

### Biographical note

#### **R. Kuchelan**

Leader of Working People's trade union Council, Chennai, Tamilnadu

Kuchelan was born on 4 July, 1936. His father was a middle peasant. Kuchelan studied upto postgraduation but decided not take up a job like others. He had heard great people say in their speeches delivered in his college that instead of taking up jobs to earn money, one should take up the service of people. Hence he opted for legal studies and served people by becoming a lawyer.

Mohan Kumarmangalam (MK) was instrumental in bringing Kuchelan into the movement. After MK became Central Minister, Kuchelan had to shoulder the responsibility of all his unions and their activities. He was already taking up workers' cases.

After the split in the Communist Party, he first joined CPI(M), but soon left them to join the Naxalites, which too he left as he got disillusioned. He started working with the AITUC though he never joined the organisation formally.

It was Kuchelan who gave the slogan of democratisation of the trade union units by holding their elections in whatever sectors they were, and whatever affiliations they had. He was himself working independently, He also pressed for close cooperation of the unions.

Kuchelan had also organised the first Madras Chinglepet trade union co-ordination committee and later Working People's Trade Union Committee.

Transcriptive note

**R. Kuchelan (Tamilnadu)**

(The interview was conducted in the afternoon of March 11, 2005 at Kuchelan's residence cum office in Chennai. It was the union office of Working People's trade union Council. The interview was conducted in calm surroundings and R Kuchelan was already eagerly waiting and looking forward to the interview.— Krishna Jha, Anil Rajimwale)

I did not take up a job after finishing my post graduation because great people who came to our college to speak said that better serve people than serve somebody for money. So I did law and became a lawyer. I had thought that it was one way to serve people.

It was in this profession that I came in close contact with Mohan Kumarmangalam (MK) and became his apprentice. Soon I myself became an advocate. That was in 1963. Besides several types of workers used to approach MK like those from wagon building etc. When MK died in the aircrash in 1964, all his trade union work as well as legal responsibilities came to me. I not only had to conduct cases but also had to talk to the management and conduct gate meetings. Though I am not a member of the AITUC but I am with them ideologically.

I am against the multiplicity of unions. I am for one union. I began functioning independently and gave a call for the democratisation of the unions. Independent unions led by AITUC leaders, if not directly by the AITUC itself, supported the call and led it. A number of unions held their elections and elected the office bearers.

The first union to be democratise was the TI Cycles in 1967. Other unions did not pay much attention. I was also elected in the TI Cycles union elections. I was also looking after Dunlop union. There was a strike also in TVS group.

In 1967, I formed Madras-Chinglepet trade union committee. This was too long a name. Later I formed Working People's trade union Council. At one time there were at least 110 to 120 unions affiliated to it. I got involved with the construction workers' problems too and organised their union.

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