PREFACE

This booklet is a record of workers experience, their struggles on the issue of workplace safety and health.

It is commonly believed that workers are not bothered about their health, they are largely ignorant about the issues related to their workplace environment. It is a myth that "workers are careless and do not want to do anything to improve their working conditions". The propagation of this myth by the management and its allied institutions is with the intention to make workers and society believe this without being able to address the real issue.

These experiences narrated or written by the workers from different occupations is an effort in the direction of breaking such a myth. This effort is also in the direction of highlighting the unhealthy realities of work place for the wider attention of society.

The stories presented here are in the own words of these workers: translated of course, but not being edited at all to retain their individuality and unique style. This rawness of these experiences, we believe, must be allowed to be communicated to the readers, for such rawness alone could possibly startle us out of our lethargy and move us to sympathise with the thousands of such workers whose voices always remain unheard.

We are extremely thankful to everybody, specifically the workers, who helped in bringing out this booklet. We would also like to express our special thanks to Mr. Micky Patei who agreed to do the illustration for this book.

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Illustrations : Micky Patel

December 1992
~FOUNDATION STONE~
TO INAUGURATE
'HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY'
~RESIDENTIAL-CUM-COMMERCIAL
COMPLEX FOR THE ELITE~
DEDICATED TO THE VALOUR,
GLORY AND LOYALTY OF THE
THOUSANDS WHO SACRIFICED
THEIR LIVES IN A GAS LEAK
AT THIS SITE~

SHRIRAM.
My name is Jawahar Eknath Pardeshi. I am working in transport city as second fitter. I have been working here for the last seven years. Initially I was appointed as a labour. The officers do not take interest in solving the worker's problems. For these problems we have to approach the union. We cannot get a thing moved without union's help. We need several things i.e., there is water problem, lavatory problem. During the rainy season there is waist high flood here, yet the management orders us to continue with work. We try to reason thing out with the management but they are adamant ever with their orders. Then we have to approach the union, and the union, when it comes in, gives either a bandh or a strike call, and we follow. Then the officers say that we have invited the union with ulterior motives. Then follow the transfers to and fro of the workers.

The garage where we work undertakes repair of vehicles like the Garbage carriers, Ambulance matadors and Jeeps etc. What I mean to say is that all types of vehicles that are there in Bombay Municipality, are repaired here. The workman here repair Tata, Leyland, Matador, Jeep etc.—all makes of vehicles. But the workers do not get adequate facilities. Another problem is regarding leave facility. We are categorized as class IV employees as we come from the fourth category. On holidays we are called to work for emergency duty. What this emergency is, we the workers do not know properly. Suppose the officer tells us to report for emergency duty and perchance we reach there late, we are threatened to be served with memos or charge-sheets. Then purely out of fear we report for duty. But the officers for themselves have fabulous leave facilities. In case of Emergency officers too must be there on the work premises. When we tell them this, they say that their and our leave rules are different. Our Union too has raised this issue several times.

Sometimes the officers insist that we finish the work in hand the very day; whether we have got the necessary instruments or not they just do not bother.

Now for example we have 10-12 Leyland vehicles, their gear boxes have imported parts. We do not have the proper instruments to open them. For that we have to take help from outside. When the concerned officer was approached he simply said, 'Do what ever is possible'. The street urchins and lads sometimes run atop the cement shade of the workshop, this results in gaps and cracks in the roof. When we complain to
the officers that the roof is leaking then they say that repairing is a part of worker’s job. Though we are fitters and labourers yet they try to coerce us, threatening to charge-sheet us. Once a new recruit, on being threatened with punishment had to climb the rooftop. This man Runkhambe then fell down from there. There upon I told my officers that they must stop coercing our comrades. If a charge sheet has to be given then they should charge-sheet us about our work and nothing else. But these officers just refuse to heed us; they continue with the same practices.

When this man fell down we demanded that he should be admitted to the hospital but the management refused saying that this was no injury warranting hospitalisation. There we approached the union. We acted upon the union’s advice, then the concerned officer came to us and apologized. Even for small facilities which we are denied; for we have to approach the union. For example a mishap victim is entitled to special leave but it is not granted. The victim is asked to avail himself of his regular leave. For fear of loss of pay the injured worker foregoes leave and reports for work. There is for example the case of Mr. Khan, a driver. Once he was driving his vehicle into the garage, the passage on both sides was cluttered with iron rods belonging to the adjacent municipal workshop. One of these rods first pierced a tyre of the vehicle and then ran across Mr. Khan’s leg. I along with another fitter colleague brought a machine and cut the rod off at both the ends. The doctor at the hospital had tears in his eyes and was hesitant to treat him as he thought it was a risky case. As a last resort we had to close the garage. This made the doctor agreeable and he took the rod out of Mr. Khan’s leg and sent him home. Now there was an enormous iron ingot lying outside the gate. We demanded that it should be removed to clear the way. But the management refused to listen. Then they resorted to garage closure and it was removed.

There are two gates to our garage, the ‘In’ gate and the ‘Out’ gate. The management says that the ingot is too big to be kept inside. But we say that it should be placed after proper planning which means it should not come out again. If they do so things will be alright. That’s what we demand.
CHEER UP, YOUNG MAN!
WE ALL SUFFER
OCCUPATIONAL DISASTERS—
I SUFFER LOW BLOOD PRESSURE.
I work in a factory manufacturing paracetamol. This factory is situated in Nandesari. On 29th October I was in the general shift, on that day I and one other worker were assigned to the task of breaking slabs of PNCB into smaller pieces. Normally this task was assigned to the labourers supplied by the contractor. But due to some reason these contract labourers were not attending the work since last few days. We worked till the recess on this job. During the recess I felt some influence of gas. So I drank a bottle of soda and some lime which is provided by the factory. I felt better after this. After the recess we put 750 kilos of PNCB into the reactor. At 4.30 my shift was over and I went home. After the evening meals I fell asleep. But by 10 P.M. I started feeling some discomfort, I was feeling giddy, my senses were going numb, and I felt as if my veins were being stretched. There is no doctor or dispensary in our village. So at around 1.30 I went all alone to Ambail and woke up the doctor. I told him of my complaints. He gave me some oral pills but refused to give me an injection. I came back home, but I did not feel any relief. Next morning I had to report for work but simply could not get up. So I sent my brother with a leave application to the factory. My brother went to the factory and met the owner who gave him Rs. 25/- and told him that I should go to Baroda for medical treatment. My brother came back home around 5.30 p.m. It was already evening and no transport was available to go to Baroda. During the night my condition worsened. Next morning we boarded the 5 A.M. bus to Baroda and got myself admitted to the E.S.I. hospital. They gave me some glucose water intravenous. And sent my stool and urine for medical examination. They prescribed some drugs and discharged me from the hospital. I went to Nandesari to buy the medicines. On my way back home I met some of my co-workers. On the fourth day of falling sick I felt slightly better. Anyway I rested for another 2-3 days. Today is the 10th day, but I still feel weak, my appetite has gone down.

The labourers supplied by the contractor refuse to work only for this reason. The owner forces us to work on PNCB because the ‘Production must continue’. Even if we refuse to do this job nothing comes of it. When we ask him about the effects of PNCB he says ‘It does not cause any health problem. If you feel some discomfort drink a bottle of soda’. But this dose nothing to reduce our discomfort.

-Maganbhal
(Age 24 Years)

[The name of the worker has been changed to protect his identity]
ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, I OFFER APOLOGIES FOR THE GAS LEAK. THE BOARD HOWEVER, OFFERS TO MEET ALL YOUR HOSPITAL, FUNERAL AND CREMATION EXPENSES.
During 1981-82 I was working as a wireman in Modern Dyes, Nandesari. At present this unit has closed down. PNCB was used there also as a raw material. I was not aware of any side effects of this PNCB, but the workers used to complain of gastric discomfort. Anyone who complained of discomfort used to get a brutal beating from our supervisor, at times he would force them under a tap and forcibly pour water on them. We would watch this routine feeling helpless. One day I could not tolerate it, so I intervened and told the supervisor that he cannot beat the workers, he should instead give them medical attention. He started scolding me, who are you to advice me? Go and do your work later on he said to me you don’t understand anyway, there is no medical treatment for this. Beating is the best and only medicine! Once I went to a doctor and told him of the peculiar discomfort that the workers felt. He said that they must be working without having proper meals, so they should be given some tea-snacks when they feel discomfort. After that, I used to spend my own money and give the worker feeling discomfort some tea and light snacks. One day the supervisor also felt discomfort due to the exposure to PNCB. But troubles started after he went home. Therefore the company refused to give him any money for medical treatment. I went to see him at residence and brought up the topic of beating being the best medicine, he was really ashamed of himself and admitted his mistake.
Cheap labour and Cheaper Death:

GAS? dissentry? constipation?

There is one remedy - cheap and simple - Isabgul. Something which is effective on both dissentry and constipation.

This industry has flourished in North Gujarat. Unza is the largest market for Isabgul in the country. Unza is famous for jiru, Umlyarnate, Isabgul and of course its local MLA Mr. Chimabhai Patel.

The Isabgul Industry has been flourishing in this area for the last 100 years. It earns foreign exchange amounting to 40-50 crores every year. Therefore its a pampered Industry. Donot ask me about rates of profit. There are around 40 factories producing Isabgul. 2-3 thousand labourers toil there. Isabgul is like coconut. Nothing is a waste. Everything is useful, everything can be sold for a price and you can have huge profits. Isn’t it nice?

Isabgul is an agricultural produce. It is grown in the region of North Gujarat and some areas of Rajasthan bordering Gujarat. Every year the production is around 1 lakh tonnes, which comes to the market yards of Unza, Siddhapur, Patan, Visnagar, Palanpur, and Disa. After some process "sat-Isabgul" is manufactured. There are 30 factories in Siddhapur, Unza, 4 in Palanpur, one each in Lilachana and Bhandu. The process done in these factories is as under. First all the dust and stones are seperated from Isabgul and then polishing is done. Then it is crushed to seperate the white cover from the Isabgul seeds. The white cover is called sat-Isabgul, which is considered to be of highest quality. The seeds are washed again, this process is repeated seven times. The last produce is used as cattle-feed, which is known as Lali, Gaio or Khakho in the local language.

The condition of the labourers toiling in this flourishing industry is no better than that of bonded slaves. Wages are not paid according to the provisions of minimum wage Act. Even equal wage for equal work principle is not honoured, men workers are paid
Rs. 14 / a day while female workers are paid Rs. 13 / a day. The owners change the name of the factory every five years to remain outside purview of labour laws, the owner, the machinery, the site of factory and the labourers remain the same!

During the grinding, dust particles are generated, there are no exhaust fans or machines to remove these dust particles, especially the dust of khakho is very dangerous. Labourers fall sick due to constant exposure to the dust particles. They are admitted to the T.B. hospitals. But we believe that what they suffer from is not T.B. but some occupational health hazard, as their condition does not improve even after under going treatment for T.B., and they die a slow and painful death.

The places of work lack adequate light or clean air. The free floating, polluting dust particles make it difficult to see and breathe when the factory owners cannot provide healthy atmosphere to work in, to expect them to provide working environment which will boost the creativity of the workers is too much. The dust (Khakho) sticks on to the clothes, even after washing and the clothes become tight as if they have been starched. Khakho has turned everyone into Khokha.

The dust particles not only cause disease to the workers they also pollute the surrounding environment. The surrounding area of around 100 Meters becomes useless, nothing grows in it. If the land is so harmed what would be happening to the human organs especially the lungs.

These and other questions must be answered by the Govt. The workers are provided no medical aid nor are they subjected to periodic medical examination. They are not even informed of the possible hazards to their health. Workers of four factories have organised themselves. Will the factory inspectors take some notice? Will the Industrial hygiene Laboratory take some steps?

-Pradip Upadhya
Siddhapur
interested. Executive Director of 'BHEL' Shri Udipa was called to Ahmedabad and we had a meeting with him. He gave us some more information regarding the quality circle and taught us the techniques of information gathering and analysis. After that the AEC provided us with some space and we held weekly meetings.

Our main problem was that we had to spend too many hours toiling in the heat, dust and gases of the plant. Work related to whistle, burner, stocker were of this kind, and specially while working on the whistle we had greatest number of problems.

This whistle is used for high-level alarm. This whistle is placed on the drum, joints of which need treatment repairs. The plant has eight whistles and at least one would be in need of repairs. In case of any fault the operational state would isolate the whistle and then we would climb up to repair it and we would invariably suffer the oppressive heat and dust of the boiler. We would open the joints of the whistle and replace them with new ones but we would never bother about the size of the Gasket or of other technical details. This came out during our discussions. So we studied the original design of the whistle. While repairing the whistle we would have to try joints of different sizes. This used to take a lot of time, and if the joints did not fit properly we would be forced to carry out another round of repairs. While studying the original design of the whistle my co-worker K.M. Mistry had a brainwave. He suggested that we should make some modifications in the original design. And if these modifications are successful we would not need to try out size of pockings everytime. He suggested that we should place a locknut in the needle of the whistle. We got the necessary approval. And now things were so easy we could repair the whistle in only 5-10 minutes. Moreover what was a daily routine now required repairs every five-six months. The workers also got protection - and we did not have to suffer the heat & dust everyday. This success inspired us. Earlier there was no structure with which we could climb up to the Drum level, Hasman Shirke and I suggested that we should build a permanent platform. Once our suggestion was implemented, the problem of insulation coming out was solved automatically, we could also reduce the heatloss. Due to all these not only the productivity
increased but workers were relieved of the heat which they felt on their legs and midriff. We could now work with much less discomfort.

The next important problem was that of noise. The machines, fans and motors created a deafening noise. The noise created by the numerous steam leakages compounded the problem. There were hundreds of steam valves and the noise and heat made this job very tedious. We discussed this with the senior maintenance Engineer Shri M.B. Desai, who suggested that we should get superior quality packings. We procured the best quality glands made from graphite with help of 'BHEL'. We experimented this gland on the valve of the super-heater. The experiment was successful so we replaced all the glands with these superior quality ones. The problem of steam leakages went down and so did the noise with it. The running defects were much less now reducing the work load of the workers. Something which we had to do every 3-4 days, now is done once a year or year and a half.

After this success we applied ourselves to the problem of coalsuit pipes which were getting punctured frequently. These pipes are made through casting. From the punctured holes coal dust would come out causing lot of pollution. To stop this leakage we used to weld a M.S. metal piece on the pipes. This was not at all effective, a slight nudge would cause the welding to come apart. The repair and maintenance had to be carried out every 10-15 days, on top of all these the repairs had to be done when the plant was running, therefore the workers had to suffer the unbearable heat and coal dust.

There was also the constant danger of the worker getting burns. If none of these things worked we had to replace the pipe with a new one which meant an expenditure of 52,000 rupees. Therefore Pratapji and I suggested that instead of welding we should bolt a patch on the puncture. Our suggestion was accepted and the problem was solved. Instead of 10-15 days this patch lasts for more than two years. The workers were relieved of the unpleasant task for two years.

Another problem area was our boiler building. It's like a container, a huge container, totally sealed from all sides. Fresh air and sunlight were prohibited entry! so all the dust from the repairs we had to remove it from the boiler and bring it down. Naturally this glass would be very hot. So we had to use cloth and rags to hold it and bring it down. We could not grip it properly because of the rags. One of our workers suggested a slight change in the design. We placed handles on both sides of the glass, so we could grip it properly.
boiler gets collected in the building itself, which would get into the lungs of the workers. Everytime we had to do some repairs we were forced to take long extension cords with us, we would attach electric bulbs to it and then work, because other wise we would not be in a position to see the parts. Central Labour Institute had suggested that we remove a part of the building, making it possible to have some light and air. The management had turned down this suggestion. Shri Mistry and I took up this matter in our quality circle. We saw that the wind direction was from East to West, therefore we suggested that we should remove some tin-sheets on the west side. Our hope was that the wind blowing from East would take with itself the boiler dust. And it worked. So we removed west side sheets from all boiler buildings. The atmosphere there is now so clean that the workers even have their meals in the building! We also solved the problem of light. Enough sun-light filters in, therefore we do not have to use electric bulbs.

There was no facility to store spare machine parts and equipments in our plant. It used to just lie scattered on the floor. In case of any failure, the operation staff would start running around. They would trip over the machine part lying around causing injury to them. We discussed this problem in our quality circle. Laxmanji Thakor, Ram Prasad, Suthar and other workers suggested that these parts should be properly stacked, for this we needed stacks and cabinets. Each plant has lot of scrap material which is of no use to the factory. We decided to build the stacks using this scrap material. We did not have to persuade anyone nor did we need to take permission from superiors. We worked on this task during the recess time. Instead of going to the canteen we would get our tea to the plant. All of us worked together. Each one contributed their skills. Stacks were ready and we put all the spare parts and equipments in them. Now we could maintain proper stacks and more importantly we knew exactly where the parts that we needed were stored. Many of our problems were solved, even the sweeper could clean the plant with much more ease.

In the same manner we started solving problems. During one of our meetings some one mentioned the problems of gauge glass. The tube which is used to measure the water levels in the boiler is called the gauge glass. This unit weighs 55 kg. In case of same day we had a breakdown. As expected the chain fell on the pipe. Instead of the earlier 10-15 workers just one worker went up, changed the link and hauled up the chain. It was so easy! We welded pipes in every boiler. After this we have not had a single accident. Repairs which used to take 16-17 hours now take just 2-3 hours. We are very lucky to have Shri Mistry. He is not only the type of person who is always ready to help others, but he is also willing to teach others.
Rs. 14 / a day while female workers are paid Rs. 13 / a day. The owners change the name of the factory every five years to remain outside purview of labour laws, the owner, the machinery, the site of factory and the labourers remain the same!

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-Pradip Upadhya
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During 1983-84 we had filed a petition in the High Court bringing to their notice very severe health and occupational hazards. The court of Gujarat had directed the company to start a hygiene department within a period of 2 years. Now we had to wait for a period of two years. Meanwhile the union elections were announced, I joined the elections and contested for the post of the union president. I was hopeful that if elected as the union president I will be able to work more to safeguard the health of my fellow workers. Any way, I lost the election, but not my courage or determination.

Meanwhile Dr. Mishra was appointed as a consultant, a very enthusiastic person. Sometimes he would come up to drum level that is around 80 feet above the ground. Sometimes even the Managing Director would come for a round, giving an opportunity to exchange a few words with him. Once while talking to Dr. Mishra I pointed out that there is a lot of noise in the staff canteen due to pulling of chairs and tables. After long hours in the factory we go to the canteen to escape from all the noise and disturbance, and there also we encounter the same noise. I requested him to do something about it. He immediately took action. He got rubber flooring for the canteen, and put some plants etc. in the canteen. The noise was gone and the plants created a pleasant environment. This gesture was really encouraging, there was someone who was ready to listen to our problem and act on them. Now there was some hope. We felt that if we take a proper initiative some results would certainly emerge. Instead of preaching us that 'Don't pull chairs' he had acted and solved our problem. This was very encouraging.

After the writ petition in the High Court, a doctor with expertise in occupational health hazards was appointed. Policies regarding provision of safety equipments were changed. Before the equipments were given to us after a fixed interval of time, now whenever we rejected them, they were given to us. For example, working in the boilers we needed apron and hand gloves. Or while working in the water fetching unit, we
required rain-suits. These were given to us. After that regular medical check-up started. Some progress was being made, but the heat & dust and noise of the plant were the same!

Those were the months of the summer. We had to work on the drumwell. The outside temperature, was 45°-46°C the heat of the boiler was adding to our discomfort, the heat and perspiration use to wear us down very fast. Some how Dr. Mishra came to the place where we were working. I told him ‘Sir, what would be happening to our bodies in this heat?’ He responded by saying that yes, there is a problem, but this is a technical problem and I am not an expert on technical issues, you, yourself should think of a solution.’. I told him who will listen to us? I pointed out the insulation legging that had come out. I was about to complain, but suddenly my mind started to race fast. What caused this insulation legging to come out... if the legging was intact we would experience less heat. I noticed that the boiler drum had no ladder. So the workers had to put their feet on the valves to climb up, causing damage to the insulation legging. While repairing the whistle we need to put our feet on the pipes, causing damage to its legging. The original design of the boiler contains a ladder, but while the shutdown work is done engineers cut this ladder loose for their convenience. Even after the work completed they do not rejoin the ladder and forget about it. I was thinking about all this, was also thinking of pointing out to the supervisor that ladders should be rejoined. I could recollect all the accidents that had taken place because the ladder had been removed.

Many ideas were flashing in my mind, Dr. Mishra was still around. He continued - you don’t work properly. If you do a job properly you will not need to repeat it again and again... with these words he left, leaving me disturbed. What he said was true. We should accomplish the task perfectly so that we donot have to repeat it time and again. I discussed my ideas with co-workers. They were also interested. We applied our collective minds to the problem. We discussed the whistle and coalfeeder. We separated the incidents of maintenance and running defects, we discussed the numbers and cases of each incident.

We approached our superiors with some requests. He suggested that we should start a quality circle. We were also
interested. Executive Director of 'BHEL' Shri Udipa was called to Ahmedabad and we had a meeting with him. He gave us some more information regarding the quality circle and taught us the techniques of information gathering and analysis. After that the AEC provided us with some space and we held weekly meetings.

Our main problem was that we had to spend too many hours toiling in the heat, dust and gases of the plant. Work related to whistle, burner, stocker were of this kind, and specially while working on the whistle we had greatest number of problems.

This whistle is used for high-level alarm. This whistle is placed on the drum, joints of which need treatment repairs. The plant has eight whistles and at least one would be in need of repairs. In case of any fault the operational state would isolate the whistle and then we would climb up to repair it and we would invariably suffer the oppressive heat and dust of the boiler. We would open the joints of the whistle and replace them with new ones but we would never bother about the size of the Gasket or of other technical details. This came out during our discussions. So we studied the original design of the whistle. While repairing the whistle we would have to try joints of different sizes. This used to take a lot of time, and if the joints did not fit properly we would be forced to carry out another round of repairs. While studying the original design of the whistle my co-worker K.M. Mistry had a brainwave. He suggested that we should make some modifications in the original design. And if these modifications are successful we would not need to try out size of packings everytime. He suggested that we should place a locknut in the needle of the whistle. We got the necessary approval. And now things were so easy we could repair the whistle in only 5-10 minutes. Moreover what was a daily routine now required repairs every five-six months. The workers also got protection - and we did not have to suffer the heat & dust everyday. This success inspired us. Earlier there was no structure with which we could climb upto the Drum level, Hasman Shirke and I suggested that we should build a permanent platform. Once our suggestion was implemented, the problem of insulation coming out was solved automatically, we could also reduce the heatloss. Due to all these not only the productivity
increased but workers were relieved of the heat which they felt on their legs and midriff. We could now work with much less discomfort.

The next important problem was that of noise. The machines, fans and motors created a deafening noise. The noise created by the numerous steam leakages compounded the problem. There were hundreds of steam valves and the noise and heat made this job very tedious. We discussed this with the senior maintenance Engineer Shri M.B. Desai, who suggested that we should get superior quality packings. We procured the best quality glands made from graphite with help of "BHEL". We experimented this gland on the valve of the super-heater. The experiment was successful so we replaced all the glands with these superior quality ones. The problem of steam leakages went down and so did the noise with it. The running defects were much less now reducing the work load of the workers. Something which we had to do every 3-4 days, now is done once a year or year and a half.

After this success we applied ourselves to the problem of coal suit pipes which were getting punctured frequently. These pipes are made through casting. From the punctured holes coal dust would come out causing lot of pollution. To stop this leakage we used to weld a M.S. metal piece on the pipes. This was not at all effective, a slight nudge would cause the welding to come apart. The repair and maintenance had to be carried out every 10-15 days, on top of all these the repairs had to be done when the plant was running, therefore the workers had to suffer the unbearable heat and coal dust.

There was also the constant danger of the worker getting burns. If none of these things worked we had to replace the pipe with a new one which meant an expenditure of 52,000 rupees. Therefore Pratapji and I suggested that instead of welding we should bolt a patch on the puncture. Our suggestion was accepted and the problem was solved. Instead of 10-15 days this patch lasts for more than two years. The workers were relieved of the unpleasant task for two years.

Another problem area was our boiler building. It's like a container, a huge container, totally sealed from all sides. Fresh air and sunlight were prohibited entry so all the dust from the
boiler gets collected in the building itself, which would get into the lungs of the workers. Everytime we had to do some repairs we were forced to take long extension cords with us, we would attach electric bulbs to it and then work, because other wise we would not be in a position to see the parts. Central Labour Institute had suggested that we remove a part of the building, making it possible to have some light and air. The management had turned down this suggestion. Shri Mistry and I took up this matter in our quality circle. We saw that the wind direction was from East to West, therefore we suggested that we should remove some tin-sheets on the west side. Our hope was that the wind blowing from East would take with itself the boiler dust. And it worked. So we removed west side sheets from all boiler buildings. The atmosphere there is now so clean that the workers even have their meals in the building! We also solved the problem of light. Enough sun-light filters in, therefore we do not have to use electric bulbs.

There was no facility to store spare machine parts and equipments in our plant. It used to just lie scattered on the floor. In case of any failure, the operation staff would start running around. They would trip over the machine part lying around causing injury to them. We discussed this problem in our quality circle. Laxmanji Thakor, Ram Prasad, Suthar and other workers suggested that these parts should be properly stacked, for this we needed stacks and cabinets. Each plant has lot of scrap material which is of no use to the factory. We decided to build the stacks using this scrap material. We did not have to persuade anyone nor did we need to take permission from superiors. We worked on this task during the recess time. Instead of going to the canteen we would get our tea to the plant. All of us worked together. Each one contributed their skills. Stacks were ready and we put all the spare parts and equipments in them. Now we could maintain proper stacks and more importantly we knew exactly where the parts that we needed were stored. Many of our problems were solved, even the sweeper could clean the plant with much more ease.

In the same manner we started solving problems. During one of our meetings some one mentioned the problems of gauge glass. The tube which is used to measure the water levels in the boiler is called the gauge glass. This unit weighs 55 kg. In case of
repairs we had to remove it from the boiler and bring it down. Naturally this glass would be very hot. So we had to use cloth and rags to hold it and bring it down. We could not grip it properly because of the rags. One of our workers suggested a slight change in the design. We placed handles on both sides of the gauge glass. Our problem was solved we could remove and replace it very fast and without any danger.

We could notice that there were many accidents due to the safety valves. This was one task which caused us lot of discomfort. Everytime the joints start leaking we would have to place a packing and fill up the gap. But there was very little space in which we had to squeeze our selves and do the repairs. There was not even enough space to work with our equipments so the breakdowns were frequent. Everytime we had a shutdown it was due to this leakage! Our quality circle studied this problem. Earlier the space was of 12-14 inches, we increased the space to 36 inches, now we could work with which more ease, the problem was solved.

One day we had a very bad accident. Our friend R.V. Suthar was working on the Great Auto chain. Suddenly it snapped and fell on his shoulder. The shoulder was ripped apart and he was rushed to the civil hospital. 16 stiches were needed. We were really worried. If he had been working within the boiler when the chain broke down, his body would have been cut into small pieces. This chain is made from 121 great bars. Greatbar is made from casting, weighing upto 17 to 18 kilos. Added to this would be the weight of link, pin, split pin, taking the total weight upto 4 to 4.5 tonnes. There were a total 32 chains of this type, atleast one would breakdown every week. Once it breaks down it falls into the hopper. Until it is removed from the hopper we have to shut down the boiler. 10-15 workers would be needed for this job. 3 chain pullies were required to bring it out. Suthar’s accident opened our eyes. We discussed this problem in our quality circle. Someone suggested that before we start the repairs we should check on how old and used the chain is. Someone else suggested that we should place a lock on it. But the most practical suggestion was that we should weld a pipe below the chain so in case of a breakdown the chain would fall on to the pipe instead of falling in the hopper. We experimented this on one boiler. On the
same day we had a breakdown. As expected the chain fell on the pipe. Instead of the earlier 10-15 workers just one worker went up, changed the link and hauled up the chain. It was so easy! We welded pipes in every boiler. After this we have not had a single accident. Repairs which used to take 16-17 hours now take up only a few. Therefore now we produce more electricity, but the workers have lost their earnings from overtime!

Meanwhile the Managing Director came to know about our quality circle. He was very happy. He praised us. He promised to provide a special budget for our quality circle. He also insisted that such quality circles should be started in every department. But this had a very undesirable effect. The middle level management thought that this is an attack on them, their status, job and importance was at stake! In some other departments the management started to ‘enforce the order of the M.D.’ They started to use pressure on the workers to start quality circles. The workers were not interested. They felt that they were being forced to do things which they did not want to do. They did not respond. Meanwhile our union had put forward some demands before the management. The progress was unsatisfactory. Management was not really keen on negotiations. On the other hand, the quality circles were being given a special budget and encouragement. The union felt that their position and influence is being threatened.

A worker who was a member of the quality circle was getting a lot of respect from the management, while a union office bearer did not get the treatment that they deserve; so there was an incentive for workers to join the quality circle. But this was a threat to our unity. We cannot allow our unity to be threatened. Therefore we stopped the activities of the quality circles until the negotiations were over. In our task some officers like Shri Ramdan, U.M. Bhatt and V.D. Desal gave us full cooperation.
THE UNITED NATIONS SHOULD DECLARE AN INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE LUNG DISEASE.
I work in Bombay Municipal Corporation. My name is Arjun. We load carriages. When we load the garbage on to the carriages, we have breathing problems. We also have skin problems like rashes. Rashes and Tuberculosis are most common. So the job of a motor loader is very troublesome. He has to pick up garbage and load the carriages. Then we have to empty them in our dumping ground. There you have rotten fish, dead dogs or animals and all sorts of decaying filth. The mosquitoes there—they are called dang—bite us but there is no medical facility from the municipality’s side which can examine us. 90% of those who are safai karamcharis get diseases one way or the other. Somebody has skin problems while some other has diseases which cannot even be mentioned. They are very painful. When there are breathing problems we can not even speak. This is our experience as motorloader. Similarly I have experience of those who clean roads. We have to get up at five o’clock in the morning. We donot even get sufficient rest. It is also a mental torture. We are always tense, for we have to reach for attendance by 6.30 a.m. What will happen if we don’t? There is this tension. Our work gets over at 1.15 p.m. We reach home at 1.15. Even there we have troubles. We often have to visit a doctor. Even the cheapest doctor means we spend about Rs. 100/- to 125/-

So we chose to ignore small problems like rashes and bad odour. If we don’t have medicines, the trouble grows. Usually we have skin diseases and T.B. Amid all this tension, we have to wake up again early in the morning and go to what we call the house-gali—i.e. a gali or lane between two buildings. There we have to do the dirtiest of dirty work. Leakages of bathrooms flows onto streets and it is so filthy that an ordinary person puts his hand on his nose while passing through. And we have to work there, at least for an hour. We develop breathing troubles which even our doctor doesn’t understand. He just tells us that you have breathing troubles which will go on its own. Such things keep happening. We think the Municipality should get these checkups done. The union should tell the municipality that once in six months we should be
checked-up. We should know what disease we have and what not. But nothing of the sort happens. Because of these problems, particularly those who do such work, are marked absent the most. We call this absenteeism, Khara. Nobody has paid any attention as to why the prevalence of Khara. We have the highest T.B. level. The new diseases now are Cholera and Paralysis. These days we have a lot of paralysis patients among us. Safai workers suffer from this most. That is because we always work in filth and the insects and mosquitoes of this filth cause us all these types of illnesses. But the municipality pays no attention. Even when we go to the hospital there are no facilities for us. We should have separate beds, separate doctors, special arrangements and medicines. In the absence of all these things, ever since we join work, till we die, our condition remains like this. I believe all safai karamcharis in Bombay face a similar situation.

In the house galls the latrine pipes are usually decayed and the girder covers too are not there. On top of that people throw acid stones, coconuts etc. That is why our union has been demanding that they be given helmets, hand gloves and gum boots. But till date we have not got this facility. If at all, it has been given to a mere 10-15 out of 200 people. BMC is such a big corporation probably the biggest in India. It’s budget is also huge. But we have never heard of the minimum facilities to be provided and expenses incurred therein, being talked of till date. I am only class VIII passed and not so educated. But I cannot understand why despite being such a huge concern, the BMC cannot think of the Safai Karamcharis and their problems. Being a representative of the Union myself, I often keep going to the Commissioner though of course along with our Union. We discuss in meetings and they say a lot of things should be done for safai karamcharis but all in the air. The Government of India claims to have done away with the word ‘Bhangi’. The word probably has been done away with, but not the name Bhangi. Wherever we go we are addressed to as Bhangis. We feel even the Commissioner BMC secretly nurtures such feelings. The central government has brought out this new idea that the practice of carrying garbage on the head must be done away with. There is no such practice in Bombay, but the practice of house galls is of the same type—instead of
carrying on the head, it is carried by the hands. But it amounts to the same thing. The least that can be done is that shoes and helmets must be provided. I do the first work in house gaili, sweep the gaili, then collect the garbage. There is no idea of the area of the gaili. It could be 1500 square feet or 5000. This area between two buildings is just full of filth, broken pipes and dirty water and human excrement flowing out. Often such dirty water falls on our heads. Then there is the bari who follows me filling the basket with this collected filth. Then we take it together like this, all twenty four hours we just have garbage and filth around us. It sort of permanently sticks on our hands. Municipality should give some facilities—give soap, good chemical, so that at least the stench goes. But so far they have done nothing. On top of that the Municipality says the same thing always about safai Karamcharis that they do not work. Wherever you go this is what you hear. But who listens to our woes. For instance one of our colleagues went to house-gaili. Human excrement fell on him. There was not even any place to wash it. Being a bhangi, leave alone entering the building, he is not allowed even to stand near a shop. They wont say that you are a bhangi, but even today the hole in their eyes says just that. Now what can he do. There is no tap, nobody to give water. So he goes home to have a bath and comeback. This is then misunderstood. People misunderstand because it is their sanitation work that suffers. But what about our officers who sit in air-conditioned offices. They too, say the same thing. You ran away from here. We shall deduct one day’s wage. If we really do not work, they should do it. But the reality should be kept in mind and we should be given the facilities. That we do not get. These just do not happen. People hold big seminars, read newspapers and watch television. There all these people say so many things that should be done for safai karamcharis. Our leaders want to make India another America. But can’t the facilities for safai karamcharis that America has, be provided to us?
I wonder which is more immoral—child labour or bonded labour.
My name is Pandu Rao Bhauli Kamble. I came to work in Bombay Municipality Corporation, when I was just twelve years old. At that time I was employed as a "boy" The "boy" signifies a youngster engaged in cleaning up small sized sewer lines. These carry a mix of rain-water effluent-water from mills and urine. To do this job the boy has to enter into the sewer and do the scavenging at a bent posture. The dirty fluid is a mixture of urine, filth, acid oil effluent from the mills. When we come-out after completing the job, our entire body is generally covered with filth. Yet we do not get any facility to wash our body (Bodies). As a result our body remains covered with filth.

One day one of our friend got an idea to sit under the sun to dry the filth and then rub dry mud all over the body to clear it. By applying this dry mud we are able to clean our body.

We have to work neck deep in the gutter. These gutters are sometimes full of toxic gases. We are supposed to clean the gutter thoroughly before we come out. One has to cleanup 10-12 such gutters each day; all alone one has to do it. There is no help, this causes a lot of trouble. A 12-14 years old boy is expected to work in such tough and hazardous conditions. Small boy is preferred because it is rather impossible for a grown up man to enter into the gutter. It's entry-point is very small while downwards the hole measures 8-9 feet. Therefore grown-up men cannot enter it. Consequently they have to opt for a small man or a boy. So, such is the problem. Yes, we also get afflicted with skin diseases like Eczema, scabies. Sometimes our bodies get rubbed against the gutter walls. That causes scabies all over. Sometimes there is fungus infection compounded with Eczema. I myself have been a victim of such maladies. I consulted the doctor for treatment of "dhachkaram", dhachkaram means scabies. There were small scabs all over my body, particularly on my hands. I went to several good doctors but the cure proved elusive. Then I did a quaint thing. I took some joss-sticks and burnt, by & and by the scabs all over my body, with it. After this my scabs were gone. To no avail I had
taken all these medicines; by syring scabs my hands and body were cleansed.

For seven years, at a stretch, I have worked there. Whatever the degree of cold, heat or rain, we had to get into the pit, everyday. Children such as work here contact lot of diseases including T.B. A real danger lurks there. These workers are small in age and they have to lift out loads of filth from inside the gutter pit; as it should be cleaned thoroughly. The worker once inside looks like a rat. This work is very troublesome, that is what my experience tells me. That is all.

Thank you.
YOU USED UP ALL YOUR LEAVE FOR TREATMENT OF YOUR LAST OCCUPATIONAL CRISIS—NOW YOU HAVE THE AUDACITY TO ASK FOR MORE!
I am the Mate-cum-overseer (Mukadam) here, Gautam Kasare. First I will relate to you the difficulties that beset our job. How we work in filth and grime. I will tell what diseases one usually contacts through working in filth and grime. It can give the worker Tubercuosis. To ward it off we need medicines which our corporation (Bombay Municipal Corporation) never properly supplies us with. We are entitled to one month’s supply of medicines at one go. But they supply us with just nothing. Next thing, for protection against skin diseases that include leprosy too, we need hand-gloves. In the process of collecting garbage our hands get sears and wounds through broken glasses etc. Our hands develop scabs which can degenerate into disease. This disease is called ‘Maharog’ (Leprosy) here. The feet too can be affected in the manner aforesaid. Sometimes our friends neglect their wounds and sears believing they will heal just by themselves. In such cases what usually happens is that such a person after sometime finds the disease erupting all over his person.

Our job involves cleaning Bombay city’s filth. We have got shovels to pick the slush up and throw it into the carriage. This carriage then goes to Baigan Wadi, Deonar, to dump the filth. While operating this carriage our hands and feet are always bare, uncovered. This leads to cuts and scars. When we tell this the officials direct us to just run to the dispensary. All these things cause us lot of difficulties. Once I received a cut through a broken glass, later it developed puss, which started oozing. Then I had to take injections and was forced to take regular leave for one and a half months, as I was suffering acutely.

These grime mounds very often contain iron nails. Another sad thing is that while we are at work, people from their houses above pour water or acid, down below. This happens quite often. We had here a boy, Gopal. At that time I was an ad hoc worker. While we were at work in a street someone from above poured acid on Gopal. We brought him out of that street (the street behind two buildings) and took him to Sanjay
Hospital for treatment. After the treatment was over he returned to work. Thereupon, called a worker’s meeting where I demanded that this boy Gopal should be given special leave and the necessary medicines provided to him free of cost. We raised this issue vociferously. This facility is there. If a worker on duty is hurt he gets these facilities. We had raised this issue in 1963 and the B.M.C. said that they will grant all the facilities including leave. But their promises proved hollow. ‘You are ad hoc workers. We cannot give you these facilities. Do what ever your please,’ that is what they tell us.

We have got a Union. We relate our problems to our leaders and request them to convey our grieveances further to senior leaders. Our leaders forward these demands and we get the facilities.

Previously I was a labourer for ten years, continuously. After that I was interviewed and promoted as Mate-overseer in this ward. As a mate I am allotted six labourers whom I have to guide to discharge their duties. Sometimes we demonstrate the way they should position their limbs for doing a particular piece of work. We tell them that if they receive an injury during their work, necessary medical help shall reach them. And further union level action will follow. ‘Why do I tell all these things to the workers? I do so because I am a Union Worker. I tell them when I am around no one should get scared. I am Gautam Mukadam, as long as I am there you should fear none’. After all this I accompany them to Deonar.

In Deonar we are subjected to a lot of atrocities by ‘hatta collectors’ (Goondas). Our labour is not allowed to enter when they do this to us we ask them the reason and explain that it is part of duty to ‘reach inside, falling which we will be marked absent, even charge sheeted. I have explained it in writing to the authorities that we are being subjected to two-pronged repression. On one side we face the officers and on the other we are troubled by the Goondas. With all this we will die. You must devise some strategy to survive. They did promise to provide police protection there, for us. But nothing so far has materialized. The labour is fearful of going there. Workers belonging to our ward do not want to go there. On all the occasions when they had gone there the labourers were
threatend with violence by the inhabitants. If we question them 'why so' the Goondas simply say 'you are not supposed to come here. Have'nt we told you so!'

Recently there was an incident near Mahalaxmi. A labour, was working in the sewer. This man fell down while filling garbage in the carriage and broke both his legs and one arm. After this incident when he met me I enquired about the mishap. He told me, that he met with this accident on the 23rd. I asked him to apply for special leave on this account, leaving the regular leave account aside.

But that boy is just afraid that applying for special leave might cause his regular salary to be paid late. I talked with him that it was alright if he receives his salary a bit late. He should not forego his Right. As it was incumbent upon B.M.C. to provide special leave to the workers hurt 'on duty'. I have asked him to come to the union office. There we would sit and send a detailed letter to the Municipality. You will definitely get your salary, as usual. That's all I have to say.
As Chief Executive Officer
I bring my personal
apologies for the tragedy.
I have personally appointed
a Concern Committee
to look into your
request for amputation.
I, Dalal Dama - from Madras have been working in the sewer department since 9th January 1981. I got this job because of my father who was a diver and required to work 30-40 feet inside the water. Labourers are not supposed to work in more than 2-3 feet of water according to the rules and regulations laid down by the municipality. Divers are called when sewer is choked at points which may be due to dead bodies, stones or things like that. The officers don’t help and cooperate in inspite of various problems and difficulties that we face and live in. About six months back when I was unable to walk due to paralysis only my incharge and my labour friends helped me. I was paralysed while fixing roller inside the gutter my back ached and my legs too, but the officers didn’t help. I remained sick for three months. I have children too and I spent my days in great trouble but the officers remained aloof and didn’t help. Without help of my labour friends and incharge I wouldn’t have stayed alive. This is all I have to say.
I Shankar Maruti, joined Municipal's main sewer department in Oct. 1975. I didn't know about sewer work, but being a daily wage worker with no work, we were sent here. But after coming here we faced a lot of difficulties as we worked 30-35 feet underground and used to take out around 60-100 drums of mud. Inside the gutter lots of gases, dirty water from flats and companies gets mixed and pass through the municipal's line. Due to faulty connections in the gutter this dirty water used to fall on our body which resulted in severe itching all over the body due to fungal infection. As the main line is on the road, we have to work during the night only, as it can not be closed during the day because of traffic. Due to working in night every day we suffered from indigestion, irritation in eye, and swelling all over the body. This job is full of problems.
I, Hasanmuddin Kaji, work in the sewer department of the B.M.C. (Bombay Municipal Corporation), which looks after the main line of the municipal sewerage. I joined this department in 1976. I, together with other men, have to work 20-25 feet inside the gutter, in the drainage department. Inside the gutter there are 19-20 types of gases which cause breathing problems. At times, we have to take out the dirty mud from the gutter. From time to time we come out to inhale fresh air. We are required to work mostly during night hours since there is a lot of traffic otherwise. I am doing this night duty since 19-20 years. Most of us have eye sight problems, which is further increased by working at night. Sometimes there is pain in our chest. Our shoulders, legs and in fact the whole body aches, usually.

In spite of the fact that we work at night we get just one torch, the light of which is inadequate. Sometimes, when we have to fix the machine wheel, in the gutter, we don’t use the light because then the filth inside is visible - and the very sight of it is terrible. Once, while working inside, acidic water from the mill rushed in and burnt my leg, also my body started itching. Later I realised that my skin had been burnt. My in-charge took me to the hospital. I returned to duty after some days.
My name is Ashok Kadam and I joined the main sewer department of the municipality in 1979. I was recruited in damage department in 1977, but due to lack of work we used to be idle for 4 to 8 months. Then we went to the labour office in Bandra, subsequently we were sent to main sewer department. At the time of joining this department, I was very scared of main sewer, as people used to say that it is too scary when you enter the sewer. Well it's a situation to be afraid of because we were required to work underground around 50-100 feet. There used to be two of us, one used to fill the drum and other used to pull it. Person who used to work inside had to come out frequently as it was too suffocating inside. One of our fellow worker was Ramachandra Kamble.

Previously in municipal department we used to get work for eight months and used to sit at home for the rest of four months. At that time everyone worked very hard in order to get work for 12 months. We had to take help of union members in order to get our demand accepted which resulted in a big fight over this issue. When I was new in this department, I was informed that there is a person who did very fine work for the union but later on due to some problem in the family he could not work efficiently for the Union. Then I thought even if we face problems, we could form a Union for fellow labourers in order to get work for 12 months.

Since 1979, I have seen that in this department at least in a year or two someone's wife deserts him because we constantly do night duty for many years and on top of that some of us suffer from T.B and Skin Infections.

With all these problems, we thought if our women run away then what is the point in working. Every body started blaming the union, then in our ward it was decided that as union is not going to do any thing in this matter, we should form our own union. Some of my fellow workers said that they will join another union, on which I told them that which ever union they join, running around has to be done by us in order to get this job done. If we don't work hard for this issue no union can be successful, so we should be prepared for hard work. Then few of my colleagues said that they will join another union. On this I told them that, I have no faith in this union but if they form any other
union I will be ready to join them. Then we formed a Samiti and named it as 'Main Sewer Sangharsh Samiti'. When we wanted to speak to officials regarding the problems of workers, they refused to talk to us saying, they don't recognise us as a union but we can talk to them as workers. Then we spoke to few of our friends who suggested that if we want to make a Union, first we should speak to our old Union as it is a very big organisation. They told us that after all we belonged to this Union. They also enquired whether we had any faith on the Union or not. We replied that we had. At last it was decided that first of all we should meet Mr. Mahabal Shetty, the secretary of Bombay Municipal Union and place our charter of demands before him. We had decided that if we found this Union reluctant to our problems, we would contact some other Union. I met with Mr. Shetty and told him that although we had not been paying the levy of the Union for the last three months, I along with all of my fellow workers, facing the same problem, wanted to know the exact stand of the Union, whether it was really interested in raising the issue of our problem of night shift or not. Mr. Shetty said that provided we could bring back the old position of the Union organisation in our ward, only then he would consider the issue. I assured him about that and about regular payment of levy by all the workers of my ward, but our problem must be solved. Then the Union agreed to raise our demands and only then all the things happened.

It was at the time, when a research work was going on about the health of sewer workers, that I said on behalf of the Union that while entering into a gutter, sewer workers have to face several types of persons gases. In fact once when I entered into a gutter one side of my hair was burnt. Many times due to the affects of the gases in the gutter, workers develop such diseases about which they do not tell others out of shame. Many workers are afraid of being immolated if they disclose their disease. I am a healthy man, but whenever I enter into a gutter I feel my throat choking. Think about those who are not so healthy and strong as I am. So there is a need to do something for the health of sewer workers and we have decided to leave no stone unturned to draw the attention of concerned authorities.
My name is Manohar Kashl Ram. I am the Vice President of Municipal Workers Union, presently located in the Municipal Corporation Press Building. I have been working here for the last 25 years. Our press was started in the year 1935. At that time the press was small. But after all these years it has grown very big. There are at least 500 workmen and together with the officers and others the number adds up to 600. The work here runs in two shifts. The printing and stationery requirements of all the municipality departments is being fulfilled from here. Be it printing, binding or some miscellaneous articles, we supply all. We have got three departments, Mono-casting, Comparing and Printing and Binding. All these things are done here. In the Casting department, the production process involves several metals and chemicals. These chemicals are very dangerous and affect the veins of our fingers. The nails of our fingers peel off on their own. The white metal used here is kept at high temperature and hence it is really hot. If it drops on some parts of our body it pierces the flesh four to five inches deep. There are no safety systems here to date. In the composing department, composing is done by hand. We have metal there, to which some chemicals are added, manually. We do not get even gloves to protect our hands. The medical check-up that was being done previously has now been stopped. And we raised this issue of workers health & safety and think that a yearly checkup for each worker is a must.

For example in the Casting department metal sometimes drops on worker's limbs. The hot metal furnace that we have got here, spurts like a fountain if even a small quantity of water drops into it. We have to pour water and white metal together for casting. Even the slightest spill over of water causes metal blast, resulting in burns for the workmen standing nearby.

We had requested the factory inspector to do something for protection must be provided to visit the premises in this regard, both individually and at the union level, but nothing significant took place and we are yet to see concrete results.

The story is identical in the composing department. The printing ink that we get now is not as good as the ink we used to get previously. It contains chemicals that are harmful to health. Also, we do not get anything to cleanse the residual ink from our
body though previously soap was provided. We took up this issue in the Grievances Committee meeting, stating that we need a place to wash. When the workmen come here they change into uniform but his normal dress keeps lying around for want of a proper closet. So this dress too gets soaked with ink, grime and dust. And we carry this spoiled dress back to our place. Toilet and bathroom should be cleaned properly daily but it usually remains very dirty exposing us to lots of diseases. During the annual medical check-up the 'Doctor' says in his report that this should be done here, that should be provided here, but nothing happens.

We in fact, hate causing losses in production by resorting to strike, therefore, we are keeping silent. The head-load worker has to carry huge and heavy bundles—things like printing rolls etc. to several floors. This usually causes severe back problems. They sometimes have to be hospitalised. Both the union and the management have got the relevant records, but what do the officers do in such cases? They simply replace a with a new one worker in this hazardous area but refuse to change the hazardous practice that causes this problem. So after six months this new fellow too gets affected and is as usual replaced by another healthy one. This vicious circle just goes on.

In the beginning I was working here in the capacity of Junior-Boiler. Now I am a Senior Operator on automatic machine. On this automatic machine the problem of occupational-health is not there. But the problem of accidents we have. The safety system of the machine usually fails to function effectively. It so happens that there are frequent replacements of the original (imported) machine parts with the Indigenous ones, as original parts are just not available. This leads to deficiency in machines' safety system. On an average we witness one accident every fortnight. The victim is given a month or two months leave. We had demanded a first aid box which they have provided us, but it unfortunately contains no medicines. Most of the times when we bring this to the management's notice they ask us to collect Rs. 50/- from the cashier and purchase the medicines from the market. That is how the system functions here.
AT MY LAST POLITICAL RALLY
I PROMISED YOU
UNSAFE DRINKING WATER.
TODAY, I PROMISE
YOU SAFE DRINKING WATER.
My name is Desai and I work as a ward boy in the T.B. Hospital. Here we have Cooks, Wardboys, Nurses, Doctors, Clerks, and Technicians and everybody works in their own way. Ward boy’s main job is to look after the patients, in the morning clean their beds & table, to give them water, tea, milk, biscuits, food. If the patient wants then to take them out wherever they want to go. If the patient falls or die then to report the incident to police. Like this, eight hours continuous work is involved along with cleaning of ward and washing the ward twice a week.

There is lot of problems working with the T.B. Patients as TB germ can enter your body through your breath and if a worker is weak he can contract this disease. Last year, in 1991 within 12 months, 40 out of 700 workers died due to TB. You see this hospital started in 1961 and at that time very few workers used to suffer from TB but nowadays due to laxity of management and short supply of essential items needed for maintaining cleanliness, people are afraid to work here and some get affected by this disease due to lack of cleanliness. In between due to false claim by govt. that TB has been eradicated and patient can be treated at home, TB has increased so much during last two-three years, that patients are dying at the double rate after coming to this hospital, then they used to be during past couple of years. As it is, lots of patients are coming from outside, all in very bad condition testing positive and without medicine. Maximum workers who died were either ward boys or sweepers who died because of these positive patients. TB patient is required to have a very healthy diet but management says that patients don’t require a healthy diet, which is totally baseless. Even a normal person can fall sick without a healthy diet. If these patients get good diet and medicines their health can improve greatly resulting in a clean and healthy atmosphere all around. This in turn will improve the condition of staff working here as they are affected by the increasing incidence of this disease.

A regular medical checkup of staff working here is required since no medical checkup was done for the last six years. Staff has been demanding regular checkups so that it can be ascertained that who is suffering from this disease because even if a
person suffers from TB, he is told that it is just common cold which comes with age. By the time it is realised, a person gets affected very badly and then doctors' tell him, that both lungs are damaged beyond repair. That's why people working in T.B. departments are required to be examined after every six months. Otherwise by the time one realises he or she dies of the disease. TB medicines are not available regularly, if one is there then another is not available. Due to this situation the disease keeps on worsening. Generally doctors prescribe medicines to be taken at regular intervals but due to unavailability, regular intake of medicines is not maintained thereby aggravating the problem. Corporation says that all medicines have been arranged for. Union says that medicines will be given free but generally it is seen that medicines supplied by corporation to hospitals run short of the actual requirement. When we raised this issue and complained to B.M.C., their Union discussed the matter on behalf of us. A new Medical Superintendent, Mrs. Adwani has joined recently, but alone even she could not start the supply of medicine, since adequate financial grant is not there. Thing is persons sitting in high positions don't want to work. If proper pressure is applied, then only grant can be made available. Second thing is, food given to patients here is also not of right quality. Previously mutton and fish used to be served but now it is stopped along with cheese, fruit, milk. Only two chapathis, dal, rice and vegetable is served. Milk is given but only 100 ml. That's all patients get to eat in a day. Result being their health deteriorates along with that of the staff. Even, cleanliness of patients is not maintained properly. Medicines are not given in a proper way resulting in increased suffering for all staff as well as patients. Because of all this every year around 40 staff members get affected by T.B. This is the real story of this T.B. Hospital.
The Executive Director regrets your loss of limb, and in deep sympathy, has declared a half day's holiday.
I have been working in the Kanti Cotton Mills, Surendra Nagar since September 1964. From 1964 to 1985, I worked as a weaver in the looms department. Since 1985, I have been working as a Receiver.

The looms generate unbearable noise. Three-four years ago I realised that my hearing ability has been impaired. I felt as if there was a ringing in my ears. In those days we did not have an E.S.I. unit, hence I went and consulted a private doctor. The doctor came to the conclusion that some earlier injury in my ears has caused this problem. In fact I never had any such injury. Anyway, I continued to take his medical advice. For six months I took the prescribed drugs spending nearly 700/800 rupees but without any results. I stopped the treatment and continued my work. By April 1989 an E.S.I. unit opened in our locality and I started my treatment again.

During the year 1989, 3 of our workers died in a short span of time due to different diseases. In that context our workers union, organised a programme ‘Vyavsayik Swastha Suraksha Mandal’ (occupational health hazards prevention committee). During that programme we were informed of different occupational health hazards. Our union leaders informed me after sometime of this programme that I can claim compensation for the damage caused to my hearing ability.

This was a useful piece of information, therefore I contacted the doctor in charge of the E.S.I. unit with Ashokbhai. The doctor informed us that he was not aware as to whether I could claim and successfully get compensation but I can get a hearing aid. He referred my case to E.S.I. hospital, Bapunagar, Ahmedabad. There I was given medical treatment and they gave me medicines for 15 days. 3 or 4 times such courses of 15 days each were given to me. It did nothing to improve my situation. Therefore we wrote to the Baroda based ‘Vyavsayik Swastha Suraksha Mandal’ for guidance. They answered our letter and with the same letter we contacted the Bapunagar E.S.I. hospital. The doctor asked me certain questions and we talked about conducting an
Audiography test. Since the Audiograph machine at Bapunagar hospital was out of order we were asked to go to the civil hospital, Ahmedabad to get the Audiography test done.

The Audiography test was done. I requested the doctor in-charge to give me a written report stating that the deafness was caused by the noise. The doctor said, I cannot write such things. We came back to Bapu Nagar with the results of the Audiography test. We repeated the same request before the doctor there. He also refused to give anything in writing. We contacted him 3 to 4 times with the same request. Ultimately on 14th July 1990 he gave us that report. The union appealed to the local office. The local office is at Dhangadhra, so I went to Dhangadhra on 16th July 1990.

On the first visit I could not meet the manager but managed to meet a clerk, who informed me that I am not eligible to get any compensation, as compensation is paid to only those who have been injured during some accident while on duty. After two days I and Ashok bhai went to Dhangadhra and met the Manager. The Manager also gave us the same answer and told us that I will have to create a false case and show that I was injured in an accident, if I wanted to claim some compensation and for that I will have to fill up form no. 16, which is not available at the local office. We did not want create a false case. We went to Ahmedabad to meet the Managing Director on the advice of the manager. The lawyer of our union also accompanied us. The Managing Director, directed us to some officer sitting ‘below’. We meant to meet that particular officer who told us that no such form was available there and we should contact the manager of the local office. We went back to Surendra Nagar and again contacted the manager at the local office and requested him to write a letter asking for the said form. We waited for about a month but failed to elicit any response from the office of the managing director. Therefore the union sent a written application to the managing director’s office asking for the said form, and also contacted the organisation at Baroda and requested them to guide us. The organisation gave us a copy of the form. Meanwhile the Managing Director’s office gave an answer that “kindly meet the local office manager at Dhangadhra”. We went to
Dhangadra, showed them the letter and asked for the forms. The manager went on long leave and some other person came in charge of that office. Despite frequent visits to Dhangadhra we did not succeed in getting a form. The Baroda based organisation sent us 10 forms which proved to be a great help. After that E.S.I. manager also managed to get some forms.

We filled the details in the form and submitted it to the local office on 7.10.90. We wanted to set an example, therefore we had decided that we will not give up inspite of all the difficulties. It was only due to such clarity and a sense of cause that we did not give up our efforts in sheer frustration. I was prepared for everything, for every eventuality.

Meanwhile, after looking at my audiograph report the E.S.I. doctor told me that I can get a hearing aid. So we obtained 3 quotations and sent them to E.S.I. office at Rajkot for approval. They sanctioned a machine costing Rs. 400/-. The entire formality took only 15 days to complete. I bought that machine with my own money. I sent the bill for the same (which was approved by the doctor in charge at civil hospital) to E.S.I. Rajkot for sanctioning the amount. They took nearly a month to pay back that amount. My hearing has improved a little due the machine, but it is troublesome to wear it for longer hours. After an hour or so of continous use it starts giving trouble. The battery cells also cost Rs. 95/-. My companion Langibhai Narayanbhai also picked a form and subsequently acquired a hearing aid. Other workers also showed interest in the machine; however there are still other workers whose hearing ability, has been impaired.

As of now I am waiting for the report of the special Medical Board which will decide on the percentage of handicap that I have.

—Govind Dergi
Surendra Nagar
I am working in a chemical plant which manufactures Nitrilo triacetic acid. In 1985, Housing of plant was in very bad shape, which required totally new flooring. Floor was full of pits ditches. Whenever we used to wash the plant, all these pits & ditches would be full of water. We had to clear up this water literally by hand from each ditch so that plant can be restarted. We all were fed-up of this absolutely unnecessary extra burden of work. We had requested the management many times for new floor but deaf ear was given to it. So, one day we all workers decided, not to clean up the water accumulated in the plant nor to wash or clean the floor. In four-five days the plant became so dirty and the plant was filled up with foul smell to such an extent that even our plant Incharge did not like to attend & sit in his place in the plant. This gave the result. Immediately decision was taken and within a week we had new flooring.

-Bhavsinh Bonia
Nandesari, Gujarat
I am working in Ashok Organic Ind. Ltd. Nandesari since last nine years. I am working in chilling plant. In this plant Gas compressor are run by huge motors. We have a chilling plant with total capacity of 350 tonnes. Apart from compressors we have pumps too. These units are continuously run for 24 hours. We operators of this plant, have to take readings every year as well as look after the plant.

Since all the machines we run simultaneously they result in high noise levels—which is disturbing, deafening, and fatiguing. Once I saw a pamphlet on our union noticeboard about noise. I read it with interest. At the end, I found that it was written by our union leader Mr. J.B. Patel. So I immediately went to him and complained that “you are doing lot of activities about safety outside but you do not pay any attention to the situation inside our company”. He replied, “I was waiting for you people to come forward with complaint. If you feel that the noise level is high you must give written complaint to the General Manager. He then helped me to draft the complaint, which I then submitted to the G.M. on 30/11/87. Later I heard that Mr. Patel was called on and was asked what he had wanted to do with the complaint. Mr. Patel advised the company to carry out the survey of noise level in all the departments. GM was scared about the resulting action by union. Mr. Patel assured him that since the Factories Act does not prescribe any threshold limit he should not worry about any legal action taken by union.

After long discussion and persuasions management was prepared to take up the survey. Who will do it, where is the meter were the questions? So, Mr. Patel suggested that he can help it borrow the meter from SOCLEEN, an NGO working for environmental awareness. Mr. Patel himself went and brought the meter. Our chief engineer and we all active union members went through all the plants. Except at a pulsating machine noise level was beyond 90 dB which is run occasionally (few hours in a day). In my plant it was about 78dB. The meter was returned to SOCLEEN ON 26/12/87. We sent the results of the survey to the Factory Inspector. Our union put forward a demand for sound proof cabin in our plant. During those days the union was negotiating on other demands too. Management prescribed the union to withdraw the demand for cabin. To win the other monetary demands, union had to sacrifice this demand.

-N.M. Panchal,
Nandesari
GUJARAT
I have been working in a Glass Factory since last 15 years. The factory produces coloured and plain sheet glasses of different sizes and variety. A special type of sand and stone is crushed, grinded and cleaned, then it is boiled in a furnace at very high temperature. The liquid that comes out after boiling is spread like a sheet and is cooled. This is what we call the Sheet Glass.

Have you noticed what happens when a glass breaks in a house? No member is allowed to move, while one member of the family collects tiny glass pieces so that no one gets injured. The injury caused by glass is quite deep and if a small invisible piece of glass enters your feet or any other part of your body, it causes severe pain and discomfort. Imagine our situation!

There is glass everywhere, we spend nearly eight hours everyday surrounded by glass of various sizes and types. And we work within the same situation for years together. At every step we encounter danger, of breaking a piece of glass, of stepping onto a piece or getting hurt by it. You can very well imagine the safety measures that one would require in such a work place. Let me tell you something about the safety measures that are provided to us.

In one of the departments of our factory we crush and ground glass. Your are all familiar with grinding and crushing of grain, but here we crush glass! The workers operating here are given handgloves made of cotton. When you handle glass wearing these cotton gloves they are invariably destroyed within a short time. They loose a pair of gloves every day, but the factory rules say that gloves shall be given once a week. So they work without gloves for the rest of the days. Not only that these gloves are not durable, they do not provide any protection to the hands above the wrists. When you grind something dust particles are bound to fly around, and remember we grind glass. The workers are not given any safety masks to prevent the glass particles from entering in their lungs. The powder also gets into their eyes but they have to work without
safety goggles as none are provided by the factory.

Even when the workers spit, their spit is full of glass particles! The glass sheets are brought from the plant to the crushing unit in a tractor. Labourers have to push the glass sheets from the factory with a hook, when the glass-sheet fall on the ground they invariably break causing injury on the feet of the workers. And yet they are not given any protective shoes. No worker in our factory gets protective shoes.

Now let us go to the packing department, where glass sheets of sizes 122" x 85" to 122" x 244" are packed in the wooden boxes. The glass sheets have to be handled with hands. The workers here are not even provided with cotton handgloves. They are given two sheets of rubber with which they protect their palms. The labourers have to be very careful, a slightest mistake or misjudgement on their part would surely result in an injury to their body. No protective gear is provided to them so their entire body is vulnerable to injury. Every month we have atleast 2 incidents of injury.

The situation in the cutting section is no better. They are given simple hand gloves reaching upto their wrists. Some years back the workers were given handgloves made of some sturdy material reaching upto their shoulders, there were also given an apron of the same material which provided protection to their chest, stomach and thighs. Since last 10 yrs. they have stopped giving these protective clothes so the worker is in constant danger of causing some serious injury to his body. Let's go to the machine department. Here the glass liquid is brought out from the furnace and spread on sheets to produce glass. The liquid that comes out has an average temperature of around 1400-1500°C., which has to be evenly spread using spades and hooks. The worker has be very careful about the evenness of the spread. the spades which they use become unbearably hot. The workers are given double layered cotton gloves, which are of no use at all. Earlier they were given gloves made of asbestos which did provide protection, but they are no longer given to the workers. As a result an average 2 to 3 workers suffer burns every week. Cold repair is even more dangerous where the workers have to remove the glass from the inner wall of the furnace. They have to get into the furnace and break the glass

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with a hand-drill. It is very obvious that glass flies everywhere when hand drill is used to break it. Last year a piece of glass fell into an eye of one of the workers. They are not given any safety glasses. The workers were enraged. The director promised the workers that company will spend whatever amount that is required to restore the eye-sight of the injured worker. The worker spent two months in the hospital but his eye was permanently damaged. The company paid the actual cost of the hospital stay, but paid nothing for the expenses incurred on special diet etc. So far, no compensation has been given to the worker. The worker requested that he should be transferred to other department and should be given the day shift only. Both the requests were turned down. He still gets into the furnace to hand drill the glass, and has to come to the factory for the night shift. He is doing the same task as before, and that too without any safety glasses. I am imagine his mental condition. While working in the furnace the danger that a glass brick might fall on one’s head is always present but no helmets are given to the workers.

The most dangerous unit in the factory is Batchhouse, where dolomite stones are crushed. The workers are not given any protective gear, not even hand gloves. The stones are crushed here but the workers have no protection from the dust, there are no exhaust fans even. And no wonder the highest mortality rate in the company is in this unit. Every year 3-4 workers die.

There is a lot that I can say about lack of protection to the workers and their health hazards. Here I have just touched upon the lack of protective, safety measures. If you still don’t believe me, come and visit our plant.

- Shailsh
On 29.7.1983, when the construction of the factory ‘Enfield India’ was going on at Ranipet, N. Arcot District, a wall 200 feet in length and 30 feet in height collapsed, killing 6 workers, including 3 women helpers, 1 male helper and 2 masons. This news which was reported in the newspapers was seen by the Union members and they undertook a spot study.

The study revealed, that ‘Enfield India Ltd’ was constructing a factory for the manufacture of motor cycles, and the contractor employed was Arunachalam & Co. Though there were engineers both from the principal employer and the contractor responsible for the site, the collapse was due to faulty design. The workers were drawn from different villages around ten miles from Ranipet. The women workers and male helpers were paid Rs. 6 & Rs. 8 respectively, much below the minimum wages. The victims were Rani, aged 18 years from Pullantagal village; Saroja, 16-years from Yedapalayam, Chinnaponnu, 15 years from Kare-colony; Vasudevan, 17 years from Ammu; Raja, 22 years (Mason) from Ammu who was newly married; Kupoan, 21 years (Mason) from Velan. After the accident, the workers had fled from the scene, and the RDO conducted an enquiry. The contractor had given Rs. 500 to the families of the deceased.

The Union members, traced the families of the deceased to their respective villages, got the workers who were witnesses to the accident together, collected the necessary documents and records and informed them of the various provision & their rights under the workman’s compensation Act. The contractor meanwhile gave another Rs. 1000/- for each family of the fatally wounded victims. Claim petitions were filed through the Ranipet Legal Aid Committee, with the help and able guidance of Mr. Raja, Secretary to the Tamil Nadu State Legal Aid Board and Compensation of Rs. 16,800 was paid to each of the families of the deceased women workers and Rs. 18,000 to the family of the male helper and Rs. 23,100 each to the families of the deceased masons. Petition award on the basis of the minimum wages has been filed at District Court.
This is again only one of the many many instances, where records might be available but the workers and their families are not aware of their rights and the provisions under the workmen’s Compensation Act.

Infact the Government of Tamilnadu has issued Orders stating that Rs. 10,000 be given to the families of the workers suffering fatal accidents in the construction industry. But there is not a single case where this G.O. has been implemented.

Hence it is very important that the workers become conscious of their rights and of the Provisions of the Workmen’s Compensation Act, Minimum wages Act, the Government orders issued from time to time, etc.
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, AT A VERY SPECIAL SESSION AND AT VERY SHORT NOTICE, HAS TAKEN AN UNPRECEDENTED AND SYMPATHETIC DECISION, TO OBSERVE TWO MINUTES’ SILENCE FOR THOSE WHO GAVE UP THEIR LIVES IN THE CAUSE OF A GAS LEAK.
I work with heavy water plant in Baroda. The heavy water plant at Baroda comes under the Department of Atomic Energy, Govt. of India.

Heavy water the main produce of this plant is used as moderator in atomic reactor, for electricity production. Heavy water is one of the main inputs in producing electricity through atomic energy.

Since the very beginning, this plant, built with French technology, had safety problems. The main reason for this lacunae was it’s ‘underdeveloped production technology’. Even in France, this production technology was in its experimental stage.

May be through helpful Indian officials the French company succeeded in securing all its dues while the plant was not able to produce even 30% of the production stipulated in the agreement.

In year 1977, after departure of French engineers, there was a massive blast in the plant. The blast was followed by a huge fire. The entire Baroda city got frightened due to the terrible noise of this blast.

The residents of neighbouring localities including workers of Gujrat State Fertilizer Corporation (G.S.F.C.) started fleeing the scene. The medical superintendent of Government hospital Baroda, made 150 beds available for casualty ward. Luckily there was no loss of life as there was no worker at blast site.

It took more than three years to repair the plant and loss worth crores of Rupees was incurred.

This accident proved that the management’s claim of safety of this plant was totally misplaced.

As always happens the management and officials refused to learn their lesson despite such a massive accident.
Once again the safety system designed specially for undertaking repairs was ignored when a pipeline under heavy pressure was allowed to be put under repair without depressurisation. As a result, the valve attached to pipe was blown off and the ensuing fire enveloped the workplace, culminated in death of two daily wagers; a supervisor too was maimed.

The management was reluctant to pay compensation to the bereaved families. This greatly agitated the workers who organised a Bandh and ‘gheraoed’ the General Manager. The union representatives were successful in forcing the management to grant the bereaved families a compensation of Rs. 20,000 each. The union submitted a detailed proposal for safety measures to the department and copies were also sent to the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission.

After this whenever there was any leakage of gas or any apprehension of fire or any other danger we approached the press to write about this.

It is ironical to note that despite two such massive accidents the management allowed to function a 600 K.G. heavy pressure ammonia process despite the continuous leakage. Similarly some small fire here and there was also a routine.

Ultimately the union representatives contacted the District Collector who by virtue of his official position also has to perform the duty of a factory inspector.

The union representatives updated the collector regarding the safety (or rather lack of it) aspect of this plant. Further he was requested to visit and personally evaluate the situation. The collector came along with the factory inspector and afterwards ordered the plant to stop functioning till full repairs were carried out. Simultaneously the union gave strike notice. Undertaking appropriate safety measures was one of the main demands of the union. Consequently a plant survey was undertaken and the plant was allowed to run only after completing the repair work.

The most notable outcome of this exercise was a policy decision by the management that if there is any leakage in heavy pressure unit, the plant will be started only after appropriate repairs.
The union succeeded in its struggle for plant safety.

Union representatives also tried to gain knowledge about statutorily applicable procedures. There were several stipulations that were being flouted.

For example, reactor column and pipe line should be hydro-tested every four years. In this test the pressure applied is 1.8 times more than the pressure during normal times. The union, in writing submitted to the department the details of damage suffered by the plant and a copy was forwarded to the Chairman Atomic Energy Commission.

A detailed draft on safety measures was prepared and presented to the High Powered Parliamentary committee; consequently this issue of safety measures was raised in the Indian Parliament. Due to these efforts the department ultimately gave a written assurance to arrange hydro test facilities in a given time-frame.

The synthetic gas (Hydrogen + Nitrogen mix, 75% + 25%) is compressed by heavy pressure compressor units of huge capacity. These units work day and night which causes heavy noise pollution. The union pressured the department to conduct a noise pollution survey. Along with this an Audiographic test for the concerned workers was also conducted. This survey revealed that noise pollution in the vicinity of the compressor machine was at 100 to 104 db. The factory act lays down the ceiling at 85-db. The union suggested to the management that the workers of compressor house should be provided sound proof cabin so that their exposure to very high frequency of noise is avoided. The department was more interested in workers using devises like ear-plug and earmuff. But limitation of and inconvenience caused by the use of these devises was brought to the notice of the management. Ultimately the department provided two cabins for the workers of compressor house, but the design of these cabins was faulty and they were not effective in keeping the noise outside. Union came to know that at other places the cabins installed are of much better quality and are much more effective in controlling the exposure to noise, as they were built with special technique. The union condemned the management for their callous attitude and demanded the
modification of these cabins. This demand in principle has been accepted and further action is being taken.

On 18th March 1988 another blast occurred subjecting the plant to huge losses and closure for four months, at a stretch. The union gave a detailed account of the mishap to press. Further a draft was submitted to the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission. He was requested not to allow the plant to restart in its present damaged state.

Two years ago a machine of German make was installed, which feeds the catalyst into the main reactor at 640 rg. pressure.

Around the beginning of year 1992 while the machine was on, a part of this machine came out, but its main motor kept running. With alacrity the operator switched the motor off and the plant was saved of an imminent mishap. Despite all this the management announced that the two damaged cylinders of the machine be isolated and the machine allowed to restart on remaining two intact cylinders.

The workers in the unit strongly opposed this decision and refused to operate the machine. They demanded an appraisal of the machine's functional safety before it was started again.

But the management was adamant with its decision and asked the foreman to restart the damaged machine. The workers approached the union leaders and informed them about the entire situation. Deliberation were held at high level where the union representatives gave a technical suggestion. Certain device was to be attached to the machine to automatically shut its electric supply off in the event of a cylinder or assembly part damage or a deflection in the stationary position of the machine by 5 mm or more so that mishap could be avoided.

The workers and its union representatives carried out a consistent struggle on the issues of work safety and workers health. There was stoppage of work, media exposure or legal action as the situation demanded.

The union raised environment related issues too. The waste
of Potassium extraction plant was burnt in an open pit. It exposed workers to metal fumes. The union demanded that this process be changed, consequently a closed system with a chimney, costing Rs. 6 lakhs was installed and pollution problem was partly solved.

During our continuous struggles it became clear that it was easier to negotiate with management on monetary issues. During deliberation on occupational health and safety measures the management tries to label us as ignorant of technicalities—they believe that this is the area of experts only. They allege that union people take up these matter as propaganda vehicles. But our experience in this regard suggests that if through constant efforts enough material is accumulated on these issues, the management is forced to recognise the importance, strength and legitimacy of the union.
YOU WORKERS, YOU'RE ALL THE SAME!
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOUR LUNGS—
YOU JUST SMOKE TOO MUCH,
DRINK TOO MUCH,
EAT TOO MUCH!
On reading an advertisement in the newspaper I applied for the job. I was interviewed thrice. During the interviews they asked me a lot of questions to check my knowledge of pesticides. I did not know much. But they did not provide me with much information during the interviews. After the interviews I was asked to go for medical examination. I was happy naturally! They did all types of checks, they didn't give me a report, but I was informed that I was fit for the job. I got the job, my pay was fixed at Rs. 700/-. I was appointed as supervisor.

This factory produces many pesticides.

When full capacity is utilised there are about 100 workers in the plant, otherwise 20-25. The factory had three shifts. Each labourer was a contract labourer.

Pesticides are in the form of powder and liquid. The powder form was packed in containers, this had to be done with hands, while liquids were packed in plastic bottles with machines. There were larger bottles with the capacity of 5-10 kg, also, which had to be filled manually. Two workers were required to operate the liquid-filling machine. They would fill the bottle and then place it on the conveyor. The bottles had no seals. While moving on the conveyor belt some liquid would spill over, at times bottles would fall. At least 3 to 4 bottles would fall in every shift. After this the bottles were cleaned and sealed. Those who were filling the powder in the containers were no better off. The powder dust would get into their system.

Those workers in charge of liquid filling are given a twin plastic face mask and disposable plastic hand gloves. They don't last for more than 2 to 3 hours. Once they are destroyed they would seldom get a new pair. While from among those working with powder some were being provided with a cap, while some with face shield. Once the plastic gloves are destroyed the workers had to use PVC hand gloves. But these are not at all comfortable. Therefore the workers would prefer to work without protection than use PVC gloves. The supervisor is not given enough plastic gloves before the start of the shift, he is told to distribute it among only those who are likely to be affected. Once they are destroyed the workers had to use the PVC gloves. Each worker did not have a pair, some would be lying in the plant, they would pick it up and use it. Each worker was given a separate face mask which they would wash with water after each shift. Those working with powder had a peculiar problem. The powder gets into the face mask, making it difficult to breathe so the worker preferred to work without any
protection. Moreover they had no protection on their hands, which would normally be full of powder. This powder causes itching sensation in the nose. So the workers would take their hand up to the nose each time they felt this sensation. In short, there was no part of their body which was not exposed to the powder. Headache was a common complaint, at times the workers would vomit. On an average there would be one or two such incidents every day. At least once a month some worker would require hospitalisation. The smell of chemicals cause headaches, vomit, sleepiness etc. The workers start complaining only after 15-10 minutes of their shift. But they keep working so the production is not affected. Some workers get fever and lose a day or a few days of wages.

Whenever some liquid falls on the worker he is asked to take a cold water bath. If that does not work he is given some oral pills. But no accident form is filled. Supervisor is strictly instructed that such things are not to be reported, no records are to be maintained.

If a worker complains of some uneasiness or discomfort he is presented before the superior officers. They might tell the worker to stop coming for work from the next day! Others are asked to go to the rest room.

The rest room is not a rest room at all. There are no beds, or mattresses. There are small wooden benches. It is not easy to sleep on them. Therefore the workers sleep on the floor. This room didn’t have a fan. Even drinking water was not available and the room had the same polluted atmosphere of the plant.

Contract labour is not subjected to medical check-up. Barring the supervisor/operator all others are contract labourers. Some workers were on contract for more than 3 years, they were forced to take a break after sometime. Every week a doctor would visit the plant and write prescriptions for the workers. They had to get the necessary medicine from the market with their own money.

At the time of the first medical check-up I weighed 50 kg. During five months I lost 7 kg. At least 20 days in a month I used to have fever. At last it was unbearable and I resigned in disgust.

--Vijay
Protective shoes are given to the workers in our factory depending upon the degree of danger they face and the type of work they do. Our factory produces chemicals, some of which are really corrosive.

During our general chats we came to the topic of protective shoes. And someone observed that many of the workers do not wear these shoes and that there has to be some valid reason for that. During our talks we felt that we must examine this issue. I volunteered to take up some important responsibility in this study. I told them that I will collect all relevant information, while someone else volunteered to analyse the data and write a report based on that.

We prepared a questionnaire containing around 10 questions and personally interviewed 57 workers to elicit responses from them. Total 64 workers are given half gumboots (PVC) while 25 workers are given full shoes. Out of 64 we interviewed 50, while out of the other 25 we interviewed 7 of them. When asked whether these protective shoes were comfortable, 29 workers gave a negative response while 28 workers gave a positive response. We asked them whether they got some injury due to wearing these shoes - out of 28 respondents 18 said yes and described the nature of injuries. We can logically conclude that out of 57, 47 workers are not comfortable at all with the protective shoes given to them by the factory. 4 workers said that they never wear these shoes, while 45 workers said that they have been using these shoes for more than 6 yrs. 93% of the workers use their protective shoes within the factory premises only while around 7% said that they used their protective shoes outside the factory also. 50 workers recommended changes in the protective shoes, five were of the opinion that no changes are required and 2 declined to answer the question.

We asked those who do not use the protective shoes about the reason for not utilising them. We got various responses; (1) causes lot of perspiration on the legs. (2) feel very hot inside the shoes (3) it causes the hair on the legs to fall. (4) it causes blisters
(5) It causes blisters on the sole of the feet (6) shoes are very heavy (7) shoes cause some damage to the fingers. (8) The eyesight is affected due to constant use of shoes.

We asked them to suggest changes in the protective shoes - their responses were (1) The hood of the shoes should be smaller (2) shoes should be light in weight (3) shoes should be made of rubber.

91% of the users complained of some injury caused by the shoes. 20 workers complained that there suffered from corns, 4 complained of discomfort on the soles of their feet, 6 complained that they got blisters on their feet, while 5 complained of failing eyesight.

As a result of this study we came to the conclusion that more such studies are necessary. We hope that this study - which was designed and conducted by the workers - will prove to be very useful while ordering new shoes next year.

--Himmat
AS DIRECTOR/PERSONNEL,
I REQUEST YOUR
SIGNATURES TO ACCEPT
TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY
FOR THE UGLY INCIDENT.

MANAGEMENT UNDERTAKES
RESPONSIBILITY FOR
YOUR SPEEDY RECOVER,
AND IF NECESSARY,
EVEN FOR THE LAST RITES.
Actually, earlier the company never used to think about safety, neither did I, nor any one of us. We all thought that dangers are a part and parcel of the work. If somebody got injured, it is inevitable. No one took it seriously. There was no documentation. There was no interest. We just took sick leave and sat back at home, when injured. We used to take our sick leaves and our own money and go to the hospital. After that in 1989 when we got elected, there was a struggle with the management on the wages, and we launched a prolonged agitation. We were only partially successful. So we thought that to build a strong union, we shall speak to other people, and we started such discussions. So we thought of holding a seminar on the question of the roles of the union. One part of the seminar was also “Occupational Health and Safety”. Apart from that, other topics were “Trade Unions” and “Labour Law”. We had a seminar on these three issues. When the question of Safety came, there were people like Vijay Kanhere, Pramod Majumdar, Sirke and Shankar Narayan. They have a lot of experience. They told us what the workers rights are. Particularly in relation to safety, what their rights are. What is the importance of documentation.

Till then, none of us knew anything. Not even that i.e. safe work environment is our right. Neither I nor any of the others had thought about it. We took accidents as inevitable. The reason for including safety in this seminar was that one of our workers working in the construction area, in the erection department, had gone to the toilet and while coming out his head hit the beam. It hit very hard. He told others. But we all thought it is part of the deal. Nothing was documented. A day later he died. I think this was in 1990. We told others and wrote a letter to the company for compensation. We tried for negotiation. The company maintained that no accident had occurred. It was then that we realised we had not documented anything. It was our fault. So we added the safety issue in the seminar. We put a lot of pressure from the union upon the management for providing a job for his son. Finally he did get it. But initially, they maintained that no accident had occurred. Then we got workers to give evidence,
and it was only then that the company accepted. Since there
was no documentation there was a problem. The company
asked how much injury he had sustained and where. We also
thought that we hardly know what to do and what not to do.
We pursued the company for compensation. We also got the
company to assure that his son would be given a job. However,
we were still not very serious. At least we did not consider
the question of a separate compensation for the worker. That was
when we decided to include the issue in the seminar. The
seminar really made us all aware about what is our right
regarding safety, what can we demand from the company
etc., what can we demand from the government? After this we
published a booklet and distributed it among all employees.
They read it and they also became aware. They realised that
safety is an extremely important issue. Actually many of us get
badly hurt quite often. Initially we thought that number of
injured would be around 40-50 but when we started
documenting we realized that and of the 800 workers, about
180-200 that is about 1/4th used to usually get hurt annually.
And this when, not all employees get their injuries recorded.
Supposing somebody gets hurt at the site, there is no phone
nearby. One has to then go in search of a phone and ring up
the office- somebody may or may not be available to
document. So small injuries usually go unreported. Many of
these are motorcycle injuries as we use the company's
motorcycles to reach the sites. We analysed our records and
found out that the maximum cases were those of heavy shock,
failing and tripping. Since there is new construction where iron
rods keep jutting out. Materials and stones too, keep falling off.
While coming some one would trip and fall. When we decided
to start documentation we decided that we should also inform
the company's personnel department. They would write it. In
order to check, we also started writing. These days there are
lots of complaints that the personnel department is not doing
the documentation.

We keep continuous pressure on the company. We
conducted an agitation for making 98 temporary employees
permanent. This was in January 1991.

The company was also taken aback by all this. They thought
we too have some power. So that when we raised the safety
issue after the seminar the company started equivocating. We demanded a safety officer, and they agreed.

We then saw that though there was a safety officer there was no safety. So we said that since he does not work, we must also have worker representatives. After initial hesitations they finally agreed to this proposal also. After having worker representation, whenever we raised any issue the company used to refuse by saying such measure would increase expenses. The money had to be sanctioned from the head office. When we used to say that this power should be with the safety officer they dilly-dallied.

A safety committee had been set up but it seemed it was only a formality. When we sat in the meeting we really regretted it. There were safety officers too who were only bothered about how much the company would lose, how much it will have to spend and so on. If we ever ask them for better safety shoes because present ones were worthless, they would only start telling us - budget does not permit. They were only bothered about the financial implications. One day I sat with them, telling them to do a bit of analysis about the accident we had last year. They as usual started telling about their charts of how many accidents took place and how many work hours were lost and how many mandays the company lost. So I asked them that day as to whether they have thought of any way of preventing such losses again in the future. They had no answer. They assured that they would have a meeting on this issue and discuss various suggestions on the issue in the meeting. Till date we have all been working very regularly according to work procedures. Because we have had our third accident as earlier there were no work procedures. The first accident had occurred in Bhagwati Hospital in Borivli. If we analyse that accident we find that its cause too was lack of proper training and proper work procedures. In the second accident that occurred in Nagpur, a worker had died by falling into a pit. That too was because proper training was not given. After these accidents, the management went on their own and did the investigations and came back. After the first accident in Nagpur itself, we had told the management that there should be a joint investigation by the workers and the management. If they go alone they would conduct a one-sided investigation.
That is to say, they would only look at the issues from the viewpoint of the Company. The company had agreed to this. But when the second accident occurred they did not even call us. When I asked the safety officer, he did not even know about it. He said that the agreement related only to accidents that occurred in Bombay. After all, how much extra expense they have to incur if they take me or one or two from our safety committee. When the first accident occurred, a safety officer from the management side and two executives went to the site. And these three people who stayed there for about two or three days showed an expense of forty to forty-five thousand rupees. The company’s money has to be spent on what it itself does not know. If an accident occurs then they will just give the money that the worker is entitled to under the Workmen’s Compensation Act. Not a single paisa more. And they don’t even care about providing employment to some dependent member of the workman’s family. We put forward all these things before the Company but it does not take anything seriously. We spoke about work procedures. They said we already have a work procedure. Whatever training that we give—the five year training—that incorporates the work procedure.

By work procedure we do not mean what has to be done but how it must be done. That must be told. A lot of things depend on that. What must be done first and what later. We recently saw the Nagpur accident, the one that they investigated. Two or three points, we found out, related to family work procedures. This accident occurred on August 21, 1992, in Kapoor Khera in Nagpur. Kapoor Khera is the name of a place. There is the MSB power plant there. It is an BHEL contract. They had just provided the lift and adjustment work was on. Behind the hostage of the lift there is an air conditioner duct, the support beams for which were coming inside the lift hostage. The content of the support beam was open so they were welding on an MS plate on top of it. The day before the accident they had been doing the same work but had to stop due to rain. The erector was there on the day of the accident. The adjusters who were adjusting the lift had been sent away to a different site. The erector left his helper along with the welder for the welding work. The welder was a BHEL contract welder.
The welder and with him our helper went up on top of the lift. The job of our helper was only to operate the lift. For operating the lift there is a push button on top as well as inside. But here, inside there was no button provided. Because adjustment work was on, the buttons provided on top would work in only one direction—either downwards or upwards. When the hand is pulled away from the buttons the lift would stop automatically. Similarly, going upwards it would stop on the topmost floor. Parallel to that, inside the lift two switches were provided. Like the ones you use at home—the bell push buttons. Such switches should not be used at least for work of this nature. The welder went with our helper for doing the welding after putting on the machine. The welding was to be done 40 metres above and they did so for sometime. After a few stitches the welding machine stopped. He checked and found there was no supply (electric). The welder told Mahendra (the one who died was called Mahendra) that they should go down and see. The welding machine was connected down below. Mahendra asked him to go on to first floor saying that then they would go down. The button/switch that was provided in the lift was suspended from a cable so he bent down to pull the cable. In order to get the lift up he pressed the up button. The direction switches were marked: U for up and D for down. So he pressed the U button and as the lift came to the level he let go off the button but the lift would not stop. The way it was going Mahendra thought the brakes had slipped. He wanted to go into the lift, so he tried to jump in, but he could not go in. Instead he just managed to catch the platform. He gripped the platform firmly. The toe guards that should have been provided in the platform too, were not provided. Had he tried to grip those he would have been thrown back. But he was able to grip timely and the lift picked him up fast. The lift did not stop as the button had got stuck. So it went on. Though he was wearing a helmet, his head was hit so badly by the beam of the door that he lost his grip and he fell down, 40 metres below. When he fell down almost everything of his brain came out. He died on the spot. So we see that if work procedures had been proper, toe guard and the inspection switch should be provided for. Other switches too should have been provided for. All these go to show that the company pays no attention to the question of work procedure. It just leaves its workers to their fate. This is so
because till now there was no awareness on part of the workers, and the company could not care less. Earlier also there used to be accidents and the workers used to take sick leave and stay at home. Workers did not even know that if they met with an accident they are entitled to benefits from the company. Now since our new leadership came, we held seminars etc. and have managed to make workers slightly more aware. Now that they are more aware, they work more carefully. But still the company should provide safety helmets, safety shoes and proper training. All workers should be provided with proper training, no matter which grade they belong to. As of now, they train only those who fall within a specific grade. But even this is not safety training. Only general training of installation of lift. Other workers manage to learn the work only by being with the erector. They are given no training-only on-hand training i.e during work, our union demands that even semi-skilled workers should be given training. This accident occurred due to lack of training. We have collected a lot of evidence and we have been demanding that trainees should not directly be given any responsibility of work. However, the company gives them directly independent work. We have written many letters in this regard but the company continues to do so. When we protest, they stop for sometime and then start again. One problem is that all of us do not work together. Such a thing can start happening anywhere and by the time we come to know a lot of time passes, often a month or two months. The company often tells the semiskilled workers that if they take independent work they would be given promotion. So the worker concerned does not often come and tell us. We cannot go to all the sites and find out what is happening—because work is simultaneously going on at three hundred sites. We cannot go and check and the company then tells other workers that, such a thing is happening elsewhere, so they should also do it. So in the last fifteen months we have had three deaths. In all three, there were untrained trainees who were working independently on jobs which they do not know properly. That is because they are so new. The latest accident that occurred was of a person who had been in this only for two years. The one who died in Nagpur was a casual worker. He should only have done the job of tightening Nuts and Bolts. But the company’s policy is such that it takes independent work
from these people. Maybe because all they are bothered about are their profits.

By the time we come to know, the company already fixes them in these jobs. When we ask them to stop, the company does so for some time and then begins again. This goes on. All three who died in the past fifteen months have been untrained workers. The untrained workers are being made to do the job of trained ones. We take this matter very seriously. But this is very difficult to implement. If somebody does such dangerous work once, then he is told that since he has done it once, he may as well do it again. Some are given the promises of promotion. So the worker also does not tell us. We think all workers, irrespective of grade, must be given full training.

Now that the company appears to be somewhat more concerned about safety it is because we had started exposing them in the press.

Many a times the company broke safety regulations and handed over the lift to the customers. Supervisor just tells us to start it for the time being. And then such dangerous lifts continue functioning. And then, finally there is an accident. Recently a lift fell in Surya Apartments, in Peddar Road. I was on duty on Sunday. A lift fell from the 11th storey. The reason was that ropes were not changed. The rope-checkers told the company twice but the area foreman did not show any interest. He did not take any immediate action. When I reached there that day the lift man told me that the lift had fallen. I thought he was saying this probably because the lift must have come into action. There was no one in the department at that time so I thought, I will go down and see. I went and saw that three ropes of the lift had broken. The lift was going up and when the ropes broke it was on the 11th storey and fell down to 7th storey and having reached there, the break came into action. The governor action was on. It was fortunate that it was in action. Later we told the company that the company's own supervisors take this attitude of negligence. Their attitude is that "it does not matter. After all, lifts don't fall everyday, what if this one fell? After all its once in thirty years". So the company not only does not care for the safety of its workers, but also of that of its customers. We brought this out in
public with the help of newspapers. At that time our agitation was also going on. All this was in April 92. We added this question in our struggle. We have a full documentation of all this. We told them that they do not care even for the clients safety, what to speak of the workers”. After that there was a bit of a stir in the company on the question of safety. Something had to be done. We sent all the press clipping to the head office and also to various other places. They also sat up thinking that now the workers union was also going directly to the consumers. When the workers say that the rope is about to break, the company does not listen. Only when it breaks they take notice. They go on postponing. Nobody comes to replace it. This attitude has now changed somewhat. Now the corporate head office is also putting pressure on the company. The company is also taking our meetings with them seriously.

But after all this, now the company has done some implementation. We have safety badges which we never got earlier. Everybody has a dust mask too. Some implementation has been done but we want more and quickly.

--Harish Pujan
--Jonsons
Otis Employees Union
I PERMIT YOU ONE QUESTION, NOT TWO—
I PERMIT YOU TO ASK ABOUT YOUR DISASTROUS MEDICAL REPORT.
BUT HOW DARE YOU ASK ABOUT THE DISASTROUS CHEMICAL USED AT OUR PLANT!
My name is A. Subramani. I worked for many years in Alembic Glass Industries, Bangalore which has been closed down now. I joined as a contract worker in December 1969. When the Crushing plant in Dharak Ltd. (which was a subsidiary of Alembic group of Industries) was started in 1972 I worked as a casual labourer from 1972 to 1974. The plant had only casual labourers & in 1974 only 18 members were made permanent of which I was one. I was appointed as a maintenance fitter. In the day we used to do maintenance work & from 4 pm in the evening till 8 a.m. we worked in the crushing plant, in the course of which we were exposed to a lot of fumes. The management provided us dust caps but those were ineffective.

In the initial period from 1972-74 we were given 20-40 tons to crush but once we were made permanent the amount was increased to 100-120 tons per day. Seven head fitters, including me, worked day & night. At that time being young & enthusiastic I did a lot of overtime & I was not aware about dust related diseases/occupational health problems etc.

In that period, a strong Trade Union movement existed in Karnataka & in 1979 all the eighteen permanent members joined ATUC & I became the first unit Secretary. An agreement was reached between the union & the management that in every six months the workers should be medically examined. The Alembic group had a school & hospital called Arogya Vardini. In Dec. 1979 we went for a complete medical check-up. The doctor who examined me suspected some problems & discussed my case with our Personnel Manager. They said I had T.B & referred me to a private radiological clinic. The doctor there did not know about silicosis, he said I had TB, but at the same time wrote Pneumoconiosis & put a question mark against it on my report.

Then I discussed the matter with the President of the union & subsequently the issue was taken up with the management. Our personnel manager said that in the crushing plant workers get affected by Silicosis, not TB or Asthma. He had thought that the
workers would keep quiet because they would not have heard about the disease would not do anything about it. He asked me to take rest and said that the management would give me salary & also take care of my medical expenses. But I was not ready for this & approached the union.

One of the members referred me to the Chief Factory Inspector. He wanted to inspect the factory but was not allowed to do so initially. However he did come, saw the conditions & then recommended us to go to KGF. In January 1980, I & six other members went to KGF and were examined for 3 days. All of us had silicosis I was certified as having 40 percent disability & the others had 30% 20% & so on.

We did not know the results of the tests as the KGF had given the reports to our management as they had paid for our medical expenses. However a copy had been sent to the Factory Inspector who provided us a xerox copy.

Then we put pressure on the management to send the "Accident Report" to the ESI, but they were not ready to do so. However, we managed to convince them and the case was sent to ESI. Meanwhile, our union put forth two new demands.

(i) All workers affected by Silicosis should be shifted from Dharak Ltd to Alimbic glass factory.

(ii) Since only 18 out of 200 workers working in the crushing plant were permanent we demanded that the rest should also be made permanent.

The management agreed to make 40 members permanent. Within six months twenty of these workers were diagnosed as Silicosis patients and out of the 18 members who were made permanent in 1974, 17 had silicosis, so in 1980 we had around 37 silicosis patients.

While all this was going on, the case of seven members who had gone to KGF was still pending in ESI. At that time one of the union's legal advisors got interested in our case & wrote a letter to ESI's regional director. In 1982 ESI formed a three member special Medical Board. The board comprised of a TB specialist, ESI's superintendent and superintendent of a government hospital who was also the chairman of the board. The doctors examined us and reduced my percentage of disability from 40
as per KGF's report to 20 and for others they declared 10%.

I was awarded a compensation of Rs. 75 per month. At that time my ESI contribution was Rs 6 and for others it was even less.

Fearing that we would go to the court the management filed a case in the medical Tribunal against ESI's award and argued that KGF's report should be accepted. In 1983 Medical Tribunal accepted the KGF award.

However, I was not satisfied. Being interested in the Trade Union movement, I used to attend a lot of classes conducted by its members. These proved to be very valuable. I discussed my case with several lawyers and doctors who encouraged me a lot so I decided to file a case in the medical tribunal to get my due. I argued that

(i) Silicosis is not curable

(ii) Since the disease increases day by day 100% compensation should be paid to me.

Further, I argued, depending upon the price index, my compensation should be increased from time to time. My case was not accepted on the technical ground of not having filed for a review within two months of judgement.

I argued that our Personnel Manager had assured me that "If the other six win their case you will also get compensation." The court summoned our Manager but as he did not appear, an exparte judgement was delivered. ESI was ordered to constitute a special Medical board to examine me. The ESI argued that it was impossible to constitute a board just to examine one person and the case prolonged till 1987.

In the meantime I again went to KGF, but they do not accept individual cases. So I had to obtain a certificate from the union. The person who had the authority to issue the certificate was none other than myself for I was the Assistant Secretary of the Alembic glass and general workers union.

They examined me and found that I now had 100 percent disability, the symptoms had also become acute by now. On hearing this I become completely dejected & I lost interest in everything on being told that I would die within 3-4 years. I got myself admitted in St. Johns Medical Hospital and was kept
there for 3 months. However I was determined not to let things end there and resolved to carry on my struggle.

The factory was closed in 1987 and my hospital bill was around Rs 12,000. I wrote a letter to the Management asking them to pay for my medical expenses. They issued a cheque along with a letter stating that this amount would be deducted from my Provident Fund. However, I have filed a case challenging this and have not cleared my accounts with the management.

In 1988 the medical tribunal accepted that I had 100 percent disability and a compensation of Rs. 275 per month was announced and the earlier dues were also paid. As is the case with Dearness Allowance the amount would be revised according to price index. Now I am getting Rs. 330 per month.

While this is my case, the picture of others is a very sorry one. Ten permanent workers have died and three are very serious. The contract workers' plight is not known since they have migrated. Those whose conditions is serious are facing severe problems because while the disease continues to grow day by day. The factory is closed and they have no economic resources to sustain them.

I am now based in Madras and work with the construction workers' union. But my health is very unpredictable. If I am fine one day I am bedridden the next day. I am taking a heavy dosage of medicines for TB and Asthma as well.

I have tried to help other patients of my factory by trying to procure food and medicines for them. But I cannot do much due to my deteriorating health.

However as long as I am alive I intend to continue fighting for justice.
My name is Dadaji Patil. I work in the welding square of the Boiler shop department of Bombay Port Trust. The situation here earlier was that the old welders never used to get the right type of cable. They used to get open flash cable and not insulated ones. Holders were not good. As modernization took place better quality cables and holders became available. New machines came in. We discarded the old ones. I connected the new machine and we started work. After that we thought of changing the way the work used to take place in the tank because the tank is closed from all sides except for a big hole for coming and going. Now when the welding work is done inside, there is a lot of smoke for which there is no outlet. If we put an exhaust fan on one side then there can be a way of letting out smoke. We can also take turns at working. A welder and an assistant welder used to work together and while working they used to put on the dungri cloth - a white cotton cloth that our union got the management to sanction. Apart from this other kinds of work also goes on in the department. All our workers in the department, like the helper, the boiler makers, welders, all do team work with us. Now when we do welding work the light flashes on others, and affects their eyes. To prevent this we have made a partition board. A three and a half feet high iron plate has been mounted on a stand. We have thus partition on all four sides - so that when there is a small job we can do it inside the partition. The advantage is that the workers working next to us now do not get flashes of light. Otherwise the skin gets burnt. Our union did this work. Earlier all this work used to be done in the open. But now our work has been systematised. Without a partition the eyesight of the gang workers (workers working on the side) used to be affected. We were not affected since we had a screen with us. Without a screen we cannot do welding. But the eyes of gang workers on the side used to get red and watery due to strong light flashes. Besides this the light burnt the skin. But the partition board put an end to all this. This partition was installed 5-6 years back.
First we approached the management for the installation of partition board, the management as is their wont, did not pay heed initially. Then we informed the Union which negotiated the matter with the management emphasising the urgency of a partition. This partition was designed and made in the department and is being used by all the workers. Besides this, we used to get a pair of safety shoes. Previously we used to get a pair of safety shoes only once in two years. Now thanks to our union, we get better quality shoes. These have two advantages - they are shock-proof, which is essential for welders. Our work is with electricity and there is always a danger of getting "shocks". Especially when we work in the tank and there is tremendous perspiration, we become more vulnerable to such a danger. But we are confident about the present shoes. There is no fear of burns and hardly any accidents, because we always have these shoes on our feet. It was only due to the union that these shoes were sanctioned to us. Our union is the Transport and Dock Workers Union. We also have work here of big ships-huge ships like the Vikram Virat, which have very large tanks and many welders work there together. In those large tanks, it is necessary to have exhaust fans. With our efforts and the union's help we were able to put on exhaust fans. At present Virat work is going on and while the work is on we put on exhaust fans - there is enough room in it. The tanks in ships are closed from all sides. Below there are many tanks like the oil tank, water tank, the fresh water tank - which stores drinking water etc. Then there is the hot water tank, there is a tank, called the balance tank which is used to maintain the balance of the ship. If the balance gets disturbed then the tank on the opposite side can be filled up to restore the balance. There is a tank below the engine, too. This is to protect the engine so that if any damage occurs, the sea water may not come straight on to the engine. This protects the ship. All these types of tanks are there in the ship. They are closed from all sides and there is only one way to go in and come out - much like a manhole. Only one person can go in or come out. There is not enough room even for air passage. So when we work inside it another hole is made on one side of the tank, where we then fit an exhaust fan and we use the manhole for going in and coming out. Therefore things are much better now.
Our employers wear dark glasses out of fashion. We wear them out of necessity.
Concerned about Safety

I am Maskiker, Assistant Secretary of the Transport and Dock Workers Union, Bombay. Basically I am an electrical engineer working with the maintenance department of the Bombay Port Trust. At present I am working in the Bombay Port Trust workshop. The workshop has five shops, one is the blacksmith shop, another is the boiler shop welding shop, third is the machine and fitting shop, fourth is the carpenter shop, and fifth one is the motor shop. All these central workshops are located in one place covering an area of about 25-30 acres of land. In this area, we were motivated first due to the blacksmith shop which is at the entrance of the gate. In the morning, when we used to come about 10-15 years back, all the smokes used to come up and used to cover the entire workshop. We started thinking about how to eliminate this smoke. One point was to put chimneys. After putting the chimneys, in the rainy season the smoke used to settle down at a height of 5-7 feet because of the wet atmosphere and then we thought of putting the bell driven exhaust and we could succeed. So from last 2/3 years the problem of smoke is very much less. In other shops-i.e. motor shops, carpenter shops fixing and machine shops, the problems were due to the faulty machines - people used to have more exertion while working. There also we tried to eliminate maximum possible things so that people should be able to work with a free mind and without any fear. The way we have tried to look after the safety aspects as well as the occupational health problems was that whenever the problem surfaced we talked with the management, with a concrete proposal. There was no use of only putting both the problems. We believe that along with the problems we also must have the solutions in mind and this approach has definitely helped us. To bring complete awareness among the port and dock workers, we started celebrating safety week so that more and more people are involved in the safety work and main aim of the safety week was to bring the accidents - fatal accidents as well as the injuries to the workmen to the fore.

I will elaborate upon how we identify the problem. Problem is identified in two ways; whenever we go for certain inspections we identify and other way is that whenever any accident takes place we diagnose it. As a doctor diagnose the disease, in a similar way we also try to diagnose the cause of the accident so that in future it will not
occur. To get the first hand report if any accident takes place, we go there and find out what exactly happened so that we could get the first hand information. This information is useful at the time of pleading the case so that the management will not be able to say every time that the workers are always at fault and not the machine. We have proved many times that machines are more faulty than the workers because the way the equipment was purchased without the knowledge of the union it has given maximum problems and whenever they have consulted with the union, they have purchased the machines in consultation with the union, we feel the problems are very less. Because the management always try to think in terms of costs and we do not think only in terms of cost but we think in two terms that the machinery which we purchase should give the maximum of output as well as it should be safe for the working of the operator or the workers.

We first ask the workers opinion about the machines which the port trust is going to purchase, both the existing machines and the machines which have to be brought. We compare both the things, suppose there is this existing machines and we have some ideas for modification. We ask the port trust to incorporate these modifications in new tenders so that new machines can be more safe to the workers. For instance, we wanted to purchase a lift machine. The fork lift is a machine which can lift and transport the load. Two companies were there and we used to purchase the machine from these two companies. I don’t want to name them, but the fork lift manufactured by one company had a radiator placed at the back of the driver. Many times the problem used to arise that the radiator cover used to blow up and the hot water used to spill on the back of the worker. So first we pointed this out and we have discarded all the machines which were purchased and these have been auctioned. Then we informed the management that if such machines are being purchased, the workers will not operate. Management must stop the purchase of that particular type of machine and if at all they want to purchase from the same company we have informed them that the modification must be there otherwise the workers will not operate the machine.
Beyond the fragrance

Shanta Bai Dongre, aged 60 years, lives at a place, where everyday, a man is murdered. Hooliganism is rampant. Quarrelling, gambling and roaming drunkards are a common sight at this place. Most of the inhabitants of this place belong to lower caste like Magasavergi, Bhatke etc. and all of them are poor and down trodden. The name of this place is Punchsheel Nagar. This is a slum area. Since no systematic arrangements were made, the houses (Jhooadbattis) are scattered here and there. It is very recently that arrangements for electric and water supply to this place are made. This is the atmosphere in which Shanta Bai makes Aggarbattis (incense sticks) to feed her family.

Shanta Bai was born at Nagpur in a poor family. She hardly completed eight years of her age, when there was a blow to her family her father died. Now her mother was the only bread earner of the family, to her help Shanta Bai started making Aggarbattis, which is continued even now.

She was married at the age of 15 or 16 years to Shanker Dongre, a rickshaw puller. In daytime Shanker pulled rickshaw and earned 10 to 20 rupees a day. Besides spending on his other needs half of this earning, was spent on liquor in the evening. So he provided very little for his family. In addition he usually quarrelled and beaten her at night. She again started making Aggarbattis to meet her family’s both ends. She was given twelve paise for making one thousand Aggarbattis. Raw material for Aggarbattis is provided by some contractor. Raw material is given by kilos and received in numbers.

The increase in wages of making Aggarbthis is nominal. When she started she got ten paise for one thousand and now she is getting rupees two for the same. She can hardly make 3 to 4 thousand Aggarbthis in a day with the help of her two daughters. One of her daughters is married now. Shanta Bai could not get education due to poor conditions of her family. She says that, had she got some education, she would have done something of importance.
Shanta Bai works at least ten hours a day. To do her work she has to sit down throughout the day. This resulted in stiff back in the evening. She earns 200 to 300 rupees in a month and half of her meager income is spent on medicines. She can not think of taking rest as this may lead her family to starvation. Making Aggarbattis causes pain to human bodies. The mixture of Aggarbattis badly affects the throat. In the winter season it causes more pain. Shanta Bai says that the government should provide some facilities to the labourers, who make Aggarbattis so that their health may not be affected.

(Shanta Bai Dongre)
Khobragade Nagar, Nagpur
Ramesh Pati Ram Khadgi, works in Aggarbatti incense stick Industry. His job includes everything from rolling to packing of Aggarbattis.

Ramesh Pati Ram is 33 years now. His education is upto seventh class. He was born at Shanti Nagar Jhopadpatti (a slum area). All the members of his family live over there. Besides parents there is a woman, two girls and a boy in his family. One of the girls is studying in IVth Class, while the boy in IInd. The wife of Ramesh does the household works. The house comprised of two rooms, is sufficient for his family. In this house he packs Aggarbattis now-a-days. Earlier he worked in a factory. Now he does all the packing of Aggarbattis at home and then takes it to the factory owner or business contractor.

Ramesh lives in Shanti Nagar, which literally means a city of peace. But the peace is not there at all. His house is situated near the shops of liquor and matka (a sort of organised gambling). The parents of Ramesh are engaged in a different type of jobs. While his father weaves saris, his mother spins. Since weaving and spinning Saris could not provide enough subsistence to this family, they were living in poor conditions. Ramesh says that seeing the condition of his family he started making Aggarbattis and packing them at the tender age of twelve years.

Ramesh started working in the factory at the very beginning. He is a good worker and has worked in four or five big and small factories till now. In the factory Ramesh did all types of works, he rolled Aggarbattis, packed them, scented them and worked in chemicals. At that time he received fifty paise daily for all his toiling.

When Ramesh started working at home, he got ten paise for making 72 packets i.e. a big bundle (called gross). He had to make 10 bundles of packets to get one rupee. But it was in the years of 1973 and 74.

In 1980 the wages went upto 1.50 rupees and in 1990 it increased upto 2.50 for a
Agarbatti worker, being regularly in touch with chemicals, developed several types of health problems. Ramesh says he feels very weak as if suffering from anemia. He complains of stinking breath. He cannot speak loudly. With pale and dull face, he feels his eyes burning and a severe headache almost daily. His fingers are badly affected with the chemicals and other things used in the making of Agarbattis. Ramesh has many other health problems and is aware of the hazards of working in Agarbatti Industry, but cannot give up this job, anyhow he has to provide food for his family.

For many years he has worked in a factory, but no facility is given to him. Provident fund and Bonus etc. are very attractive words for him but as he never got any facility, he doesn’t know much about these things. Being unable to do other jobs, he will have to make Agarbatti upto his last breathe, says Ramesh.

Agarbatti is used to fill the houses, bungalows and kotis with fragrance. The role of Agarbatti in rituals of every religion is very significant. Ramesh complains that the people, who toll to give fragrance to others, are living in stinking atmosphere and nobody takes a note of it. We are being exploited day by day and nobody cares. This sad story is told by Rameshji.

(Ramesh Pati Ram Khadgi)
Shanti Nagar, Jhopadpatti, Nagpur
I am Dhanasekharan. I have been working in Ennore Thermal Power Station for the past twenty years. This power station started in 1966. There were many refugees from Burma who were looking for a job & I was one of them. We joined ETPS as construction workers & we were paid Rs. 1.25 per day and worked for eight hours a day, our wages were increased to Rs. 3.75 per day in 1976 & in 1980 to Rs. 9 per day. Women however got less wages than men.

I joined as a contract worker. Such workers were not assigned any fixed work & had to do all kinds of jobs. I started with unloading coal & then put it in a crusher to bring it to one & half jelly size. In this process one inhales a lot of coal dust. We were not provided with dust mask nor were any safety measures taken to protect our health. The crushed coal goes through a conveyor belt to the crusher then to boiler & then to the ash plant. There is a device called ID which pulls up the ash. The remaining ash comes down from a super pipe which is very hot so that the ash doesn’t get solidified. As the ash comes down, water is sprayed on it. This water then mixes with the sea.

Alongside the workers who spray water are those who unload the slack which comes down the ID & then put it in crushers. The unloading work is done only when the machine comes down, which means that workers need not be present when the machine goes up, but as there was no rest room the workers had to keep standing near the machine. These workers too inhale a lot of coal dust. Those who work in the chemical plant inhale a lot of dust when they use caustic soda to purify coal.

Apart from the health problems stemming from the occupation there were other problems - like for instance — there was no provision for safe drinking water, no separate toilets for men & women. We were conscious of all these factors but felt that we could not do anything about it.

One incident however jolted us out of our slumber. On first April, 1986 there was a major accident in the power station. It was raining & splashes of rain on the superpipe led to its cooling which in turn led to the solidification of ash in the pipe. Once rain stopped, the pipe became hot again & all that ash came down suddenly & seven women workers (who were standing near the pipe to spray water) got scalded & died immediately.
Actually there is a control room where constant monitoring of the ashplant, boiler, slack etc. is supposed to done. So, the solidification of ash should have been detected & workers removed from there. But obviously, on that day, monitoring was not being done properly.

Apart from those who died, the workers who had to unload the slack got injured. If there was a rest room these workers could have escaped injury but as they had to stand near the machine they got affected. I was one of the injured - my thigh got scalded & the scars are still there for everyone to see.

There was no ambulance to take these dead women & the injured to the hospital as all of us were contract workers. Only after we raised a hue & cry was an ambulance called for.

This accident resulted in the death of seven people & left eleven injured.

After the accident some people from the Tamil Nadu Construction Worker’s Union visited our power station & spoke to us but we dismissed them as “curious people”. Meanwhile the Chief Minister announced a payment of Rs. 2000. However, when we did not receive even that money we approached the union. Then we demanded that irrespective of the worker being on contract basis he/she should get a compensation of Rs. 40,000. For the first time all the workers got united.

Since contract workers had no rights, we forced the ETPS to deposit Rs. 20,000 (under section IOA of workmen compensation Act) with the labour commissioner for speedy hearing of the case. Subsequently we filed for compensation according to victims’ age.

We staged several dharnas & held meetings. Our demands included — ESI facilities, maternity leave for women, equal wages for men & women, rest-rooms, installation/placement of danger signals, separate toilets for men & women, drinking water, identity cards for workers (because whenever we went for dharna etc. we were dismissed as on lookers)

Most of our demands have been met. We now have ESI facilities all over that area.

Our employer wanted to retrench women workers using the
excuse that their sarees get stuck in machines. But we have obtained a stay order.

Before the union came into the picture we were not even aware of the existence of the personnel department, leave alone the fact that it is supposed to take care of the welfare of the workers.

In 1988, a sixteen year old boy, Jayavel, got electrocuted while spading coal from a train’s compartment. We fought for & obtained compensation.

The ETPS has a coal yard in which there is always a coal stock of a minimum of one lakh tons. In 1987, seven worker’s died when they were digging out the coal. These workers were insured against accident on floor jobs and were paid a meagre amount by the insurance company. We sent a notice to the company stating that their insurance policy was only for accidents on floor, but in this case the coal had slid from above. Their Insurance was cancelled we got a compensation of Rs. 40,000.

On the steam pipeline there is a covering of insulation cotton to prevent it from getting heated. This cotton has a lot of glass particles, we have to put a wire fence around the cotton & then cover it with a sheet. Whenever we have to change either the cotton or the sheet we face great difficulties because the moment we unwrap the sheet this cotton flies & gets stuck on our skin and glass particles enter our bodies. We experience a lot of irritation in those parts where the cotton has settled & rashes also develop. Only when we apply a lot of oil do we get some relief.

Our struggle for a safe & healthy workplace is going on. We are also struggling to get the management to regularise the workers.

Earlier I used to think that the boss was our God. Only after meeting the union people I became conscious and aware of my rights as well as those of others and I decided to struggle against oppression.

We decided to take up the issue of contract workers in particular and have formed the Tamil Manila Tozhilalar Sangam to struggle for the rights of such workers. I am its secretary now.
YOU ARE BEING FAR TOO GREEDY, 
FAR TOO UNREASONABLE:
FIRST YOU WANT THE NATION TO PROVIDE 
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND 
LABOUR INSTITUTES —
NOW YOU WANT THEM TO SHARE THEIR 
FINDINGS WITH YOU.
We were convinced that since this sangam of Bidi Workers was there, our problems would be heard & solutions could be arrived at. Then at first we became members & then encouraged & motivated others to become members.

Initially only those who had identity cards could avail medical facilities of medical treatment, goggles for eyes etc. Later it was extended to all Bidi Workers. We went & met the welfare commissioner who agreed to come to our area & do a survey of the number of workers. After the survey we were issued medical cards & gained access to medical facilities. When someone is admitted in the TB sanatorium he/she gets not only free treatment but also stipend of Rs. 250 per month.

The doctor is supposed to come every week but she comes here only once a month. She says that there is no proper infrastructure here - like room, electricity, so we are trying to get all these, though we feel that she can carry out her work even without these.

Apart from health facilities, now our children also get scholarship to pursue their studies.

Earlier all of us were isolated & so were resigned to our fate. Now we have become organised & conscious of our due. While the issue of wages is an important item on our agenda the issue of our health is of primary concern.
YOU ARE BEING FAR TOO GREEDY,
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FINDINGS WITH YOU.
Ponnammal, aged 45 years w/o Manickam, Valdyanathan Street, Chetpet, Madras, was a construction worker with 20 years experience as a helper. She was employed along with 100 other workers in laying the roof of the second story in the Madhavaram Telephone exchange Building, Madhavaram High Road, Madras. The contractor Srinivasa Reddy and the Assistant Engineer Civil Wing of the P & T Department were present when she fell from a building of 80 feet, while carrying a load, at 3 p.m. She was taken to a private doctor who refused to treat her and as she was being taken to General Hospital, she died. But with the connivance of the doctors in the General Hospital, the contractor got her ‘admitted’ and without postmortem, got her discharged, by threatening her son to sign a declaration, that he was getting her discharged against medical advice. This the contractor and the Engineer thought was the end of the case.

The news of the accident reached the branch of the Union situated near the spot of accident. The Union members were fed with the false information, that the accident victim had recovered and returned home, by the Junior Engineer at the work spot. Unconvinced, the Union members, traced down the victim to her residence at Chetpet, where her body was lying outside her house. This was on the evening of the day of the accident. The same night the workers, held a meeting, and took a decision to take necessary steps for getting the postmortem done.

The next morning hundreds of workers assembled at the General Hospital and after nearly an hour of negotiations, the Dean finally agreed to make it into a Medico-legal case and conduct the post mortem in the Kilpauk Medical College Hospital. A claim petition was filed before the Deputy Commissier of Labour, by the dependents of Ponnammal with the assistance of the Tamilnadu Legal Aid Board. Though there was sufficient evidence from the post mortem report and the co-workers who were witnesses to the accident the DCL did not grant any award. Now the appeal is before the High Court.

In this case it can be noted that the CPWD provisions are violated and this is only one of the many instances where the Union had to intervene to get the accident recorded. It is not uncommon to have similar deaths and accidents in both private and Government buildings and works, and be hushed by the contractor in connivance with the officials. From this it is evident that the workers have to be aware of the provisions and procedures of Laws governing construction workers even to get accidents, fatal or otherwise recorded.
This is the first time in my entire life that I've been able to sit on a chair.
My name is C.C. Seaman, and worked as senior tester in Ashok Leyland's Madras division. My duty was to test the quality of the truck chassis produced. This plant was started in 1954 in collaboration with Austin Motor. In 1955 Austin went back and Leyland came in picture. Around 1985-86 British control ended and this company became totally Indian. The other plants of Ashok Leyland are at Alwar, Hosur and Bhandara and produce three types of chassis; full cab, half cab and without cab. In full the driving seat is totally covered, there is wind screen and door shutters. In half cab the floor is made of steel and no wind screen, permanent seat or door shutters. And in the third variety the floor board and seat is made of jungle wood. 72 chassis are produced in this plant daily. These 72 chassis which are produced daily are taken to the regional sales offices which are spread throughout the country. Ashok Leyland gives them to the transport companies on contract who further employ drivers for this job. The contract transport companies are:

2. Western Transport Co.
3. S.G. Swaminathan & Co.
4. Ujwal Trade Transport Co.
5. United Transport Co.

Most of these truck chassis move in convoy. There routes are fixed and are supposed to drive 200 kms per day. According to new settlement these contract drivers are paid Rs. 30/- per day as wage and Rs. 35/- as food expenses and staying charges per day.

These convey drivers are not only under paid but also exposed to all type of health and safety hazards. Every year at least ten drivers die due to their occupation. This story is about the life of these drivers.

The current break up of wage of the contract drivers is as follows:

Rs. 35/- Journey expenses (food, staying, medical, etc.)
Rs. 30/- wages
Rs. 10/-  

i) 6/- p.f. 3 (employees contribution)  

3 (employer’s contribution)  

ii) 3/- bonus  

iii) 1/- welfare fund  

Rs. 75/- Total  

Under the welfare fund Janata policy is started, in which every driver pays one Rupee per day when he is on the trip. Out of this fund compensation is paid and also the gratuity. This gratuity is Rs. 2000/- maximum irrespective of the length of the service. If there is any traffic rule broken by the driver than the expenditure on bail and fine is also done from this amount.

The vehicles are left under the charge of these drivers in the journey. So what ever is the damage during the way even if it is due to manufacture fault the recovery is made from the wages of these drivers. Some companies employ drivers on permanent basis, who get salary Rs. 1000/- per month, but the time given to them to cover a distance is less than the contact drivers.

Since the money paid to these workers for food in the way is much less than the price inflation. They have to starve most of the time. They eat once in a day. As they also go for the cheapest food in the area and what they get is unhygienic. In the process one observes that whatever small amount is given to them as total wages is taken by the contractor directly or indirectly. No where on this earth employee pay for the employer’s share in PF, but here as we see above they deduct Rs. 6/- for everyday out of which Rs. 3/- is employee’s and Rs. 3/- as employer’s share. Secondly if there is any loss or damage to the vehicle even if it is so due to manufacturing defect, their contractors deduct money for that. The worst part is that all these vehicle are also insured by Ashok Leyland, so the company earns both way.

On the other hand whenever the various demands for better health care and wages are raised the management says that they are in mess. But the Ashok Layland came to 21st position in top in India 100 super Industries and there was 1042.48 24.4 Crores profit this year.
HOW SAFE WE ARE?

The very chassis which rolls out of the factory is not fit on the roads. According to the transport rules any vehicles in this condition should not be allowed. Everything is temporary. The drivers are exposed to various types of safety and health hazards. It is a bitter fact that every year at least ten drivers die in one or other accidents. The major safety hazards are as follows.

1. As written earlier, the driving seat, floor etc is made of forest wood. The changing weathers deteriorate the wood. The rains, heat of summer and winter makes this wood crack and loose. The net result is the whole structure starts shaking. Sometimes seat moves from its original position and drivers find it very difficult to drive and judge the traffic. So the chances of accident increase, as the driver is not behind the steering.

2. As these seats do not have safety belts or guard, so when breaks are applied sometime drivers falls infront of his own vehicle and is crushed to death. Sometime this temporary seats breaks and drivers are thrown out from the running vehicle. For the past we have seen many deaths due to these.

3. The absence of wind screen and roof exposes the drivers to all type of insects, dust and small stones (these stones get spinned from rear wheels and land on the head of drivers). There had been instances when wild animals had attacked them. Many times union has demanded for screen but management has said no, even the demand of helmet with glasses has been rejected by management. But the worst of all there is the wildest animal i.e, human. Many times these drivers are attacked by the thieves and doliots who kill them to sell the chassis in spare parts. I remember a case near Jamshedpur when a driver was killed by thieves and neither his body nor truck was traced. Only it was when his colleagues searched for him then they got his information. His contractor simply washed his hands from responsibility and paid some amount through welfare fund.

4. Changing seasons also affect badly to these drivers. One can imagine the response of a human body, when one is asked for drive from warm weather of Madras to the cold weather of
North India during the winter. Even during the rain these drivers are without shelter.

They continue driving even if there is hot sun, cold winter or rain. Their contractors provide them nothing in the name of clothing leave apart the warm cloths or rain coats. I remember one instance when a driver was told to take truck to Jammu in December. To save himself from the chilled winter he first wrapped newspaper and then covered polythene sheet over him. The people on the way were wondering that what object is going. Many a times lighting has stuck on the trucks and drivers got electrocuted. A driver named K.R. Kassi became the victim of lightning.

5. Many times defective pumps are installed in the engine so the driver has to pump it manually to keep vehicle running. So this constant contact with oil leads to the development of rashes on the hands.

6. There is no guard from the fan belt. So if the seat losen which is regular feature) the driver’s legs get injured in the fan belt.

7. If there arises a short circuit then the whole wooden seat and floor catches fire. Many drivers got injured in these type of accidents.

8. Absence of night shelters in the way are also hazards. If anything is stolen from the truck then driver has to pay. Many times lights on tool boxes are broke open by the thief and drivers have to pay from their whatever small salary they have. But the worst part of night is if it is rain they can’t hide themselves. During the winter they put camp fire and wrap themselves in news papers and polythene sheets, many a times poisonous insect sting them. Many of our friends have lost life due to scorpion or snake bites.

9. There are four types of chassis produced by company. They are classified on the basis of wheel base (distance between the wheels). Trailer model has 97 wheel base and Tipper models with 118,210 and 197. Out of which 118, is most dangerous. When breaks are applied than the whole body spins in full circle from rear and drivers are thrown.

In such a scenario of deprivation drivers are forced to do neutral driving to save diesel. In this process vehicle is acceler-
ated to maximum speed and then put in neutral. Like this some
diesel is saved. But this process is dangerous if break fails. So
union advises its members not to do such practices.

**MEDICAL FACILITIES**

What happens when they are affected by the diseases or
injuries due to above stated reasons. Their contractor does not
provides them medical benefits. If in the way a driver fell sick he
has to on the quacks way as he can’t afford to pay to the
qualified doctors. Even ESI is not ready to provide them any
help as they pass through many states, for which they do not
have any registration. When union pursued it with ESI then after
great pressure ESI agreed that if they take letter from them then
they do anything. But plant the nature of contract is such that
they set very short notice to take the vehicle. On the other
hand management says that if you want medical bill reimbursed
then you have to take the signature of MLA or Panchayat
President from where you take treatment. One can imagine
how impractical procedure has been adopted by the ESI, the
Contractor and our prime employer Ashok Leyland. R. Sundram
died two years ago and no compensation has been paid by
Western Transport Agency. The problem also exist in collecting
information. Suppose a convoy driver dies in a far flung area,
then what union needs is the detail information of the cause of
death. But we find it very difficult in collecting information. For
the local law enforcing agency this becomes the last priority
but for the victims family and union it is the only benefit, so we
have to try very hard.

Some of the drivers who have died recently are:-

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cause</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.S. Rajan</td>
<td>pain in chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.D. Shammugan</td>
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My name is Indrani and I live in Madras. My brother Tamilarsan was a construction worker. One day he along with Govindraj and Chandrashekar (manson) was employed by local mistry for construction of a building. Since he was a helper he used to carry cement mud in a iron bowl to the mistry. On the day of accident Chandrashekar was standing on the roof wall of over 15 feet height and Tamilarsen along with Govindraj were helping him. Suddenly the high tension wire snapped and three of them were electrocuted immediately. Since it was high tension wire they suffered burn. Both the hands and legs of my brother were burnt, and Govindraj got his right side burnt. People and their colleagues took them to Kilpauk Medical Hospital. This accident occurred at around 9.30 in the morning and Chandrashekar died at 1.30 same night. My brother Tamilarsan died on 12th at morning 4.30. Local news papers also covered this news.

My family was then contacted by Geeta and Vajayalaxmi of TNCV on the second day after the accident. They took the statement from my brother. As he was not in position to write they took his thumb impression. Then I along with the other family members of the victims met the house owner. Only funeral of the dead were looked after by them. Even we were not told by them about the accident. We got the information about the accident only at 4.30 p.m. by the contractor that they are ill and when we reached the hospital we came to know about the accident.

After Tamilarsan died they called us to the police station for inquiry. In police station we were told that on humanitarian ground we can take some money. The money offered to us was Chandrashekar - 5000, Tamilarsan - 4000 and for Govindraj who was badly injured - 1000 Rupees. Police officer and the owner of the building wanted us to sign a typed statement but I insisted on reading it which they refused. They also played tricks with us by saying that Chandrashekar's wife has already taken money and now I have no other option than taking this amount. We refused and never went again.

Then I came to union office and I was asked to procure some documents — FIR, Death certificate, Post-mortem report, Legal heirship (dependent) certificate, as they
are very important in claiming money through Workmen- Compensation act. After I collected all the above documents a case was filed in the court of Labour Commissioner.

When in labour court mistry was called he denied his involvement with the building owner as the mistry and said that he has nothing to do with the work which was going on. He said that as he sells cement he knows the owner due to that capacity. The building owner was also asked whether he informed workers about the high tension wire. But he said no and also that he was not at the site at that time. Than the victim’s family and the trade union tried to find out the economic condition of the builder and also the purpose for which the house was constructed.

We found that he had 2-3 shops. The workers of his shops were called. It was tried to find out that how many years they have worked and how their employer is treating them. During the process we came to know that he also had two liquor shops. The owner said that his building is less than 12 feet. (Under the WCA, if the building is more than 12 feet than only compensation can be made). Court went to measure the height and which came out to be 11.5 feet.

In the mean time judge got transferred and the new judge also wanted to measure. When the team went to measure the owner started shouting that he has finished the building and when accident took place the height was less than 12. The union argued that the proposed building may be less than 12 feet but the related factors must also be taken into consideration. At last the judgement was made in our favor.

Court calculated compensation on the basis of daily wage. Chandreshkar was getting Rs. 35/=, so his family got Rs. 53000. Cash compensation was paid to his widow and fixed deposit were made on the name of his three children. Our family got around Rs. 44000.

The family of Chandrashekar got money year back and since my father lives in Trichy we have still not been able to collect the money. Money is deposited with the court of labour commissioner.
I am a permanent inhabitant of this village. I don’t have any land. I earn my livelihood working as a wage labourer. Only in the rainy season, the village provides work for hardly sixty mandays. And on the rest of the days, I have to go out of the village for work.

This year we heard that some employment was available in the ordnance factory at Sainita. Hence, four families including mine went there. We started working with a Contractor, named Deepa and lived in Gokhanga Colony. We were engaged in road construction and paid Rs. 20/- per day as wage.

On 4th November ’91, at 8.00 am., we six were digging a drain beside a wall of six feet hight. At around 2.00 pm., while we were busy in digging, the wall collapsed and we all were buried under it. We shouted for help. Some people came and rescued us. Out of six, four were rescued alive with major injuries and the rest two died.

The dead were Ramesh Mirdha and Garsi Poda. The dead bodies were sent to Titlagarh hospital for postmortom and the injured ones were admitted into Sainita hospital.

The contractor consoled us and advised us not to go to the court of law. He assured to give us compensation. But later we realised that the contractor wanted to cheat us. Then we filed a legal case in Titlagarh court with the help of a lawyer named Sri Jayprakash Sahoo. As per the notice of the court, we went to the court and narrated whole incident before the judge. After that neither we have been called again to the court nor we have got any compensation. Now we are facing a lot of difficulties in meeting our basic needs, even two squares of meal a day. Who is there to pay heed to us?

Ramesh Mirdh
We Learnt about a Welfare Fund

My name is Dalvasahayam. I am 50 years old & have been making bidis for the past 35 years. My father died when I was very young, so I started making bidis to support my family. At that time I used to get Rs.1.25 per thousand bidis. The minimum wage was fixed at Rs.13 per 1000 bidis by the govt. in 1982 & now ten years later along with D.A it is Rs. 19.35.

However in most of the cases we have to pay those who cut leaves, then for the thread etc., with the result that our net earning is somewhere around eleven or twelve rupees per 1000 bidis.

We have barely been able to make our ends meet. In addition to low wages there are also a lot of health hazards in our profession - we inhale a lot of tobacco which causes nausea, breathing problems etc., some villagers have T.B. Further we have to sit for hours on end, which causes back aches, stiff joints and so on. In our village, predominantly, the leaves are cut by women and the rolling of bidis is done by men.

A couple of years back, CITU started a "Sangam" here. The only benefit which accrued to us from them was that some of us were issued Identity Cards by the Companies, & we got P.F. facilities in 1986. But as CITU was involved in different areas our problems did not receive due attention. We were not made aware of the government schemes for us or of occupational health issues.

We were all disillusioned with CITU's sangam & reverted back to our original state because we did not have the confidence to tackle our problems on our own.

It was then that some people from TN Bidi workers sangam came here. They made us aware of the Bidi Workers welfare fund & all the benefits that we could avail from it. They had persuaded a doctor to come to our village for conducting a medical check up. I along with other villagers watched them & discussed among ourselves about the objectives of the sangam, whether we would benefit from it by becoming members.
We were convinced that since this sangam of Bidi Workers was there, our problems would be heard & solutions could be arrived at. Then at first we became members & then encouraged & motivated others to become members.

Initially only those who had identity cards could avail medical facilities of medical treatment, goggles for eyes etc. Later it was extended to all Bidi Workers. We went & met the welfare commissioner who agreed to come to our area & do a survey of the number of workers. After the survey we were issued medical cards & gained access to medical facilities. When someone is admitted in the TB sanatorium he/she gets not only free treatment but also stipend of Rs. 250 per month.

The doctor is supposed to come every week but she comes here only once a month. She says that there is no proper infrastructure here - like room, electricity, so we are trying to get all these, though we feel that she can carry out her work even without these.

Apart from health facilities, now our children also get scholarship to pursue their studies.

Earlier all of us were isolated & so were resigned to our fate. Now we have become organised & conscious of our due. While the issue of wages is an important item on our agenda the issue of our health is of primary concern.
I am a permanent inhabitant of this village. I own only fifty decimal of land. With such meagre land, I am not able to manage my family with six children. Except in the rainy season, no employment is available in the village. Hence, I was forced to go out of the village for employment. Two families including mine went to Bhilai steel plant. There, we started working under a contractor named Radhashyam. That time I was paid Rs. 2/- per day as wage. On this wage we stayed there for ten years. Then, I was sent as foreman to work with machine. But I refused to work expressing my inability to handle the machine. I migrated to Raipur and pulled cycle rickshaw for three years. After that, I got employment in Om Prakash T.V. cabinet factory. I worked there for five years. I used to work very hard. All of a sudden, I fell ill and I had high temperature with severe body pain. I was bedridden for a month. People advised me to consult a doctor. And I consulted the doctor who diagnosed my problem as Tuberculosis. The doctor asked me to get admitted into the hospital, which I did on the payment of fees. I remained in the hospital for a month. As I had to be confined to bed, I went out of money and my family started starving. Then, I left the hospital and returned to my village. As there was no money, I stopped purchasing medicines. Consequently, the problem has gradually aggravated. My children are working in some lodge in Raipur. They send Rs. 200/- once in two months. With that much of money we are sustaining with great difficulties. Thinking about our problems, my wife went mad. Hence, she is not able to do any household work. Rather, she keeps roaming around. And I am so severely sick that, I am not able to get up from the bed. Anyway, let God inflict all the pains on us as he wishes.

Daknabag Chahlia
HOW ENVIEABLE!
TO BE ABLE TO VOLUNTARILY
DESTROY
YOUR LUNGS!