

WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS

The Trade Union has come to become an important element of modern industries. The paternalistic employer in general does not encourage workers to form union. This is true in case of private as well as public sector industries. The employers, left to themselves, by and large are not prepared to forego their dictatorial stance. This is particularly so when they are aware that they are required to enforce something which the workers do not like. But wherever the trade unions exist, the situation is different. The workers come unitedly to resist any illegal and sometimes even legal orders of the management. Bhowmick (1981) makes a similar observation in his study of the tea plantation industry of India. As it reveals, if it is not possible to exploit them by extending extra facilities, the employers try to destroy the trade union activities through adoption of illegal means.

The situation is quite different in the case of public enterprises. The management (it is to be remembered that they are also employees in general) tries to keep the union leaders within their own group by giving certain extra facilities. In most cases, the management takes initiative to divide the workers and their unions systematically in order to make them weak and take advantage of them. In some cases (specially in the public sector organizations)

the management encourages workers to start union activity. It tries to keep a group of organised workers within their fold by extending favourable terms. The trade union activity at the Farakka Super Thermal Power Project follows more or less a similar pattern. There are altogether three workers' unions, one Supervisors' Union and an Executives' Union in this power plant. The unions are named as below:

(i) FSTPP Employees' Union, Farakka : This union is affiliated to INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress). The number of members of this Union upto May, 1989 is 310. The General Secretary of this Union was Mr. Amlan Pandey at that time.

(ii) FSTPP Workers' Union, Farakka : This Union is affiliated to CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Union). The total number of members of this Union in May, 1989 was 610. The General Secretary of this Union was Mr. K.L. Mishra at that time.

(iii) FSTPP Sramik Union, Farakka : This Union is affiliated by UTUC (United Trade Union Congress). The total number of members of this Union is very low. The General Secretary of this Union was Mr. Narayan Sarkar at that time.

The FSTPP Employees' Union, Farakka, has at present two parts :

(i) FSTPP Employees' Union, Farakka, headed by Mr. Amlan Pandey and (ii) FSTPP Employees' Congress, Farakka, headed by

Mr. Laxmikanta Banerjee. The members of FSTPP Employees' Union are now divided into two groups. The differences are primarily due to differences in the political inclinations of the leaders. In Fact, there was no secrecy about the political patronization of FSTPP Workers' Union. The local M.L.A., Mr. Abul Hasnat Khan was the President of this union. Though he was not an employee of FSTPP, he was elected the President. Although an outsider, he often visits this plant for union activities. It is to be mentioned here that there are too many restrictions about entry into this power plant by an outsider. But for Mr. Khan, there was not much difficulty in continuing with his Union activities and repeated visits to the power plant.

The Supervisors' Association is exclusively for the Supervisors of this power plant. It was reported that there were Supervisors' Association in every plant of NTPC. There is a close connection among the Associations between plants. The Executives' Association, on the other hand, is exclusively for the executives of this power plant. There are, nevertheless, Executives' Association in every plant of NTPC.

The Supervisors' Association of this power plant was formed in the year 1983 and the Executives' Association was formed in the year 1984. All the Supervisors are the members of Supervisors' Association and all the Executives are the members of Executives' Association.

Supervisors' Association and Executives' Association are non-political bodies. But members have keen interest in politics and many of the members of these two associations indulge in political activities (which is not formally open but is only an open secret).

It is to be mentioned here that there are more than 8000 contract labours who are working under different contractors. Out of these, about 1000 labourers are permanent and the rest are temporary. The permanent are so in the sense that the works of their respective contractors are permanent.

Actually the contract works of NTPC as well as FSTPP may be divided into two parts : These are (i) Temporary Contract Works - construction is under this category. (ii) Running contract works — Repairing works, Canteen etc are under this category.

The workers works under the first category are known as temporary workers. Their works will continue till the completion of the construction works of the project. After completion the construction works, the contractors may give them opportunity of works to other new projects if available. Generally this scope is for the well mannered and skilled workers.

On the other hand, running works should continue upto the continuation of NTPC. Those who work into this category are known as permanent workers.

The contractors may change from year to year but the workers under these contractors continue. Due to this, there is a sense of permanency in their jobs. There is an agreement between the Union (of these Contractors' workers) leaders and FSTPP management that these workers should continue their works. Their salary and other benefits are also decided upon by the management. The contractors should obey this decision. The temporary workers are mainly engaged in construction sites.

The leftist union of these temporary workers is called Paschim Banga Nirman Karmi Union, Farakka Unit. Since the construction work varies from time to time, the number of workers also varies and due to this the number of members of the union also varies from time to time. Mr. Abul Hasnat Khan (local M.L.A.) was the Secretary of this Union for a long time. At the time of field investigation, as already stated, he was the President of this Union. Regarding remuneration and other benefits of the workers, the workers and the Union leaders generally negotiate with the contractors.

The leftist Union of the first category i.e. of permanent contract labourers is 'Farakka Tapbidyut Thikadar Mazdur Union',

Mr. Khan was the Secretary of this Union the number of members of which was about 700.

A Union leader (Mainul Haque) here also functioned as a contractor. As a result, people working under him enjoy no benefits of Union activities, despite the fact that the Union formally exists there.

Workers' Attitude Toward Unions and Associations:

At the time of filling out the questionnaire, most of the workers highlighted positive attributes to the Unions/Associations and the leaders. But the same workers demonstrated apathy or negative attitude toward Unions/Associations during latter discussions. In response to a question "What role the union leaders play for the development of the power project and of its employees?", one of the workers reacted, "Please find out".

As already mentioned, there was a clash between the Executives and Supervisors vs. workers. One of the Executives (member of Executives' Association) mentioned, "Workers' Union is not working for upliftment of the project and is only busy for satisfying every desire of its members (of the particular union) whether the same is legal or illegal. Supervisors' Association is also working in the same fashion. Executives' Association is working both for the upliftment of the project and for the employees.

Union leaders are anxious for the development of its members (members for the particular union) only and not for the project as a whole. They are mostly working for the fulfilment of unfair demands of its members.

It has been observed that practically no union/association were working for the overall benefit of the project. The Executives' Association was interested to get more facilities from the authorities. They were least bother whether their demands were legal. Examples may be produced regarding the allotment of quarters. The same type of observation was there for the supervisors association and workers union.

It was observed that the union leaders (whether it is executives association or supervisors' association or workers' Union) were more interested to pass their time by enjoyment but less interested to do their works. The author observed that a number of leaders were ~~indifferent~~ about duty hours and even to relaxing in their respective quarters during duty hours. That's why it may be concluded that the respondent appear to be highly committed to the executives' association and has a negative opinion about the Supervisors and workers.

A worker (member of FSTPP Workers' Union, CITU) reported that "Activity of CITU and of Supervisors' Association is for the benefit of common employees and the plant. The activity of

Executives' Association is exclusively for their members".

This suggests that the respondent was politically motivated. Instead of FSTPP Workers' Union and FSTPP Employees' Union, he wanted to say about CITU and INTUC respectively. According to him, his Union (CITU) was only doing works for the benefit of the employees but not the others. He did not hesitate to refer to the clash between the workers and executives.

In general, every Union leader was eager to say or demonstrate that his Union has been engaged for the benefit of the employees and the plant but alleged that the other unions were doing nothing. They were puppets of the management. Some of the observations the author made are noted herein this context.

Many members and leaders of FSTPP Workers' Union remarked the present investigator that the FSTPP Employees' Union was established by the then Cabinet Minister A.B.A. Gani Khan Chaudhury. Since he was the minister of power at that time, he wanted that the employees might be under the management by the help of the said Employees' Union. According to their version, since the time of establishment of FSTPP Employees' Union, they were working on behalf of the management but not for the workers. They also added that since Congress Government is in Delhi, the said union is still continuing such type of activities. The similar statement was made by the members and leaders of the FSTPP Sramik Union.

On the other hand, the members and leaders of FSTPP Employees' Union told that the works of FSTPP Workers' Union is harmful for the project and for the workers. According to them leaders of FSTPP Workers' Union are highly political motivated and they talk much but not work at all. They also added that these leaders always try to achieve something for their personal benefit. Many respondents told the present author that the leaders of FSTPP Workers' Union was trying to destroy the rythm of work among the employees.

This suggests that the interrelation of the members of different Unions and Associations was not smooth. Most of the members of all Unions/Associations wanted to say/show that the Executives' Association was a part of the management. They work as a part of the management's organization. Most of the workers had grievances against the executives. In order to demonstrate this grievance, the workers merged with the supervisors. During field investigation of the author there was a combined protest rally of the workers and supervisors in the month of December, 1989.

The relationship between the leaders of various Unions/Associations was apparently smooth though in public they alleged each other for their interest. Some of the facts regarding this are given below:

Members and leaders of FSTPP workers' Union remarked that the works of FSTPP Employees' Union was continuing on behalf of

the management. Similar statement was by the members and leaders of the FSTPP Sramik Union. On the other hand, members and leaders of the FSTPP employees' union blamed the FSTPP workers' union that they were trying to destroy the rythm of work among the employees. These remarks shows the political interest of the unions.

All the three unions with the Supervisors' Association remarked that the activities of Executives' Association was on behalf of the management's organization. This remarks reflects the grievance of non-executive staff against the executives.

Members of Executives' Association remarked that the activities of the workers' union and Supervisors' Association was not for the benefit of the plant but for the narrow interest of the members. This remarks reflects the grievance of Supervisors against the subordinates.

The following tables (Tables 6:1 and 6:2) show the workers' attituce towards own Union and Association and notion about the other Unions and Associations.

Table 6:1
 Workers' Attitude Toward Unions/Associations
 (among the respondents)

Name of the Union/ Association	No. of members whose attitude towards their own Union/Association is			
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No comments
FSTPP Employees' Union	48	35	35	118
FSTPP Workers' Union	51	44	31	126
FSTPP Sramik Union	18	08	04	30
Supervisors Association	43	32	22	97
Executives' Association	22	10	07	39
Total	182	129	99	410

Table 6:2
 Attitude of the Union/Association Members
 Toward other Union/Association Members
 (among the respondents)

Name of the Union/ Association	No. of members whose attitude towards the other Union is			
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No comments
FSTPP Employees' Union	30	37	09	76
FSTPP Workers' Union	29	108	14	151
FSTPP Sramik Union	06	26	02	34
Supervisors' Association	21	62	16	99
Executives' Association	11	30	09	50
Total	97	263	50	410

It may be mentioned here that the activities of the FSTPP employees' union were started under direct patronization of the management. It was reported that the then management wanted to keep the workers within their own fold and hence patronized the workers to form the first Workers' Union in this power plant. One important point is that Mr. A.B.A. Gani Khan Chaudhury was the Cabinet Minister of power and energy at that time. Mr. Chaudhury is from Malda District. The first union was affiliated by INTUC. Since INTUC is closely related with Indian National Congress and since Mr. Chaudhury was a popular Congress leader of the locality at that time, he might initiate to form the union.

It was observed that the FSTPP Employees' Union (INTUC) and FSTPP Workers' Union (CITU) were taking active part in different functions of the management. It was reported that the Unions were negotiating only in the case of demand-based activities. It is certainly true that most of the Union works in West Bengal as well as India are basically demand-based. Higher salary, higher bonus, higher D.A., more facilities are their main demands. The Union leaders are least interested in promoting creative role of the workers.

It was observed that the personal relations among the employees were rather very formal. The relations of workers were centering around the workers and relations of executives were mainly restricted to the executives. A few bachelors were

exceptions in this respect. The officers vis-a-vis the workers were maintaining a distance inside and outside the plant. In most cases, this is also true for the families of the employees.

Workers were taking the Unions/Associations as good protective platforms. They were enrolling themselves as members only for the protection. The Union leaders and a few employees had active participation in the Union/Association function. They are interested to cultivating relationship (formal as well as informal) among the departmental colleagues. Most of the Union/Association members expect something from the Union/Association. One of the high officials of the Personnel Department told the present investigator, "If I face any problem, this Association (executive association) would help me". According to him, the Association is nothing but a problem solving organization for him.

Another high official of the same Department reacted as follows:

"Since most of the Union as well as Association leaders are not exposed to industrial climate, they are unaware of how an Union/Association can be run without clash of rights with the management. As a result, to fulfil their demands they resort to use of muscle power".

This power station is not an exception in this respect. They are quite in tune with the trade union activity which is going on to the other private/public sector organizations in West Bengal.

At present in West Bengal (in other parts of India also), many of the trade union workers are getting more salary, more D.A. and other facilities compared to other sections of the working class.... Freedom of the working class is not the aim of the present trade union activities. It's aim is to acquire some special facilities and to manage the 'permanency of the service'..... Leadership is a profession or career to conduct this type of unionism. It is also a business like the pleading (Bhattacharya , 1986 : 51).

It should be noted here that most of the trade union activities in West Bengal are guided by the political leaders (not by trade union leaders) and due to this most of the union movements are going on for the political interest but not for the interest of the working class and industries. The trade union activity in the Farakka Super Thermal Power Project is not an exception in this respect. It should be mentioned here that though the FSTPP is at the top to produce electricity in West Bengal but it is not upto the level to the other power plants of NTPC. So many respondents mentioned that narrow trade union activities are liable for this.

Attitude of Workers Toward Union/Association Leaders :

Union/Association leaders are playing an important role in industries/organizations. They don't have the role in the Union works only but the administration, production etc. are also dependent upon them. A true leader will also make such informal and individual relations with the workers/employees by which not only the employees but their family members also would accept him as a friend of their family. A leader should project such a type of image by which the employees should take suggestions not only for service but also for personal problems.

Many of today's leaders do not conform to this image (personal relation), workers attach a great deal of importance to their leaders and leadership (Ramaswamy, 1983 : 96).

Workers always want such leader(s) who will participate to major social, cultural and even family activities. Ramaswamy further wrote,

The availability of abundant leadership skills had led to the organization of community affairs along lines which closely resemble union organization. Workers believe that a leader is indispensable to planning and organization of any major activity (p. 98).

.It was observed in this power plant that the Union/ Association leaders had accepted the Union/Association works as a part of their job. They took this as duty rather than as social work. They demonstrated that they were busy and almost all the time were surrounded by some followers. This was a general picture whether he was a leader of leftist Union or otherwise.

. A leader of an Association was doing his Association works with some co-members in his office table during office hours. The Deputy Manager's chair was just beside him. No one was bothering him about this work. The leader does not want to spend his personal time for such activities. He rather preferred to spend his office-time for Union activities. Due to this mentality many employees do not work properly to this power plant. Specially this type of employees were observed more in the Personnel & Administration and Finance & Accounts section. The informants also informed about this. A Deputy General Manager remarked, ".... Even there is a CITU leader in this plant who did not type a single page in four years".

An interesting fact was that most of the Union/Association leaders were from the 'Personnel & Administration' Department. The General Secretary of FSTPP Employees' Union, the General Secretary of FSTPP Workers' Union, are all from the Personnel Department. It is to be mentioned here that there were only 99 employees (six percent) in this Department out of total strength of 1630 as in May 1989.

In some cases, the wives and other relatives of the Union leaders are in service (although several among them are not efficient). Union leaders are getting extra leave, bonus and such other benefits.

It is also needed to discuss about the attitude of Union members towards the union leaders. It was observed that many members were not satisfied with the union leaders due to their works. Many respondent remarked that the union and association leaders were interested to get personal benefit rather than collective benefit. Few of them told, "Union leaders are busy to manage special vehicle, wives' service and etc." This type of remarks, obviously indicates that there is no proper union activities in this power plant. Table 6:3 shows the attitude of union members towards their leaders.

Table 6:3

Attitude of Union members Toward their Leaders
(among the respondents)

Name of Union/ Association	A T T I T U D E			
	(No. of members with percentages)			
	Positive	Negative	No comments	Total
(i) FSTPP Employees' Union	55 (13.41)	37 (9.02)	24 (5.85)	116 (28.28)
(ii) FSTPP Workers Union	64 (15.61)	39 (9.51)	41 (10)	144 (35.12)
(iii) FSTPP Sramik Union	11 (2.68)	05 (1.22)	04 (0.98)	20 (4.88)
(iv) Supervisors' Association	38 (9.27)	24 (5.85)	33 (8.05)	95 (23.17)
(v) Executives' Association	18 (4.34)	09 (2.20)	08 (1.95)	35 (8.45)
Total	186 (45.36)	114 (27.80)	110 (26.83)	410 (100.00)

From the given table we observe that 45 percent of the members have shown positive attitude towards their Union leaders and 27.5 percent (among the respondent) have shown negative attitude towards their leaders.

Although there is a general notion that Trade Union activities of the private sector undertakings and public sector undertakings are quite different, but the characteristics appear almost similar in both the cases.

Study of social, cultural and religious life of the employees of an industry reflects the unity among the employees and the unity obviously influence the production. Due to this it is necessary to particularly highlight about the social and cultural life of the employees of ESTPP which has been attempted in the chapter that follows.