

BRIEF NOTES ON INTERVIEWEES (CONTINUED)

6. DK Sarma (HMS), general secretary, Port Employees Union, Vishakhapatnam

BIO-NOTE

A short biographical note on D K Sarma, Vice President, HMS, General Secretary of Port Employees Union, Vishakhapatnam, Trustee, Vishakhapatnam Port Trust, Member, Dock Labour Board, interviewed at Vizag on September 9, 2004

Deevi Koteswara Sarma was born on June 5, 1944 in a village called Pedapudi, near Tenaly in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh in a family of gold smiths. It was a middle class family and most of the members were in academics. Sarma got his school education in Kuchipudi and after SSLC he came to Tenaly for college education. He graduated from Vizag and joined law.

Sarma joined the vizag port in 1966 and only after a year was forced to join the union. The president and secretary of the union were working in his section and took him once to union office where he was asked to reply to a chargesheet a worker was served by the port management. His letter was highly appreciated by the union leaders who refused to spare him after that.

Sarma attended the Central Board Workers' education programme and was sent to Turin in Italy for a three month training scheme in the Emergency period in 1976.

After the training, Sarma was taught to negotiate with the management, attend reconciliations and keep the records. He was directly trained by leaders like SR Kulkarni, Anthony Pillai and others. Sarma was also taught to observe the changing scenario and formulate trade union policies accordingly.

According to Sarma, he is the junior most among the five leaders of the union who started the organisation in 1965 at Vizag. Out of 12000 port employees, the union membership could claim only 500 and that too from the office staff. The general worker was still not in our rolls. There was no money even to pay for the rent of the union office. Sarma and others took loan from their provident funds to meet such expenses. However, by 1980, the union was commanding the majority of workers. At this point, Mr Dharmarao was the general secretary and DVK Shastri was the president and intellectual of the group.

By this time, AITUC was strongly present in the port and had membership among the mainstream workers. However HMS union did its best to protect the ministerial staff who were all in the HMS union.

Sarma is also a representative of labour in the Port Trust Board where all sections are represented. In fact, each port has a board with nineteen members to manage the affairs locally.

At Vizag, the Port Trust has two labour members and AITUC and HMS are both represented. The board decides about promotion, appointment etc according to the directives of the Shipping Ministry. The chairman of the board is appointed by the ministry. There are rights exclusively given to the board and then there are issues in the concurrent list like general fixation of charges from the ships anchored at the port but only after consultation with the central ministry. However the board does not have to anything with the state government.

So far as the changing scenarionis concerned, Sarma is worried over the declining number of the workers at the port. In 1944, the foundation stone of the port was placed by Dr Rajendra Prasad as Bhalchand Hirachand took initiative to build up the port. Soon it was taken away from the private sector and after independence in 1947, first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru started the port with 250000 workers. But today, the number of workers has come down to 73000 only due to automation, ban on recruitment, reduction in retirement age, voluntary retirement scheme and privatisation of various sections. The shipyard here used to produce three ships a year which has come down to a ship in five years. There are repair shops too.

Hoever, even after all these handicaps, the port here is handling 47.5 million tonnes work which is highest among all ports.

The port workers have undertaken some unusual jobs too like transferring of oil from the big ship moored out at the sea to another vessel which has its own dangers too. The union under the leadership of Sarma accepted to do the job with Rs 150 extra incentive per shift per worker.

Even after such initiatives, contract workers are employed to do the jobs assigned to the regular workers. In the month of August, all the unions went on strike on this issue and negotiations are going on.

Sarma is still the undispute leader of the union and fighting for the cause.

TRANSCRIPTIVE NOTE

A short transcriptive note on D K Sarma, Vice President, HMS, General Secretary of Port Employees Union, Vishakhapatnam, Trustee, Vishakhapatnam Port Trust, Member, Dock Labour Board, interviewed at Vizag on September 9, 2004

I was born on June 5, 1944 in a village called Pedapudi, near Tenaly in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh in a family of gold smiths. Ours was a middle class family and most of the members were in academics. I got my schoold education in Kuchipudi and after SSLC I came to Tenaly for college education. I graduated from Vizag and joined law.

I joined the Vizag port in 1966 and only after a year was forced to join the union. The president and secretary of the union were working in my section and took me once to union office where I was asked to reply to a chargesheet a worker was served by the port management. My letter was highly appreciated by the union leaders who refused to spare me after that.

I attended the Central Board Workers' education programme and was sent to Turin in Italy for a three month training scheme in the Emergency period in 1976.

After the training, I was taught to negotiate with the management, attend reconciliations and keep the records. I was directly trained by leaders like SR Kulkarni, Anthony Pillai and others. I was also taught to observe the changing scenario and formulate trade union policies accordingly.

I am the junior most among the five leaders of the union who started the organisation in 1965 at Vizag. Out of 12000 port employees, the union membership could claim only 500 and that too from the office staff. The general worker was still not in our rolls. There was no money even to pay for the rent of the union office. Along with others, I took loan from our provident funds to meet such expenses. However, by 1980, the union was commanding the majority of workers. At this point, Mr Dharmarao was the general secretary and DVK Shastri was the president and intellectual of the group.

By this time, AITUC was strongly present in the port and had membership among the mainstream workers. However HMS union did its best to protect the ministerial staff who were all in the HMS union.

I am also a representative of labour in the Port Trust Board where all sections are represented. In fact, each port has a board with nineteen members to manage the affairs locally. At Vizag, the Port Trust has two labour members and AITUC and HMS are both represented. The board decides about promotion, appointment etc according to the directives of the Shipping Ministry. The chairman of the board is appointed by the ministry. There are rights exclusively given to the board and then there are issues in the concurrent list like general fixation of charges from the ships anchored at the port but only after consultation with the central ministry. However the board does not have to do anything with the state government.

So far as the changing scenarios concerned, I am worried over the declining number of the workers at the port. In 1944, the foundation stone of the port was placed by Dr Rajendra Prasad as Bhalchand Hirachand took initiative to build up the port. Soon it was taken away from the private sector and after independence in 1947, first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru started the port with 250000 workers. But today, the number of workers has come down to 73000 only due to automation, ban on recruitment, reduction in retirement age, voluntary retirement scheme and privatisation of various sections. The shipyard here used to produce three ships a year which has come down to a ship in five years. There are repair shops too.

However, even after all these handicaps, the port here is handling 47.5 million tonnes work which is highest among all ports.

The port workers have undertaken some unusual jobs too like transferring of oil from the big ship moored out at the sea to another vessel which has its own dangers too. The union under my leadership accepted to do the job with Rs 150 extra incentive per shift per worker.

Even after such initiatives, contract workers are employed to do the jobs assigned to the regular workers. In the month of August, all the unions went on strike on this issue and negotiations are going on.

I am working actively in the union and fighting for the cause.