

T Venkateshwara Rao

A short biographical note on T Venkateshwara Rao (AITUC) former city mayor and trade union leader interviewed at Vijayawada on September 24, 2004

T Venkateshwara Rao was born on November 12, 1916 in a village in Guntur. His father was a farmer. He studied upto graduation.

Venkateshwara joined the Communist Party of India in 1938 when the party was formed in the state. He was basically from Guntur where he was active in All India Students' Federation. He was also in-charge of Railwaymen's unit. At this time S Guruswamy was the president of the All India Railwaymen's Federation.

In 1940, Venkateshwara was asked to come to Vijayawada and work among railwaymen here. His task was to contact the workers and record their problems. He used to walk down to the gangmen as they usually were in between two stations. There were no hotels around and the gangmen themselves, mostly from backward castes, were extremely reluctant to offer any food. Quite often, Venkateshwara used to go hungry. The salary of the railway staff was paid on post by the treasurer himself who visited each of them on salary day. Comrades used to meet the workers after they got their salary and collect the levy which was only twentyfive paise.

Later VV Giri became the president of the AIRF. It was the period when Second World War had already started and gave a boost to the union activities. Discontent was on the rise everywhere. Prices were soaring up and general condition of people was extremely pathetic as there was no food. The black marketing of goods was soaring up.

At this point, Venkateshwara felt he was more needed in the party and slowly left the railwaymen's organisation after working for three years among them. Venkateshwara was taken in the city committee of the party and was diverted to other fronts.

Venkateshwara was also instrumental in organising the press workers, municipal workers and cement company employees. It was a time when agitations were launched for fair price shops for basic necessities like food and kerosene. He also led teams to dehoard goods from black marketeers and distribute them.

Communist Party had organised food committees for the starving population and Venkateshwara actively participated. By 1945-46, Telengana armed struggle was at its heights and Venkateshwara collected funds for them and got the injured comrades treated.

By 1947, the country attained independence and national flag was hoisted everywhere. Soon on 30 January, 1948, news of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination came and the entire city went into gloom. However in Vijayawada Government college there was a unit of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and its members went into joyful celebrations. They distributed sweets and brought out rallies. General public in the town could not take it any more and attacked their rally. Police was called and in the firing several innocent people were killed. Communists were arrested. Venkateshwara was one among them and was sent to Rajamundri. In the jail, the Communists believed that Telengana warriors would storm the jail and release them. However, Nizam of

Hyderabad against whom the struggle was launched, surrendered to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1948 to join the Indian Union, though for some more time, the struggle continued even against the Nehru government.

Venkateshwara was in detention for four years and was released only when elections were declared in 1952.

After 1952 elections, Venkateshwara contested the municipal corporation elections and got elected. By then he was also working in the Road Transport Corporation where many rural workers had also joined. He remained in the union till 1967 fighting their main contender INTUC in the process.

In 1967, Venkateshwara became the secretary of Vishalandhra Gyan Vigyan Samiti. In 1981, he was elected again municipal councillor and later became the first mayor of the corporation and remained so till 1983. In 1987, CPIM supported Telugu Desham Party and as a result Congress candidate was elected. In 1995, again Venkateshwara was asked by the CPI to contest for Mayorship. He got elected and remained mayor till 2000.

Venkateshwara Rao is now 88-year-old and extremely humble about his achievements. He has a scientific temperament and remains true to his commitments.

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I am now 88-year-old but still I wish to work for the masses.