CHAPTER-II

LABOUR ISSUES

The role played by Thiru.V. Kalyanasundara Mudailar (Thiru.Vi.Ka.) and P.Varadarajulu Naidu, the Congress Leaders in the labour activities and Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu, is remarkable one. Both of them were not only Freedom Fighters of the Congress but also a frontline, Working Class Movement Leaders of Tamil Nadu. Born on August 26, 1883 at Thullam in Tiruvarur in Tamil Nadu, Thiru.Vi.Ka. joined the Congress in 1917 with the firm belief in rendering service to the working class community of Madras Presidency. Thiru.Vi.Ka. had become more and more a disseminator of Gandhian political ideas to the people of Tamil Nadu since 1920. The arrival of Keir Hardie, the chairman of the Labour Party in England had a salutary effect on the history of the Labour activities in Tamil Nadu. His short stay in Madras and publication of his life history in Newspapers influenced Thiru.Vi.Ka. Then Thiru.Vi.Ka. became a prominent Tamil Nationalist and journalist and also one of the founders of the ‘Madras Labour Union’ (MLU).

Formation of Labour Unions

The impact of labour unrest was never before felt as in the years that closely followed the First World War (1914-1918). The aftermath of this War brought with it acute problem for industrial labour. The labourers
expected that the end of war would be the beginning of a long stretch of continuous prosperity for them. Everybody expected that the prices would fall and that there would be ample scope for employment for all. But these hopes were blasted by an unprecedented epidemic in the form of influenza. The death toll mounted to over eight millions. The war had done something to educate Indian labour to open their eyes. There was unprecedented outbreak of industrial strikes.¹

Textile Mills contributed much to the numerical strength of the factory labourers in Tamil Nadu. Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli were the important centres of textile industry in Tamil Nadu. A good beginning towards organised labour movement was made among the textile mill workers in the Madras city by Thiru.Vi.Ka., B.P. Wadia, and others who took the cause of workers and motivated them.²

The Madras State had a fair share of these industrial strikes and disturbances. No less than forty-five strikes occurred in different industries in this State. A number of trade unions sprang into existence, but none of them was registered. No less than thirty-three strikes occurred in the year 1921 of which nineteen were in Madras city itself. A significant feature in the settlement of one these strikes in the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills was that the then Governor of Madras acted as a mediator and secured the happy
result of a settlement. During this year a labourer Advisory Board was also constituted over which the Commissioner of Labour presided.³

The Madras Labour Union owed its birth to the combined efforts of the Home Rule Leaguers and Congress propagandists. The interest of the Home Rule Leaguers in the labour Movement was short lived. After the departure of B.P. Wadia from Madras in 1921, the leadership of the textile mill workers in the Madras City was assumed by the Congress activists.⁴

In the beginning, work in the Madras Labour Union was looked upon as a kind of social service. The Union organized meetings and discussed questions like increase in wages, establishment of night schools, reduction of working hours, and sanitation. Leaders with socialist philosophy were very few.⁵ They never used to propagate their philosophy among the workers in Madras City.⁶ However, the consciousness of the workers was aroused frequently by holding meetings on Saturdays in Perambur.⁷

The Madras Labour Union conducted heroic struggles in the cause of working people against the managements of Buckingham and Carnatic Mills (B&C mills) and the Madras United Spinning and Weaving Mills (Choolai Mills) in Madras City in the 1920s and 1930s.
Strike in Buckingham and Carnatic Mills

The official report states that the workers were dissatisfied with the mill authorities over the non-payment of the annual increment of eight annas per month in 1918. There was discontent among the workers in the weaving department about their wages, owing to the increase in the price of food stuff. A meeting was held in the garden attached to the Ramaboyammal's bungalow at Strahan's Road, at 4.30 p.m on March 2, 1918. About a thousand people were present and most of them were coolies from the Band C Mill. The chief speaker was Thiru.Vi.Ka. He spoke on the need of organizing workers at Madras and emphasized the fact that "Labour plays an important part in the prosperity of a country and how India is becoming poor day by day by the industrial exploitation of foreign countries. He enumerated the success of Labour Movement in England, Japan, America and other Countries. He told the workers that by organizing themselves, they could find out their difficulties and if they had any grievances, instead of an individual representation, they could send in a joint appeal and get their grievances redressed by Government. They could appeal to the highest authorities and need not be afraid of petty low paid officials. Thiru.Vi.Ka. placed the picture of Gandhi's life before them and exhorted them to try and follow his example. A hand bill was distributed on the day of the meeting. The workers pasted a manuscript notice during the night of March 3, 1918 on a small temple wall close to the mills asking the workers in the mills to
put their signature. It was also stated in the notice that, if the request was not complied with, the legs of the proprietor would be broken. The purpose of the petition was to get the working hours lessened and wages increased. They had been working from 6.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon and again from 12.30 to 6.00 p.m. daily. They wished that their working hours should be from 7 am to 11 am and from 12.30 to 5 p.m., and that their pay should be more. A memorial was drafted after the meeting of the workers. Meanwhile, the mill management gave an increase of wages to the watchmen and workmen. Hence, the discontent of the workers did not lead to any major strike in the B & C mills. However, the workers were on organizing themselves.

An attempt towards an organized movement was keenly watched by the Government and the mill management. Both of them viewed the organized movement with disfavour. The factory workers in the Buckingham mills began to understand that some of the officers in the mills were trying to break the Madras Labour Union by victimizing in various ways the workers who were prominently associated with the Madras Labour Union.8

The leading labour leaders – Thiru.Vi.Ka., M. Singaravelu Chetti, V.Chakkarai Chetti, V.V. Giri, M.S. Ramaswami Ayyagnar were all active Congressites. The 1920s witnessed establishment of labour unions by
workers of almost every kind in Tamil Nadu. The office-bearers of several of these unions were well-known political activists.\(^9\)

The strike began in the carding department of the Carnatic Mills on May 20, 1921 over the question of wages.\(^10\) Thiru.Vi.Ka intervened and guided the workers. The strike spread to other departments and the mill authorities closed down the mills. The mill management announced that they were withholding the bonus and the workers should return to work without expecting bonus.\(^11\)

The Madras Labour Union condemned the attitude of the mill management and appealed to Madras Government but in vain.\(^12\) Meanwhile, the workers of the Buckingham mill joined together on June 3, 1921 and decided to go on a sympathetic strike unless justice was rendered to the Carnatic mill workers before June 11, 1921.\(^13\)

No positive reply came from the mill management. Hence, the workers of the Buckingham mill struck work in the morning of June 20, 1921 in sympathy with the workers of the Carnatic mills who did not obtain redress of their legitimate grievances.\(^14\) The workmen of both mills met in their union premises in the morning of June 20, 1921 and listened to the address of their elders who advised the workmen that as they had finally resorted to the strike, they should stand by the same till their grievances were redressed and thereby render future strike impossible.\(^15\)
The strike lasted for nearly five months. The mill management in collaboration with the Assistant Commissioner of Labour induced the Adi-Dravida workers to break the strike. A section of the Adi-Dravida workers fell prey to the false propaganda of the management. The police force together with European military personnel was stationed in the neighborhood of the union premises. By July, a very grave situation prevailed at Perambur. The Hindu wrote on July 4, 1921 thus: "The police are equally under suspicion and their method of handling the situation has left a good deal to be desired. The mill management promoted communal clashes between a section of the Adi-Dravida workers and other caste workers who were on strike. Soon a collision between a section of the Adi-Dravida workers and other caste workers developed, much to the expectations of the Madras Government. The Madras Government contemplated action against the labour leaders Thiru.Vi.Ka. The Governor of Madras invited the labour leaders like Thiru.Vi.Ka., V. Chakkarai Chetti, E.L. Aiyar to his residence in Madras on July 5,1921 and warned them. And yet the strike continued. Public sympathy was with the striking workers.

The mill area continued to be the scene of frequent clashes between the traitors and the striking workers. The clashes assumed serious dimensions. On August 29, 1921, these disturbances culminated in a riot, in which the police opened fire and five men and one woman were killed.
Their bodies were taken in a procession through the city on August 30, 1921. It excited much popular feeling and the situation became very serious. The Madras Government deployed more and more police force near the mill premises.

However, the recruitment of new labourers continued. The Madras Labour Union was facing severe financial crisis. The 'Chakra' introduced by the nationalists among the workers did not produce an adequate substitute for the wages earned in the mills. The Justice Party leader, P. Theagaraya Chetty persuaded the labourers to go back to work. He told them that the new labourers could be made permanent unless the striking workers returned to work immediately. He assured them that their union would be allowed to function normally. Hence the workers returned to work in September 1921.

Labour Movement

The factory workers did not wage economic struggle alone. They did not remain isolated from the rest of the society. They were slowly brought into the vortex of nationalist politics by the congress activists. Some of the founding fathers of the Madras Labour Union like Thiru.Vi.Ka were active Congress leaders.

The political experience of the factory workers under Congress leadership was not a continuous and regular phenomenon. In the beginning, the Congress leaders like Thiru.Vi.Ka did not talk about politics openly
among the workers, the obvious reason was being the fear of official persecution.\textsuperscript{37}

The celebrations of Satyagraha Day on April 6, 1919 in Madras City included procession and the meeting on the Beach which were attended by an unprecedentedly large assemblage, estimated at about 1,00,000 persons.\textsuperscript{38} A huge procession of factory workers was started from Royapettah in the city and reached the Madras Beach to participate in the public meeting.\textsuperscript{39} Thiru.Vi.Ka and a number of Congress activists addressed the meeting from the platform set up separately for the workers.\textsuperscript{40} All the shops in the Madras city remained closed on that day.\textsuperscript{41} Deshabhaktan wrote on the April 1919: "The celebration at Madras exceeded all expectations. The day was observed by all classes irrespective of caste or creed in obedience to the call of Gandhi."\textsuperscript{42} In 1920, Thiru.Vi.Ka. edited the Tamil newspaper \textit{Navasakthi}. Politics, religion and social problems were the central themes of his writings. In 1926 he was the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Party.\textsuperscript{43}

The Labour Movement was carried on with a message of hatredness towards capitalists. It is the primary duty of a Government to arrive at a satisfactory settlement of the labour question promptly, as prevention is better than cure. This movement was on foot even in India for some years past, but for want of proper organization among the labourers the agitation made by them was not strong enough when compared with the hardships
they underwent. It was felt that if only there was a proper organization and a compact among them, their aspirations would be achieved very soon.

**Political Agitation**

The *Deshabhaktan* of the January 16, 1920, writes: "It is true that, as observed by His majesty in his proclamation, a new era has dawned, and it is only the political agitators that should spread the light of the new era in the world, dispelling the old darkness". Therefore, it is the politicians that hold the responsibility of improving the condition of the country. It is regrettable indeed that while all the rest of the world is basking in the sunshine of liberty, the Tamil Land alone should not be alive to it. There are many heroes in this land that can get rid of its bondage. But they are, for some reasons or other, standing in the background like lions in their dens and this has led to the political agitation here being a farce. We expect some aged persons to come forward to regulate this agitation. Four years ago, the land was all agitation and the blame for having allowed it to sleep rests on ourselves. Our leaders stated that we should accept the reforms granted and agitate for more. It is the wish of the labourers that Gandhi should preside over the Labour Conference to be held in Madras next month. It will be advantageous to hold a secret conference when Gandhi is here and, securing a sort of union in the Tamil Land, start the work of propagandism.  

The *Deshabhaktan*, of the March 10, 1920 publishes a lecture said to have been delivered by Thiru.Vi.Ka., the editor of the newspaper, at...
Tiruchengodu. He said, "The present policy is for the strong to oppress the weak and rob them. Even birds and beasts enjoy liberty. Hence it is necessary for man to obtain it. The present situation is that the Indians are in a slavish condition and no one will need their prayer on account of this. If, without being slaves, we live like many, due regard will be paid to us. So we should try to get rid of this slavery. We became slaves, as we allowed others to rule over us. We have to put up with the condition and insult, on account of our having forgotten our country and language and the want of union among us. It is Europeans that now govern us. Our people are carried away by the white colour of these Europeans and are changing their very lives, deeming the Europeans to be celestials. This is what has bring to us to a slavish condition. To get rid of this, we should resort to swadeshism. While the westerners are leading a happy life with full liberty both here and in other places like the Fiji Islands, we are insulted much, though we can show our manliness. In the Punjab, two of our women were dragged in the street, made to crawl there on and shot down. We have become reduced to this miserable position... When, even after lavishing men and money in the war, we have not got rid slavish condition. The reforms granted to us are of no avail. Dames America, England, France and Japan are seated on their thrones, clad in gorgeous attire and wearing crowns; but we do not see among them mother Bharata, whose children were thirty-three crores. It may be due to her want of a beautiful dress or a crown. But it is due mainly to our being slaves. The land of the Himalayas, the Punjab, the land of the Ganges and the Kaveri has been reduced to a slavish condition."
Depressed Classes

The *Deshabhaktan* issue of March 11, 1920 takes exception to the classification of the classes into three divisions by the Labour Commissioner in a communiqué recently issued by him and observed: "The communiqué does not state definitely who the "untouchables" are. There does not seem to be any separate class like the "untouchables" in India. It is those who deem themselves to be a higher class that do not touch others who are deemed by them to belong to a lower class. Judged from this stand point, who are to be regarded as the "untouchables."? The Government should note this. It is the Panchamas that are mostly considered to be the depressed classes now through several ways are striving to ameliorate their condition in many directions. Their efforts do not seem to have proved successful. So these classes should realize this and try to better their condition themselves.\(^{46}\)

Service to Labour Society

The two newspapers worked for the growth of Madras Labour Movement. One was *New India* and the another one was *Deshabhaktan*. The *Deshabhaktan* did a separate service to the labour cause.\(^{47}\)

Thiru.Vi.Ka. served the people in many ways. The most important among them was his service to labour movement. The problems which were raised in this movement disturbed Thiru.Vi.Ka's peace.\(^{48}\)
In 1908, there was unrest all over the country because of the spread of Swadeshi Movement. Thiru.Vi.Ka saw the Keir Hardi, a Member of British Parliament and a leader of Labour party in Spencer Company. One of the newspapers published about the history of Keir Hardi. His history gave inspiration about labour issues in Thiru.Vi.Ka's heart and it forced him to take the cause of labourers. Thiru.Vi.Ka. was highly influenced by the labour ideals enunciated by Keir Hardi in his labour mission.\textsuperscript{49}

The formation of M.L.U. was a milestone in the Labour Movement in Tamil Nadu. Thiru.Vi.Ka., Kesavapillai, Chelvapathi Chetti and Ramanajulu Naidu were the architects of the union. Very soon the Labour Union spread its activities. Many labour unions were started by the activities of Thiru.Vi.Ka.\textsuperscript{50}

In a few months after the establishment of Madras Labour Union, there were strikes and lock-outs everywhere. The Madras Labour Union, Tramway Labour Union, Kerosene Oil Labour Union, and Printing Labours Association were the four Unions involved in total strikes. The speeches of Thiru.Vi.Ka and Wadia about the reasons of the strikes were narrated in a book called 'Labour in Madras'.\textsuperscript{51} The rise and growth of labour unions took place in the midst of opposition. The Madras Governor Lord Bentland strictly warned Wadia.\textsuperscript{52}
Many leaders got political mileage by using the labour union as a ladder and retained their position in top level. But Thiru.Vi.Ka was not done like that. This is one of the examples of his selfless service. The strikes of labour in South India spread like a wild fire all over the Nation. The Labour Unions were also started in Bombay, Calcutta, Kanpur and Nagpur. In Madras, many such unions were started. Some labour associations like M & M Railway Labour Association and Police Association had problems in the initial stage. The meeting was held in Perambur near Semathammantemple to start M & S.M. Association. The leaders like Ramanujulu Naidu, Dhandapani Pillai and Thiru.Vi.Ka. attended that meeting.

Thiru.Vi.Ka wished to develop the Labour Movement. On March 2, 1918, a meeting was held at Ramaboyammal banglow. Thousands of labours joined that meeting. Thiru.Vi.Ka talked in that meeting. He lectured about the history of labour movement in Western Countries, the greatness of the economic freedom, and the necessity of labour union.

Thiru.Vi.Ka told that when he presided over Tamil Nadu Congress political sessions, in he spoke about the 'Swaraj'. He warned the people that "swaraj is an economic freedom in business" This was pressed in a political session at South Arcot District. His speeches induced many of the Congress leaders to involve in the labour activities. The aim of the labour association was to promote the welfare of the labour society.
From the beginning the leaders like. Thiru.Vi.Ka., B.P.Wadia, G. Ramanjalu Naidu, Vedanadam, S. Nadesa Mudaliar, Varadharajalu Naidu, Kesavalu Naidu, and Namasiyayam Pillai joined together to protect the interest of labourers.\(^{59}\)

Thiru.Vi.Ka, stressed the freedom of politics along with the economic status to the people. He viewed thus: "The people can get strength by this political freedom. The power mongers can create religious and caste problems among the people. So, it is necessary to get the economic freedom with political liberation." He insisted on economic right, swaraj and equal status to the workers.\(^{60}\)

Many labour union branches were established in Madras and outer places. The important among them are M & S.M Labour Union. Tramway Labour Union. Electricity Labour Union, Oil Labour Union, Printing Labour Union, Aluminium Labour Union, European House Labour Union, Police Union, Kovai Weavers Labour Union, Madurai Weavers Labour Union, etc.\(^{61}\)

**First Provincial Labour Conference Madras 1920**

On March 21, 1920, the First Provincial Labour Conference was convened in Madras. Kesavappillai was the President of this conference and the Chairman of the Reception Committee was Thiru.Vi.Ka. The leaders of labourers came to this conference from different areas. Thiru.Vi.Ka urged the necessity to start the Central Labour Association in his speech.\(^{62}\)
As the Chairman of the First Provincial Labour Conference, Thiru.Vi.Ka. delivered the following noteworthy speech. He spoke thus: The labourers of England work for eight hours a day and get good wages. The labourers of England do not bother about the working time and wages. But the labourers of India are arguing for their wages and time because the income of the Indians is very low. In England labourers are improved only because of the practice of equality among themselves. But in India they are not following the equality among themselves. Even though the politicians and ruling class did not care about the Indian labourers, due to God's grace they are somewhat at growing level.

**Formation of Central Labour Union 1920**

After this conference, the Central Labour Union was established on July 4, 1920. The persons who asked the leader post at last disagreed it. Thiru.Vi.Ka was also one among them. However, Thiru.Vi.Ka agreed the post. Thiru.Vi.Ka was elected as the leader of the Central Labour Union by the labour leaders.

Thiru.Vi.Ka said that the labour's problems were increasing day by day. So he wanted to form a Central Labour Union as a head of all labour associations, and he advised all of them to affiliate with the Central Union. Fortunately, this union acted as a great organ of the labour cause under the able leadership and guideship of Thiru.Vi.Ka.
Fight for Labour's Cause

Thiru.Vi.Ka. fought against slavery and cries of labourers in the years between 1921 and 1924. In the month of June 1921, 13,000 labourers in Carnatic Mill involved in strike. This strike extended for six months. The unsafe labourers were shot without mercy. Thiru.Vi.Ka. joined labour side and opposed the injustice without any fear. The ruling caste charged the strike as a class revolt. Not only that, they tried to kidnap the labour leader, Thiru.Vi.Ka to Andaman and spread the gossips. At that time, the ruling party was Justice Party which supported the cause of British to some extent. Lord Wellington was the Governor of Madras and his Government just warned Thiru.Vi.Ka. In 1921, as the President of Labour Union, Thiru.Vi.Ka's speeches mostly dwelt upon economic issues of the labourers. Those speeches gave new enthusiasm to the labourers. But the wealthy land lords hated the speech of Thiru.Vi.Ka, for his speeches advocated economic parity.

In 1923, Thiru.Vi.Ka. resigned his post and he appointed, K.M. Nadesa Naicker as the leader. After Nadesa Naicker, G.S. Arundale, P.Shiva Rao (1926-1935) were elected, as the leaders. Then Thiru.Vi.Ka became the union leader because of the compulsion of labourers.

In 1942, there took place a small problem in Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. The youths in spinning department stopped their work inside the Mill.
The police entered into the mill and used gunfire. Shooting was done outside the mill. Two people died. Thiru.Vi.Ka was going between the labourers. One of the bombs went on his head. The Government was not ready to help the deceased labourers, and had not done any interrogation.

In the year 1943, Thiru.Vi.Ka. celebrated his 60th birthday. The labourers of M.S.M Association and Madras Labour Union celebrated it well. In that ceremony the statue of Thiru.Vi.Ka. was unveiled in the premises of both organisations. The statue of Thiru.Vi.Ka. in the Madras Workers Union shows how he would be in the age of thirty-five years. The statue of Thiru.Vi.Ka. of the M.S.M association shows that how Thiru.Vi.Ka. was at the age of sixty years.

The labourers in Backingham and Carnatic Mill started a big revolt in 1947. The leader of that revolt was Anthoni Pillai. The Congress Government kidnapped him. Hence, many important leaders in Union were imprisoned. The labour invited Thiru.Vi.Ka and convinced him to hold the banner of revolt by taking the mantle of leadership. Thiru.Vi.Ka accepted and took the mantleship. The labour classes stood behind him.

The labourers placed their demands in a peaceful manner under the leadership of Thiru.Vi.Ka. By seeing the rise of labourers, the Congress Government got angry. Thiru.Vi.Ka. was made house arrest and his house was made a prison, and the Government placed the police in his house in order to arrest his activities. The group of labourers came to Thiru.Vi.Ka's
house which is in the Ganapathi Street. Thiru.Vi.Ka. was allowed to appear on upstairs to talk to the laborers. The labourers were satisfied by hearing his voice and seeing him.\textsuperscript{79} This was the last labour agitation done by Thiru.Vi.Ka. for the sake of labourers. Afterwards, he lost his health and eyesight.\textsuperscript{80}

Thiru.Vi.Ka. did social service for nearly twenty-five years for the cause labourers of Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. Many strikes took place in his span of his public service. If he heard about any problem among the labourers, he tired to solve and find peace among them.\textsuperscript{81}

Thiru.Vi.Ka. did many humanitarian services for the sake of labourers. In the Asian continent the first labour association was organised only by Thiru.Vi.Ka.\textsuperscript{82} He said that the labourers should be freed from the bondage of slavery. Increase in the wages and decrease of the working time only can make the labourers cheerful.\textsuperscript{83} He spent his life only for the sake of the welfare of the labourers.\textsuperscript{84} Thiru.Vi.Ka became labour leader when the Justice Party was in power. As a Congress man, he strongly hated the wealthy land lords of the Justice Party and their pro British policy. In the labour issue, as a Congress labour leader he had to face troubles which were ignited by the Justice Party leaders. Even though he was a Congress labour leader, he did not fail to criticize and even agitate against the policy of Congress ministries after 1937.
Varadarajulu Naidu and Labour Issues

It was in August 1916, in the presence of T.S.S. Rajan, VO.C. Pillai and C. Rajagopalachari, P. Varadarajulu Naidu made his political entry and involved into National struggle. From that time onwards he was very active, touring all over Madras Presidency and giving speeches supporting the freedom movement. He had taken the message to masses, in their native language and made them actively involved in the national struggle.

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai had already shown keen interest in labour movement and worked for their welfare. He had earlier started the "Desaabimanisangh" and also started the "Coral Mill employees Union" at Tuticorin. He successfully staged a strike of the workers and got a raise in their wages.

P. Varadarajulu Naidu who was very much inspired by V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, wanted the Railway employees to be brought into a Union. The South Indian Railway workshop was at that time located at Nagapattinam and Naidu's work started from there. He addressed labourers there and formed themselves into a Union called the "South Indian Railway Labour Union" at Nagapattinam in 1917.

It was the first Railway Labour Union to be started in Madras Presidency, and it successfully got a raise in the wages of the labourers. Naidu was publishing a Tamil weekly called, Prapancha Mithran since 1916, and he wrote a series of articles urging the labourers to unite and form
Trade Unions. He consistently advocated that the misery and distress of the labourers should be mitigated.

During 1918, the workers of Harvey Mills Madurai launched a strike which was supported by the Justice Party under the leadership of J.N. Ramanathan. Varadarajulu Naidu as usual supported the cause of the labourers, and wrote articles in his *Prapancha Mithran*. But the Madras Government prohibited J.N. Ramanathan from addressing any meeting within a ten miles radius of Madurai, for a period of one month, with a view of diffuse the situation. The striking employees were in disarray since there was nobody to lead their struggle or show them the right direction. A lifelong fighter for labour rights, Naidu rose up to the occasion, stepped in and urged the strikers to continue their struggle till all their demands were met.

He effectively made use of his press *Prapancha Mithran* and public platform. Neither the Mill management, nor the Madras Govt. cherished this new development and wanted to put an end to Naidu's involvement in labour matters. The labourers were given some raise in the wages, but the Government charged Naidu of treason. An inflammatory article published in *Prapancha Mithran*, inciting the employees to continue the struggle till the end was charged seditious under section 124-A,153-A of Indian Criminal Procedure Code. He was arrested on August 29, 1918 and put behind the bars. It was the first occasion. Naidu was arrested. Even though Naidu was not the leader of that employees union, and did not bear any responsibility for the strike, he was heart and soul supporting the cause of the labourers.
and did not let down the labour agitation. He did not bother about his arrest also.

The trial of the case started on September 27, 1918, before the First class Sub-Divisional Magistrate at Madurai. This case had become so sensational for two reasons. First, a team of very efficient nationalist Congress Lawyers like Salem. C. Rajagopalachari, Salem Adi Narayana Chettiyar, Madurai George Jeseph, M.K. Sundaraja Iyengar and R.S. Varadarajulu Naidu appeared in defending Naidu, Secondly, to witness the trial and show their antipathy towards Government, thousands of people thronged the court each day. It was an exceptional event in the colonial India, that such a huge gathering assembled each day at the court hall. Alarmed at the situation, British Administration anticipated a law and order problem because more Congressites poured into Madurai town from various parts of the Madras Presidency each day. Hence to intimidate the gathering a huge canon which could fire continuously over the crowd was installed at the court.

Eminent Congress leaders like VO.C., Thiru.Vi.ka, T.S.S. Rajan, Va. Ra. addressed meetings at Madurai, and press all over India issued a detailed coverage about the trial. Congress movement raised fund to defend the case and Subramania Siva spoke in many meetings highlighting this issue. Finding the situation uncontrollable, the Government, employed army at Madurai along with police force Army conducted flag march in the
streets of Madurai. On one occasion the crowd became uncontrollable and the police fired in which two persons were killed.

In spite of all these, Naidu was punished with eighteen months of rigorous imprisonment. All over the country this sentence raised waves of indignation and all papers condemned the British atrocity. Naidu appealed in the Madras High Court and this time Salem C. Rajagopalachari, K. Srinivasa Iyengar and Alladi Krishnasamy Iyer appeared. On a technical point raised by Rajaji, the sentence was annulled and Naidu was released. This did not deter Naidu, in fact his name and fame became so popular that he started showing interest in the labour movement.

From 1920, Naidu entered active politics still he continued to show specific interest in the well being of the labourers and often addressed their meetings. He wanted that the labour force should take part in the freedom movement actively. Naidu welcomed the formation of All India Trade Union congress (AITUC) and in 1926 he was nominated as a member of that National body. By this time Naidu was publishing three very powerful and popular newspapers. *Tamilnadu* in Tamil, *The Indian Express* in English and *Andhra Praja* in Telugu.

In all these newspapers he continuously contributed on labour issues and published articles written by labour leaders. In 1924 he presided over the South Indian Railway Labour Conference. The Madras Labour Union
which was formed in 1918 by B.P. Wadia, celebrated the annual conference in 1924 and Dr. Naidu delivered the Presidential address. He presided over the Madras Provincial Labour Conference in 1924. In that historic meeting Naidu paid glowing tributes to the Bolshevik Government, the Government of the proletariat formed by V I. Lenin and passed a resolution mourning the demise of Lenin. In 1926 he was elected as the President of the Central Railway Labour Board, and he was appreciated for his yeoman services for the cause of the Railway employees.

In July 1928, the Railway employees from Tirunelveli to Madras resorted to wildcat strike, pressing for their demands. The Government resorted to coercion instead of conciliation. Due to this strike many labour leaders were arrested on charges of conspiracy and the strike did not succeed. Varadarajulu Naidu was not the office bearer of that union; Still he supported the employees strike, in his newspaper Tamil Nadu and requested the Government to concede the demands of the employees. There he was serving as the president of "The supply Corporation Employees Union" and "Kerosene Oil Workers Union". In the meetings of these unions, Naidu criticized the strike as an untimely attempt, and warned the employees that the strike should be a last resort.

At the same time he passed resolutions demanding the release of the labour leaders and withdrawal of the conspiracy cases. He had also contrib-
uted funds towards the cost of the appeal on that case pending before the High court of Madras.\textsuperscript{92}

During the year 1929, due to difference of opinion with the Congress Leadership over the appeasement shown to Md. Ali Jinnah, Dr. P.V Naidu left the Congress Party and joined the Hindu Mahasabha. But still he continued his concentration on labour movement. In 1930, he presided over the conference of the Government Cordite Factory Labour Union. The same year he undertook a mission to establish trade union movement in Pondicherry, then a French territory in India.

During 1934, Varadarajulu Naidu tried to bring all the labour unions under one banner. Hence, he arranged for a private meeting at Madras and invited about eighty people representing various unions in the city and a few in the mofussal. He suggested the idea of a central labour political party which would exclusively work for the labourers. Further he made extensive tour in Madurai and Trichy districts to organize labour opinion for this new party but this did not materialize. He appealed to the Government that genuine labourers alone be nominated to labour seats in the reformed Provincial Legislatures.\textsuperscript{93}

**Labour Problem in the Mills of Madurai, 1938-1939**

Though Varadarajulu Naidu appreciated the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and congratulated the establishment of the Government of the
proletariat, he did not support communism. Particularly during Stalin's regime the developments in USSR made him condemn Communism. Commenting on Russian Bolshevism, Naidu remarked, "There are early two divisions in the world today, the rich and the poor, capital vs labour. All other divisions are manifestation of this eternal problem. Various remedies have been attempted. The Russian Bolshevism was one such attempt, but it did not succeed because the remedy contracted the method of the disease itself. It used force and persecution in asserting itself and its rights".94

During 1937, C. Rajagopalachari formed the first ministry of the Congress party since 1920, in the Madras Presidency. U. Muthuramalinga Thever, popularly known as Thevar, the undisputed leader of the Mukkulathor community, demanded to repeal the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) which humiliated that community. But Rajaji did not pay any attention to that issue. A disillusioned U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, got interested in the Congress Socialist Party which was formed in 1934, but began to percolate to the Madras Presidency only in 1936. Thevar used all his influence to put the socialists on a firm footing. He founded and led the Pasumalai Mahalakshmi Mill workers union, Meenakshi Mill Textile union and Madras knitting company labour union parallel trade unions to already existing ones. For the sake of the labour, Thevar collided with the managements. Thevar’s active participation in the strike of Mahalakshmi Mill Workers Union, Pasumalai, brought him seven months rigorous
imprisonment from October 15, 1938. Again he led another strike in the same year in Madurai Knitting Company.\textsuperscript{95}

There developed difference of opinion between Varadarajulu Naidu and U. Muthuramalinga Thevar. At Thanalakshmi Mill, Madurai, U.Muthuramalinga Thevar succeeded in forming a rival Trade union which was opposed by Naidu, who was the president of the labour union there. Muthramalinga Thevar was supported by P. Jeevanandam, another veteran labour leader. The Government avoided the possibility of a strike there in 1938.\textsuperscript{96}

But the difference culminated in a different form at Meenakshi Mill, Madurai. Varadarajulu Naidu was the president of the labour union of that mill, where a rival union was started by Muthuramalinga Thevar. The controversy became more prolonged with the show of strength. Muthuramalinga Thevar opened a Bose reading room in a quarter occupied by Varadarajulu Naidu's adherents. Hence Naidu accused it as a communist cell and replied with the opening of a Tagore reading room on the opposite side of the road. In this confrontation between the unions, a few workers of Varadarajulu Naidu union were suspended and demanding their reinstatement, a strike by the labourers was started on March 0, 1939. Subsequently the strike was withdrawn following an agreement to take back all employees.\textsuperscript{97} Since Muthuramalinga Thevar was arrested in
September 1940, and subsequently suffered various punishments till 1945, normally was restored at Meenakshi Mills, Madurai. The union had the benefit of a cooperative stores managed by the employees and it functioned profitably. When Naidu was arrested in 1944, for criminal breach of trust, the employees of the labour union organised a meeting. The efficient management of co-operative stores was appreciated and a bonus of Rs. 1,200/- was recommended to be given to Naidu. Further to meet the legal expenses, a grant was also resolved in that meeting. On April 30, 1947 Varadajulu Naidu presided over the South Indian Railway workers union, at Golden rock, Trichy.

**Naidu's Vision on Labour**

Varadajulu Naidu's thoughts on labour are very clear. It was the suffering of the ordinary labourers, that originally attracted him towards service to society and thereafter nation. The fundamental cause of human miseries is due to poverty, want of necessities and comforts of life. Poverty leads to crimes and diseases. It is the sacred duty of every right thinking man to remedy the evils and miseries of humanity by fighting out poverty and make the world fit for all people to live in comfort and safety was his Presidential address among the Cordite Factory Labour Union conference held at Wellington on August 30, 1930.
According to Varadajulu Naidu, "The labour movement is a great humanitarian and divine movement that stands for the happiness and freedom of man, political, social, economic and cultural. In India and all over the world, it strives for the establishment of a system of administration in which air, water, land and capital are commonly owned and the process of production, distribution and exchange will be social functions. The industrial and agricultural workers of the world are struggling today for the security of freedom from the economic tyranny by the capitalist organisation." 

"The labourer’s who believes in the principle of socialism should consider it as his foremost duty to fight against “caste and racial distinction and creed antagonism". Caste system is opposed to socialism. It is the caste system which divided the Indians to become colonised. A true capitalist should wage a war against caste system. The religious and social bondage should be broken first and “the industrial and economic next”, Naidu wrote in Tamilnadu.

"The Masses of India are poor. All the year round, they are practically starving. There are lakhs and lakhs of toilers in the country who never get enough to live on, who never have their hunger satisfied, once in their lives. There are thousands and hundreds of thousands of Men, Women and children living like dogs in dirty holes, in all the cities. We want for our people enough to eat, decent rooms to live in and a clean bed to sleep on, after the day's labour. We are struggling for Swaraj to secure these things for
the masses of our countrymen. The men who produce the food grains for the whole country must not go hungry. Science has shown how abundant harvests be had from the land, if modern methods were adopted. With the aid of modern implements, the peasant can cultivate his soil with much less labour. A plough driven by steam can take the place of at-least a hundred of those we use now. Government should purchase modern agricultural implements and place them at the disposal of the village communities. Thus, the poverty of the peasants can be eradicated to a great extent" Varadarajulu Naidu wrote in *Tamilnadu*.

He was bold enough to declare that “besides land, there are other institutes and properties used by everybody which are indispensable to the life and progress of the nations; such are the Railways, Mines, etc., which are known as public utilities. These should cease to be owned by private individuals for their own profit, but should be owned by the whole society, and belong to the nation" ¹⁰⁰

"Eight hours of work per day with only six days working in the week should be the maximum amount of compulsory labour performed by anybody. The labourers are our fellow men. They need to be treated fairly. It should be the duty of the capitalists to take care of the welfare of their unfortunate labour brothers. Their children need to be decently educated." These were his common address everywhere. "The labourers should
organise themselves effectively, so that they could have benefits of collective bargaining: Communalism and Communism are the two evils the labour force should avoid" had been his advice for long. The labour should not join any political party, but should have their own policies” and fight for their rights" were the suggestions to them.

Referring to communist activities among the labour population, Varadarajulu Naidu pointed out that what was good for Soviet Russia, where a few rich noblemen held all the lands during the Tsar regime, would not be good for India, where most of the land holders were small pattadars. He observed that the growth of the influence of the Soviet would necessitate another freedom fight to cast it out of the country.

As an MLC and MLA, Varadarajulu Naidu continued the same care and compassion towards the labourers. He often reminded the administration that "they should remember their sufferings under the British, what promises they made to the people, how far they were successful and what remained to be accomplished should be reviewed",

While presiding over that Southern Railway loco workers conference, Naidu spoke of two very important aspects. Firstly mutual understanding and cooperation between the labour and capital alone would render industrial progress and National welfare. Secondly he warned about the interference in the labour capital affairs by self-styled labour leaders whose interest centres around their own selfishness. So, both the labour and the
capital should realize that they could not stand alone without the other and therefore, should not allow, Communalism or Communism to enter into their domain and avoid political leaders between them. Naidu wanted women propagandists to visit the homes of the workman, and spread the gospel of labour capital to operation.

While speaking in the Assembly, he reminded the Government about the abject poverty of the labourers and the duty of the Government to control price rise, effective food rationing and appointment of honest officials to redress the grievances of the poor and needy. Till his death Varadajulu Naidu remained as a trusted leader of the labourers, who selflessly toiled for their cause.

Thus, Varadajulu Naidu, was a Congressman of exemplary nature, journalist of a great order, eloquent platform speaker, tough freedom fighter and above all a good friend and leader of the labourers. He dedicated himself for the development of the labourers. His eloquence attracted thousands of employees to forge unity, which ultimately resulted in the formation of South Indian Railway Employees Union in Nagapatnam 1917, the first of its kind in Madras Presidency.

His journals aided and assisted him in his holy war for the sake of labourers. Caste and creed differences did not matter for Naidu, and he was concerned only about the welfare of the labourers. Congress Movement and the short lived Madras Presidency Association provided him the first hand
knowledge about the condition of labour. His extensive tours helped him for an on the spot idea of labour conditions. Friends like VO. Chidambaram Pillai, Thiru V.Ka, B.P. Wadia, E.V.R. Rajaji stood as a good support in his Trade union activities. He possessed very clean idea about the labourers and did not deter any threat or punishment in the course of his activities for the labourers.

Wherever Varadajulu Naidu toured, the Government was anxious to know whether this "Agitator" was doing anything with labourers there. He wanted the labourers to join the National movement for the liberation of the mother land. Similarly he warned the evils of Communalism and Communism getting mixed with trade unions. He never hesitated to cross swords with U. Muthuramalinga Thevar an MLA and Congressman, over the question of splitting a labour union and starting a parallel union. He always insisted on labour unity to develop the collective bargaining capacity.

Unlike the other trade union leaders, he never hated the capitalists. Rather he emphasized that labourers and capitalists could not stand independent. He suggested a strong cooperation and mutual understanding. He states that the strike should be a last resort. He never wanted the labour agitations go waste. His love for workers, peasants, labourers even unemployed was remarkable: Next to Gandhi, he had presided over hundreds of labour conferences and in all those places he quoted his
gospel of good will i.e. labour capital cooperation and mutual understanding as the solution for all problems.

In the Union’s history, there was a degree of discipline established between the Union and the ordinary workers in the individual mills. The Madras Labour Union when compared with other Labour Unions was more rationalized, concerted and unified. The Madras about Union’s lines of communication between the union and the workers were weak and the union’s hold on the workers was more feeble. The Coimbatore Labour Union was similar to the Madurai Labour Union and its hold was more strong in the more easily organized town workers. It failed to establish any strong links among the workers in the village mills outside the town. The forgotten isolated workers in rural Ambasamudram had no union until they asked the Madras Labour Union to help them to organize. However, the Madras Labour Union dominated by the Congress Leaders shared the Labour Issues with the Congress backed labour unions of Madurai and Coimbatore.

During the third and fourth decades of the Twentieth Century, the Congress was much sympathized with the cause of the laboures. The Congress allowed its leaders in Tamil Nadu to organize the labour unions and it aspired to secure the support of the labour unions for the cause of the political liberation of the nation. The Congress leaders like Thiru.Vi.Ka. and
P. Varadarajulu Naidu were the Congress stalwarts and actively involved in the labour issues in the Mills and took such issues to the mill authorities and found solutions to the grievances of the labourers now and then. The activities of Thiru. Vi. Ka centred around Madras, while P. Varadarajulu Naidu’s activities were in Coimbatore, Salem and Madurai. The Congress Leaders tried to attain economic Justice through the elevation of the condition of the labourers.

The advent of the Congress Ministry began a new era in the Working Class Movement in Tamil Nadu by creating and widening the space for greater working class activity. There was also relaxation in the repressive regime. The Congress Government released several Working Class leaders imprisoned by the Colonial Government. The Working Class leaders convicted in the Madras Conspiracy Case and South India Railway Workers’ Strike were released by the Congress Government. In addition, the establishment of the Congress Government encouraged the industrial workers to articulate their grievances fearlessly. This was evidenced by the fact that as many as 153 industrial strikes occurred between 1937 and 1939. The success of the textile workers’ historic strikes against the British capitalists in achieving their economic demands all Madurai, Papanasam and Coimbatore constituted an important saga of the gains for the Working Class. The other remarkable gain for the workers during the Congress Ministry period was the recognition of their right to form trade
union organizations. The capitalists, both foreign and Indian, were advised by the Congress Ministry to accept this right. It was specifically on this dimension that Congress Government was different from the previous repressive British regime. The perception of V.V.Giri, as the Labour Minister during the Congress rule, was that the labourers and workers were in total freedom in their activities.
END NOTES


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70. Kanagasabapathi Mudaliar, op.cit., p.63.

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