A government's labour policy for industry and agriculture may be considered as an indicator for judging the performance of the party in power. This may help us assess how far the DMK protected the labour interest. Within a year

of assuming office, C.N. Annadurai warned trade unions "not to put forward unreasonable demands" and further made it clear that "the government would not hesitate to take firm action to curb violence indulged in by workers with a view to forcing the management to concede their demands."¹ Whatever humanitarian concern that the government might have had for labour had been drowned in its pre-occupation to maintain production. It was not a surprise when the DMK showed itself reluctant to challenge directly the capitalist interests in production, though one may be somewhat surprised by the bluntness of the following policy statement from Annadurai. "I am not going into the question of the justice of the demands of the workers or the logic of the replies from the employers side. I am concerned about the total effect on production".²

A government that is concerned with 'labour welfare', not in a humanitarian but in a political sense, would be expected to demonstrate its concern by strengthening trade unions and their struggles. But DMK leaders, apart from disrupting the labour movement, deplored the political affiliations of unions and held political leaders responsible for labour troubles. They repeated in public platforms the typical management slogan that the trade unions should be strictly welfare organisation.

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1. The Hindu, January 21, 1968.
 2. The Hindu, January 14, 1968.

The DMK had interpreted strikes as a threat to its own existence. Consequently it had tried hard and in some cases successfully to disrupt the working class struggles. The DMK formed rival unions in industries, where many unions existed, thereby dividing the labour struggle. They were the first to accept the 'settlements'. For example, in textile industry, the DMK labour union signed an agreement with Mill Owners' Association instead of entering into agreement with individual mill owners. In this case, non-DMK trade unions accused the DMK of splitting the solidarity of industrial workers at the bidding of the employers. Moreover, the DMK government collaborated with employers in using police force to break workers' struggle.

In its attempt to establish control over labour unions, the DMK left no stone unturned. In Madras Rubber Factory struggle, it tried to divide the workers on the basis of language and region. It aroused regional fanaticism and put the Tamil worker against his Malayalee brother while the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and the Malayalee owner of MRF joined hands.³

The DMK like other parties applauded the concept of 'one union for one industry'. However, the party rejected the specific proposals for the recognition of the majority

3. Author's discussion with an official of the W.P.C. (Madras, December 1975). Cf. Supra, p.78.

union. After Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister, the DMK started to implement its avowed policy of starting a union of its own in every industry: 'one union in every industry - it must be ours'. In practice, the part, 'it must be ours', took precedence over 'one union in every industry'.⁴

The use the DMK made of police force to further the growth of its labour organisations is an important indicator of its labour policy. It freely resorted to section 144 - banning processions and meetings and rushing of police to factory premises at the slightest provocation. This led to police excesses such as lathi charges, use of police vans for transporting 'black legs' during strikes. In the Simpson case, the workers demanded their legitimate share in profits in the form of higher bonus, but this was rejected by the management. In order to suppress the workers resentment, the DMK government placed the State armed police at the disposal of the management. The DMK government ensured that the management's interests were not affected by the workers' struggle.

In the class confrontation between the workers and the management, the government backed the latter in the guise of maintaining 'law and order'. On earlier occasions

4. The Radical Review, Vol.3, No.1, January-March, 1972, p.2.

also, the State government, under the garb of 'law and order', had supported landlord against landless. For example, in the Thanjavur episode, where a series of murderous attacks by the landlords on agricultural labourers in 1968, culminating in the ghastly horror of Kilvenmani - where 44 Harijan women and children were burnt alive. In both instances, the police was used to break the strike and protect the 'black legs' and 'outside labour'.

The DMK labour policy had however been in reality a clear power play in the use, non-use or misuse of discretionary powers that the executive branch of the government enjoys under Industrial Disputes Act. The crux of the policy was to assure the management that if they come for a deal with DMK, the goods would be delivered under the auspices of the party and the State administration it controlled, to some extent helped by its labour front organisation.

During its tenure, the DMK introduced the concept of "joint sector" in the State economy. It envisaged a three fold partnership - the government which represented the interest of the public, the private sector for its efficiency and partial capital and finally the workers. As far as working of this was concerned, it encouraged the private capital rather than the State monopoly over the industry, where the concept of joint sector operated. The Industries Minister, Madhavan,

said, "The DMK government would encourage the industrialization of the State with the public and private sector coming together and starting industries wherever possible. It is not the sector that matters, only the enthusiasm and ability of the sector should be considered".⁵ Also, "I strongly feel that the economic power should not be concentrated in the hands of the government".⁶ But the DMK wanted to establish scientific socialism by nationalising the industry. This showed that the DMK was neither serious about nationalisation nor about socialism. The working of the joint sector showed that the private capital was allowed to exploit the governmental resources and facilities, which were provided at the cost of the public and the labour. Thus, this gave a helping hand to the capitalists to re-establish themselves to gain dominance in the State economy.

The DMK's record in office as well as its policies such as industrial labour policy showed that it had come to reflect the pro-capitalist interests and sought to undermine the interests of the working class.

5. The Hindu, December 12, 1969.

6. The Hindu, January 1, 1970.

APPENDIX-I

LIST OF THE TRADE UNION LEADERS/PERSONS INTERVIEWED

| <u>Sl.No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Designation/Party</u> |
|---------------|---------------------------|---|
| 1 | Anthony Pillai, S.C.C. | Vice-President, All-India Port Workers' Union, and a leading trade unionist in Madras. |
| 2. | Chintan, V.P. | Vice-President, Simpson Group Companies Workers' and Staff Union & CITU leader. |
| 3. | Kattur Gopal | General Secretary, Labour Progressive Federation. |
| 4. | Kiruttinan, T. | President, Railway Employees' Progressive Union and Member of Parliament |
| 5. | Kuchelor, R. | President, Working Peoples' Council and the President of Simpson Group Companies Workers' & Staff Unions. |
| 6. | Mythili Sivaraman | Editor, The Radical Review |
| 7. | Narashiman, R. | Group Leader, India Piston Company, Madras. |
| 8. | Padmanabhan | CITU leader & General Secretary, Hotel Workers' Union |
| 9. | Peter, S. | An official in Working Peoples' Council |
| 10. | Raghavanandam, S. | Labour Secretary, Anna DMK |
| 11. | Ramanujam, S. | General Secretary, INTUC |
| 12. | Ramasamy | Group Leader, Simpson & Co. Ltd. |
| 13. | Sundaram, K.M. | President, Tamil Nadu unit of AITUC |
| 14. | Suppu, K. | President, Madras Labour Union |
| 15. | Thangamani, K.T.K. | CPI leader |
| 16. | Thillainayagam | Managing Director, Pallavan Transport Corporation |
| 17. | Venkatesan, P.J. | Treasurer, Simpson Group Companies Workers' and Staff Union, Madras |
| 18. | Viswakedhu | Group Leader, Indian Piston Company, Madras. |

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