

**YOU HAVE NOT REALISED
WHAT TREMENDOUS POWER
YOU HAVE**

“Stringent criticism of the manner in which some of the labour unions in the city were conducted was made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the course of his Presidential remarks at the annual general meeting of the Bombay Municipal Kamgar Union held on 13th July 1941 in the Cowasji Jahangir Hall, Bombay where over a thousand men and women of the Health, Drainage and other sanitary department of the municipality had gathered and were told how they could get everything they wanted by the mere force of organised unity and without overmuch sacrifice.

The leaders of some of the union in the city, specially the textile unions had led their men into a number of strikes during the last 14 years, said Dr. Ambedkar, but not in one of them had they succeeded in getting any of their demands. In fact these strikes had only resulted, because of unemployment during strike periods and retrenchments and dismissals following strikes, in adding to the woes and miseries of the workers.

Such activities, far from organising the workers had only resulted in disorganising them and disintegrating their unions.

On the other hand the Municipal Workers Union had succeeded in getting many of the grievances redressed by negotiations with the authorities.

“You do not seem to realise the tremendous power you have in your hand”, observed the Harijan leader. “You can, simply by refusing to work, spread more havoc and disaster in a week than the Hindu-Muslim riots should do in three months. The authorities know this and will therefore yield to your united demands more easily than elsewhere. I have of course no desire to spread such a havoc in the city and will do everything possible to avoid it as long as the authorities

concede our just demands. All that I say is that you must unite in the Union, and that fact, combined with the competent and energetic leadership you have in the Managing Committee will do the rest of the job.

Dr. Ambedkar then referred to the position secured by the Depressed Classes in the political life of the country as a result of unity and said that this class which had no political status ten years ago ranked equal with the Congress and the League to-day because of unity.

Finally he exhorted the Depressed Classes in general to enroll themselves in the Assembly electoral roll.

In this connection he recalled how in the last Assembly elections in the constituency from which he contested (North Bombay) there were only 8,000 Harijans against 48,000 caste Hindu voters and he almost felt that he had tied a halter round his neck in standing from such a constituency. The Depressed Class voters, however, rallied to the polling booth to a man and achieved what was a miracle in electioneering.

Mr. D. V. Pradhan, General Secretary of the Union, read at the outset the annual report which recorded a year of all round progress.

Resolutions passed :

Resolutions demanding increase in dearness allowance by one rupee and making the allowance applicable to all workers getting upto Rs. 75 per month; urging on the committee appointed by the Corporation to report on the housing and living conditions of Municipal labour to expedite its report; and making some minor changes in the constitution of the Union, were then moved and sanctioned by the general body. Among the speakers on the resolutions were Messrs M. V. Donde, M. Kavli and G. M. Jadhav.

A new Managing Committee with Dr. Ambedkar as President and Messrs M. V. Donde and S. B. Keni, as Vice-Presidents was then elected on the proposition moved by Mr. D. V. Pradhan.

Mr. M. V. Jadhav, Assistant Secretary, then explained how communalism was being exploited among workers and how the Gujarati Depressed Class workers like Bhangis, etc. had kept themselves aloof from the Union though they were getting all advantages such as increase in wages, etc., secured as a result of the Union's activities.”¹

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¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 15th July 1941.