

No18. SALIL KAR

Sailil Kar was born in 1933 at Purulia in West Bengal. His father was a school headmaster. From 1942 to 1952 he completed his matriculation from Patna. In 1954 he went to Ranchi to do his BA and MA. In 1954 his father died. In 1960 he started teaching at a TATA school at Jamshedpur in Class 11 and 12 history and english. In 1966 he was removed from the TATA school for his involvement in Bihar Bandh and from then on became a wholetimer. In 1962 he was married. He had two children. Sailil Kar says he could not have become a full-time activist in trade union had it not been for the financial support throughout of his wife. From 1960 he came into contact with JMU and Kedar Das the biggest leader of Jamshedpur and he was involved in all the major movements and led some singlehandedly too from 1960. First he was deeply involved in the 1969 movement in TELCO, Tinplate, India Cable, Indian Tubes, ISWP, ZEMCO, TRF companies. The 1969 engineering workers strike continued for 48 days. It was a historic strike in Jamshedpur and the leader was obviously Kedar Das along with Dr. Akhori of the parallel INTUC and other unions also supported it. The next movement was given by Kedar Das to Sailil Kar and Salim to lead in 1971 i.e. the contractor workers movement of those working in steel and engineering companies at Jamshedpur. The 1971 strike saw Sailil Kar coming of age in the JMU leadership. Then came his involvement in the 1973 strike again

for contractor workers' demands. This was not AITUC led as was the 1973 strike but one in which all unions were involved. It was a UF strike. Under this strike TATA agreed to implement partially the Contractor Workers Abolition and Regulation Act of the Bihar govt. and hundreds of contractor workers got their jobs permanent. By mid-1970s after the '73 strike the trade union movement in Jamshedpur got slightly blunted. The next major strike action was in 1981 again on the issue of giving permanency to contractor workers in various TATA companies of Jamshedpur, but it did not succeed as TATAs came down heavily and killed Kedar Das who was the leader of all the movements against them in Jamshedpur since 1958. The movement died after his death and JMU almost collapsed as a big union. The TATAs were successful. After the 1981 strike there has not been another major workers struggle against them only some movement is now growing though not very strongly against the job cuts and social security and permanency cuts and introduction of contractualization in 1990s.

18. SALIL KAR, Iron and Steel, Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union. Jamshedpur.

Date:- January 26th 2003

Time:- 8.00 am in morning to 10.30 am.

Venue:- At his residence Anand Vihar Road No. 11, Q.No. 104, Mango Jamshedpur.
P.O. MGMNH-33, Jharkhand.

Interviewers:- Bobby Poulouse.

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Context:- Salil Kar is a very motivated and committed person and being a teacher has though he was a full time trade unionist having an intellectual bent of mind. He has written a book on Kashmir and is also writing one on the labour history of Jamshedpur.

Salil Kar was born in 1933 in Purulia District, of West Bengal. His father was a head master of a school. In 1942 to 52 period he completed his matriculation from Patna. In 1954 he went to Ranchi to complete his graduation and MA. In 1954 his father retired. In 1960 he started teaching in a school of TATAs at Jamshedpur in class 11 and 12 in history and english. However in 1966 Salil Kar said he was discharged from the TATA company as he took part in the Bihar Bandh and from then on he became a wholetimer. Then he said that in 1962 he married by arranged marriage. After that he worked as a UDC in various places. In 1966 he was arrested and jailed. His father died in 1963 of cancer. He had two children and he thanks his wife who worked while she allowed him to do wholetimer trade unionism. Then he said his elder brother worked in TELCO. He said that upto 1987 Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union(JMU) was the only engineering steel workers union in TATA. In early 1980s Salil Kar said a separate union was formed in TELCO and TINPLATE. As far as the positions held by Salil Kar he narrated that he got associated with JMU and AITUC from the 1960s. He said he was Joint Secretary of Jamshedpur AITUC along with Md. Salim from 1995-2002. From 1987 to 2002 he was General Secretary of Telco Mazdoor Union and Vice President of Tinsplate Mazdoor Union from 1987 to 2002. Then he said he was Vice-President Jamshedpur Contractor Workers Union form 1971-2000. Then Vice President JMU many times from 1970 to 2002 period. Then Gen-Secretary of Punj & Sons Workers Union from 1970 to 1978. As regards the struggles of JMU he said there have been historic struggles by JMU in 1958, 1969, 1971, 1973, and 1981.

Salil Kar said he was not there in the 1958 movement by JMU but from 1958 Kedar Das had emerged as leader of Jamshedpur engineering and steel workers. Later he became leader of contractor workers also. Salil Kar narrated the 1958 strike in detail as he saw it. From 1960 Salil Kar said he got associated with JMU and AITUC. And he narrated that part of history. In 1967 Salil Kar said CPI lost all MLA and MP seats in Jamshedpur town. But the formation of UF ministry in Bihar in 1967 and the background of anti-Congress wave throughout north India helped Red Flag unions revive once more especially in the engineering sectors. In 1969 there was unity among left and it helped revival in assembly and parliamentary constituencies. And so in 1969 Kedar Das and Sunil Mukherjee won parliamentary seats. With some political revival there began a movement in Tinsplate and TELCO with workers demanding wage revision and new grade. This movement in 1969 at Jamshedpur was supported by a section of INTUC which was popularly called parallel INTUC led by Dr. M.K. Akhori who according to Salil Kar played a big role in bringing about trade union unity and this help the '69 movement in a major way. The 1969 engineering workers strike continued for 48 days. In this movement Salil Kar said that the workers of TELCO, Tinsplate, India Cable Company, Indian Tubes, ISWP, ZEMCO, TRF workers were involved. Though the '69 movement was not an exclusively AITUC movement but involving also mainly INTUC the biggest and recognized union which got divided and a parallel one led by Dr. Akhori supported the '69 strike. But of course Salil Kar said AITUC's role along with INTUC was leading and in it Kedar Das was the obvious leader. The

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management this time also like 1958 took repressive steps but though not on the scale of 1958. As regards the reason why TATAs were not so repressive this time the answer according to Salil Kar was that the collapse of the Congress party all over north India and the split in Congress party and the rise of opposition along with Communists made the government friendly to the trade unions who were leading the '69 strike so TATAs were afraid to crush the strike brutally. Salil Kar said that under the pressure of engineering unions the TISCO workers also indirectly benefitted and after 1 year a joint negotiating committee was also formed on an all-India basis and TISCO workers became also party to that Joint Negotiating Committee and TISCO workers also benefited from it. Then Salil Kar said that under the impact of 1969 strike in 1971 a movement began of contractor workers who numbered 30,000 in engineering and steel industry and came out in 1971 demanding pay revision and the strike continued for about 15 days. This time also partly due to political situation and partly to protect TISCOs interests the management forced the contractors in the engineering and steel sectors of Jamshedpur to increase the wage rate of contractor workers by 12 annas. This movement was according to Salil Kar exclusively led by AITUC and that too under the leadership of Salil Kar himself and Md. Salim who is the current Gen. Secretary of JMU. Although JMU was not the recognized union of TISCO but talked indirectly to them and the signature of 5 workers were put on an agreement and thus JMU leaders formed a new union for contractor workers i.e. Contractor Workers Union after the 1971 strike. The leaders in it were Kedar Das, Ram Avtar Singh, Md. Salim, Salil Kar, Barin Dey, Dilip Ghosh, Rabinder Sinha, B.N. Thakur, Shankar Dayal Singh leader of India Tube Company.

Then came the 1973 strike in which also Salil Kar was involved by way of JMU and AITUC and other Contractor Workers Union. In the 1973 movement the workers of TELCO, Tinsplate and ancillary industries were demanding grade revision. This time also the strike was under a United Front banner involving AITUC, parallel INTUC, HMS, MMP, CITU and others and their demand was the period of pay commission should be reduced from 5 years to 4 years and that they should get a grade revision and pay rise one year before in 1973. The strike was not a prolonged strike but a 5 day token strike. It also demanded other things e.g. the worker participation in tripartite decision making along with recognized union. The movement was also against professional tax. In this strike the workers of organized engineering industries participated by abstaining from their duties. The contractor workers also participated in a big way by abstaining from their duties for 15 days and they got some new concessions from employers. After the constitution of wage agreements for two to three terms consecutively the condition of workers improved considerably. And so also the attitude of the workmen also changed i.e. now they were not for long struggles and struggles that involves any risk to their jobs. Thus the need for security of jobs, fear of unemployment, and repressive measures by the management were slowing down the 1973 strike. In this strike the contractor workers were demanding permanency of job. Under the effect of all trade unions especially AITUC according to Salil Kar and a favourable Labour Department the provisions of Contractor Workers Abolition and Regulation Act got partially accepted by the TATAs and thus in 1973 hundreds of contractor workers in TELCO and Tinsplate and other engineering units got permanency of job from their present daily wage. This was a big achievement.

However by mid-1970s i.e. after the 1973 strike the trade union movement got slightly blunted in Jamshedpur.

Then Salil Kar narrated the last big strike by any trade union in Jamshedpur i.e. in 1981 in which Kedar Das was martyred by TATA goondas. The 1981 strike was also one of the most and perhaps most historic strike of Jamshedpur workers and after that the trade union movement in the city has only declined. It was the last strike for Kedar Das. The 1981 strike was again for the permanency of the TISCO workers. This time however TISCO management did not compromise and let loose lumpens on the trade union leaders who ultimately threw a big stone on Kedar Das which hit his back and was hospitalized and later died. TATA also broke the movement by organizing a Jharkhand party and encouraging the INTUC union. The 1981 movement after the killing of Kedar Das collapsed. And it also marked the decline of JMU as a trade union in TATA town. After that trade unions have not been able to revive their militancy again. This was the labour history narrated by Salil Kar of which he was an important participant.