

SUDDEN DEPARTURE of A 'VETERAN' UNIONIST!

***"Ask not my name
Nor if you knew me
The dreams I have had
Will grow without me
Alive no more
I will go where my dreams have shown me.
Those who carry on the fight
Will plant other roses
All will remember me."***

*- Poem by and found in the pocket of dead body of
an unknown El Salvadorian freedom fighter guerrilla*

His life always took sudden changes; time and again his life came across many unexpected phases. But this year, the incident of October 29 was not only unexpected but it was shocking and painful as well. That day not only GEFONT, the whole Nepali Trade Union Movement was shocked. GEFONT lost one of its founders and the Nepali trade union lost a tireless fighter.

He is no other than our very own Comrade Madhav Neupane; who took his last breath on October 29, 7:30 am at *Bluecross Hospital, Tripureshor* and left us for ever.

While I was talking to Dr. Shilpakar on October 28, I remembered the sudden decision of October 25. I along with our ex-chair Comrade Mukunda, Comrade Umesh, Comrade Uddhav and Comrade Lamsal had visited Neupane's home that day. He was in rest and was obviously happy with our presence.

"How are you now, comrade?" we asked.

"Yes!!" he replied. It seemed he didn't get our question. We get to know it later on; due to his illness he was unable to understand most of the things.

We decided not to have tea but he told his daughter to serve us with the cold drink. He again said something to her. This time she came up with medical records and test reports and gave it to me.

I was touched. Most of my colleagues from GEFONT think that I know 'everything' due to their "overconfidence" on me. I guess, Neupane, too, did think like that.

"How can I check this?"

I am zero at the medical knowledge but still I picked up the reports and checked it out.' Tuber Coloma..... Brain... second stage..... fair condition at discharge.' It was written something like that. Comrade Umesh looked at it once and we said to him," Everything will be fine, don't worry. Tb is nothing this 21st century? This is not even communicable."

Poor us! We didn't know that meeting would be our last meeting with him. Comrade Mukunda who is bit knowledgeable about health, medication, yoga etc, shared a lot of things. We too added our experiences on it- things we had seen and felt around us.

We returned but we didn't even guess in our wildest dream that Neupane was in his last stage. We felt he will be all right. We had even told him that within three months he will be healthy enough to go back to work. Therefore, on the very day we talked with the UML Health Department Chief Comrade Krishna Gopal on various aspects like possible medication and financial help. We decided to help Neupane with the government fund that is provided to the victims of selected diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer, heart and kidney; Comrade Umesh even assigned the responsibility to NIHWU President.

But the process couldn't even get started. The same night his condition turned worse. In the situation of fully packed emergency services in most of the Hospitals and Nursing Homes, his family members with lot of difficulties took him to *Hames* hospital and the treatment started. After one day, he was taken back to his first hospital, *Bluecross*.

But all this was of no use. His daughter remembers, "On the 10th dad was very serious, at around 8 pm he told mom to go home. Before he was taken to the ventilator, he told me, 'Dad is going now!'. After that he was taken to the ventilator and never returned back."

The start of a veteran unionist

He used to say –"I came into labour movement without any plans."

In the mid year of 1979, vacancy was opened for trainees in different posts in Hotel Soaltee. As soon as I came to know it, I decided to join the hotel. After series of interviews, I got the job of 'Steward' for rupees two hundred per month.

The training was not at all easy. He remembers," we were given heavy trays to carry on our left hand and had to walk through the ground for more than 20 minutes. In the initial days I felt I didn't want to take this job."

Even his co-workers were not much supportive in those days. In deep memories of Comrade Neupane lied the bitter experiences of the initial phase of his career. "This boy won't survive in this job" they kept on saying and even stopped him from approaching

the guests. So, he sometimes felt like running from the Garden Terrace Restaurant, his first job ever.

But Soaltee hotel was in the wait for the veteran unionist, this might be the reason comrade Neupane decided to stay and survive the job handling all the difficulties. After that not only hotel Soaltee was blessed with an honest staff, but Trade Union movement of Nepal also got its one of the finest leader

Spontaneous involvement in the movement

The same year, the workers of hotel Soaltee started a labour-action. The then general manager D.S. Dilli had misbehaved with the trainee manager *Dharmaraj Kafle* and the case was taken seriously by the workers. Comrade Neupane remembers-"We all gathered in the premises of the hotel and leaving off our duty. Madan Amatya led the action, who was trainee along with me but as Captain. The news was all over the hotel and all the workers even those who were in off-duty hours joined in our movement. And a struggle committee was established then & there, which was led by the then student leader *Jaganath Thapaliya* working at the hotel.

The movement continued for five days and after that Police interrupted in. Many of the leaders were arrested and they were kept at Mahendra Police Club, *Baggikhana* and Tripureshor police club. This was the first time he ever went to 'experience' the lock-up.

"After that incident I knew that unity is the biggest strength we all can have. If we are united we will never lose," says comrade Neupane."The day after management and government decided to take charge upon the case. Guilty general manager was promised to be punished and other demands of the workers, including the 10% service charge was also taken seriously. This was the first movement in the history where all the workers participated actively and was a historically successful event."

Live witness of all the ups and downs of union building

It is so obvious that the ups and down comes with the life of the leaders in the process of establishing a union. Some of them are bribed & sold-out in the hand of bosses, and many of them dedicated themselves in the movement without caring even bread & butter of their family members. Comrade Neupane has seen and experienced in the movement several such ups & downs in his life-time.

It was on the month of October and the year was 1980 when all the leaders with different ideology from hotel Yak & Yeti, hotel Crystal, hotel Soaltee and hotel Everest got together to form a Nepal National Independent Hotel Workers Union and it established the first national conference organizing committee. But before it started working, co-coordinator of the committee Narayan Kafle was sold-out and he became inactive in the process. Another member Dinesh Jha was also sent to Delhi on the training for the post of manager. Neupane says, "As per I have heard, they had promised to be dedicated to the workers' cause. But they turned into renegade. After that the committee was reorganised under the leadership of Hari Prasad Sharma."

Continuing with the movement

He used to remember this incident a lot which he has shared in many places and even written in his own way.

"That incident had take place in November 27, 1981. Many labourers were called in Baneshwor in between 10 to 12 pm. I reached there on time. We were taken to Minbhawan Campus. Then, I got to know that I had already become the delegate of the national conference. We raised fund and got ready to start the conference. And the next day the first national conference of NIHWU was inaugurated. A nine member central committee was announced under the leadership of Hari Prasad Sharma. The conference was in a threatened environment due to the presence of police but it was largely successful."

Comrade Neupane says, "After that conference I got to know that if we move on by establishing our committee we can be stronger and more active. I got into the union movement in an unexpected way."

And their efforts began to show the results very soon. Comrade Neupane then didn't look back. From there he got higher posts and of course his responsibilities were added as well. In the year 1984, he was elected as the central treasurer of the NIHWU by its Second National Conference.

After he was involved in the union activities, he first time was punished by management in 1983. That day, Soaltee again got into action when Mohan Aryal, a house-keeping worker at airport restaurant was accused of stealing some dollars and was kidnapped. Workers went into strike; management declared that the demands were fulfilled but *Hari Prasad Sharma* and *Madan Amatya* were fired from the job and Neupane was given the last warning.

Troubled Union, troubled Neupane

Even after the second national conference, NIHWU didn't get the proper leadership. Many of the members went abroad; some of them left the job. Some changed their profession and some stayed out of contact. Soon, many important posts of the Union were vacant. Just Neupane and his 'senior'- Sharma were left in the central committee.

But the trade union movement took a bright change. Workers at Hotel Everest, Yak & Yeti and Hotel Blue Star staged weeklong strikes under NIHWU leadership. Again hotel Soaltee got into controversies. The management of the hotel decided to increase the cost of cafeteria without any increment on the food allowance. Against this unjust decision, none of the workers stepped-in into cafeteria and for this management blamed Neupane and honoured him with the expel letter.

It was a great shock in his life. "I was against the injustice that management had done with the workers. Their salary was just Rs.400 and the food cost was more than

Rs.240. I wasn't wrong anywhere but my fight was of no use. I lost my job in return", he says.

Then he started the job of searching the job. After a long process of three months, he got the job at *Van Van* restaurant. Even though the place was not comparable, the salary and other facilities were as good as Hotel Soaltee. He was again jobless after one year and in 1987, he joined Hotel *Kathmandu*. It was his final workplace *Hotel d' la Annapurna* where he worked till the last stage of his life.

Even in this difficult situation, comrade Neupane was given the major responsibility of handling NIHWU. He didn't turn back and from the third national conference he was elected as the President of NIHWU. He continued to be in the leadership until he himself decided to quit. If he had not done so, no other wanted to take his place.

GEFONT and its co-founder Neupane

After a decade of establishment of central union in manufacturing industries- NIWU, total of four central Unions including manufacturing & general industries (NIWU), hotel (NIHWU), tourism (TWAN) and transport (ITWAN) were active. The industrial unions had gained sufficient ground, which could make visible impact to the then political movement. To get all the unions together, the need of a new "umbrella" organisation was visualised. Thus, in 20th July 1989, General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) was established- Com. Neupane with the responsibility of coordinating hotel sector's union as a founder member.

Comrade Neupane was involved in different activities of GEFONT, from its establishment to his last date. He spent total 21 years in the service of the Confederation. He was one of the nine GEFONT founders and one of the twelve selected union educators. He represented GEFONT in different forums both at national and international level. He was one of the four leaders of newly launched "GEFONT Veteran Network" and has contributed total 31 years of his life to cultivate Nepali Union movement.

How can we remember him?

***"Neither any grievances; Nor any comments;
Let you be all right, I pray always!"***

After his death, when we look back to him; these lines perhaps mirror his image. He was the gentle and humble character where he never thought about himself. His way of living had a simple policy; don't care what other think about you and don't think wrong about anyone. He never used to share his problems with anyone. It makes us feel it is one of the reasons that a minor disease like Tb took him away so easily!

But it doesn't mean that he was an introvert. He was a straightforward man and was always optimistic. He was not at all ambitious; didn't have the lust of position and

monetary-wealth. He never thought of achieving "big" and was very strong to his determinations. He was happy in what he earned and was highly satisfied. Many of his competitors envy him with this habit.

Life was not easy to him. On December 3, 2006, he was humiliated by a gang of hooligans who identified themselves as "the leaders" of the then Maoist party. They accused him for some baseless and false allegations. They showed how can an honest and dedicated leader is envied by those who never can do something good by themselves. GEFONT stood up against the incident. All of the major trade unions including NTUC took the charge against the incident. The next day, a public forum was organised in the same place by the national trade union centres. The perpetrators apologised for the crime they had done there; and the people who were involved in it, were promised to be punished.

But comrade Neupane didn't make it a personal issue. He never hit the topic in the internal meeting of the Union. Rather he took the incident against the pride of entire unionism and the Nepali working class. He, without any unnecessary aggressiveness, asked for punishment to the accused and published it through Hotel's notice board.

His contribution to the Nepali Trade Union movement is always worth memorable. He was equally active in the popular movement of 1979, 1990 and 2006.

Born at *Thokarpa VDC-7, Sindhupalchok* in 21 June 1959, Neupane has completed his graduation in humanities. He was now residing in Imadol, Lalitpur and was highly appreciated by CPN (UML) with party membership from 1988. He always followed the ethics of the party and always loved NIHWU as his next home.

I pay my heartfelt tribute to the tireless GEFONT-Veteran Comrade Madhav Neupane.

We deeply express our condolence to heartily mourn his wife Sharada, daughter Manisha, son Manish, father Bhuminanda, mother Sudha and entire family members. Let me clarify here your contribution to make Madhav, comrade Madhav is incomparable! Nepali union movement is indebted by your great contribution!! We are equally aware about the vacuum & difficulties of the family after the sudden demise of comrade Neupane; we will remain always with your family.

Long Live Comrade Madhav Neupane!

Thank you comrades!!



Bishnu Rimal
President, GEFONT