

(20) Com Phani Bora (interviewed in Guwahati on June 5, 2001)

Com. Phani Bora was born in Vorjaha village (six miles from Naogaon) and studied in the primary school there. Later he was shifted to another one half a mile away. He did his high schooling in Naogaon and passed matriculation examination in 1942. Soon he got admission in the prestigious Cotton College in Guwahati that was the centre of Assamese culture and politics.

Com Bora was in touch with All India Students Federation since his school days. He was one of the star sportsman and used to visit various parts of the state in this connection which provided him opportunities to meet political activists of every shade. As a result when he was in AISF, he was also in touch with RCPI and Congress leaders. However, Bombay convention of the AISF impressed him deeply and he became pro-Soviet. Gradually he got himself integrated in the Communist Party of India.

Soonafter, the few members of the Communist Party in the region organised a workers' convention in Guwahati for the first time. They also started a study circle and studied historical and dialectical materialism alongwith political economy.

It was at this time that a decision was taken to organise Communist Party in Assam valley in 1942 under the leadership of Dhiren Dutta, Kirti Bordoloi, Nandeshwar Talukdar, Jagannath Bhattacharjee and others. Com Phani Bora was also among the 11-member state committee of the party. Com Neelmani, who was the pioneer of the labour movement in Assam, was arrested in 1939 but was included in the committee. They attended the party Congress in Bombay in 1943.

Alongwith others, Com Phani Bora had been organising workers under the AITUC since 1938 and had their first strike in 1939 in Digboi called by a reformist trade union leader called Pramanik. They could not even properly benefit from the gains.

It may be mentioned that even before that, Com Phani Bora and his comrades were active among the tea garden workers and had launched struggles for their demands in several tea gardens.

In Santola Bagan tea garden, unlawful restrictions were imposed on the workers against which discontent was already brewing up when a worker was shot dead by the management. A series of strikes was organised by the militant workers under the leadership of communists but could not face the brutal repression by the British. However again in 1947, massive agitation was launched followed by large scale arrests.

It was a period of violent encounters as they had to face the British as well as Japanese attacks and they all had military training.

Alongwith the railway workers, students movement also gained strength and an agitation was launched on behalf of Cotton College students against the war in 1941. Students were lathicharged but the agitation could not be suppressed and spread in other parts of the state. Peasantry and tea garden workers also joined the movement but not so effectively. In 1943, All India Kisan Sabha was organised in Assam.

It was in this period that a call was given for Post and Telegraph strike by the communists in Guwahati and Com Phani Bora was one among them. The strike was a success.

By this time, Com Bora had organised the students all over the state. He used to travel whole of Assam and mobilise the students. Finally a massive movement was launched in support of INA soldiers.

Agitation was launched in support of Jawaharlal Nehru also when he was denied entry into Kashmir.

In solidarity with RIN soldiers, another student agitation was launched. The rebellion against British rule sparked off on various issues.

The AISF conference in Delhi was organised on an anti-imperialist note and a massive demonstration was brought out by leaders like KM Ashraf, Satyapal Dang.

By 1946, the communists had a strong base among railway workers spread over in Chittagaon-Calcutta-Guwahati-Dibrugarh line and played a significant role in Assam. All the movements were signalled by the railway engines moving into the station adorned with red flags.

It was at this time that a peace conference was organised in Nalyapul which was to be attended by some underground communist leaders and the police came to arrest them. One of the SI entered the venue but was manhandled by the workers and eventually got killed. Taking advantage of the situation, police launched massive repression and arrested hundreds of peace activists and trade union workers, beat up brutally railway and tea garden workers and dismissed them from jobs. Even Congress government that followed soonafter was equally repressive. INTUC was also formed by this time.

In Assam, trade union movement faced a major challenge from INTUC that captured the tea garden workers' union, railway workers' union, public sector unions and others, though it would be needless to add that workers never got influenced by their ideology. It was their economism that brought the workers under their banner.

As far as post-independence context was concerned, Com Bora was against the extreme radical line of BT Ranadive though served jail sentences also in this period.

He has held high positions in the AITUC and still keeps contributing towards the ideological development of the working class movement. According to him, the movement suffers today with the twin problems of economism and parliamentarism. There is no continuous movement against capitalism or landlordism. The consequent stagnation has resulted into ideological confusion among the party ranks. The new generation has almost ignored the path that was chartered by the CPI.

According to him, the joining of coalition governments in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in 1960s was a fetal mistake that created the Frankstein we are facing today in the form of communal forces. The Janasangh (former name of the BJP) party which had till then only a regional following was promoted by the cooperation of the leftists and rose up to a national stature.

Com Bora, a revolutionary in saddle even now, has a lively

infectious optimism that inspires the comrades around him.

(2) Com Phani Bora (Transcription of the interview of Com Phani Bora in Guwahati on June 5, 2001) (Phase III)

I was born in Vorjaha village (six miles from Naogaon) and studied in the primary school there. Later I was shifted to another one half a mile away. I did my high schooling in Naogaon and passed matriculation examination in 1942. Soon I got admission in the prestigious Cotton College in Guwahati that was the centre of Assamese culture and politics.

I was in touch with All India Students Federation since my school days. I was one of the star sportsman and used to visit various parts of the state in this connection which provided me opportunities to meet political activists of every shade. As a result when I was in AISF, I was also in touch with RCPI and Congress leaders. However, Bombay convention of the AISF impressed me deeply and I became pro-Soviet. Gradually I got myself integrated in the Communist Party of India.

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Aongwith others, I had been organising workers under the AITUC since 1938 and had their first strike in 1939 in Digboi called by a reformist trade union leader called Pramanik. They could not even properly benefit from the gains.

It may be mentioned that even before that, our comrades were active among the tea garden workers and had launched struggles for their demands in several tea gardens. I was also involved in these activities.

In Santola Bagan tea garden, unlawful restrictions were imposed on the workers against which discontent was already brewing up when a worker was shot dead by the management. A series of strikes was organised by the militant workers under the leadership of communists but could not face the brutal repression by the British. However again in 1947, massive agitation was launched followed by large scale arrests.

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As far as post-independence context was concerned, I was against the extreme radical line of BT Ranadive though served jail sentences also in this period.

I have always been with the AITUC and still keep in touch with the ideological debates prevailing in the working class movement. As I see, the movement suffers today with the twin problems of economism and parliamentarism. There is no continuous movement against capitalism or landlordism. The consequent stagnation has resulted into ideological confusion among the party ranks. The new generation has almost ignored the path that was chartered by the CPI.

I think, the joining of coalition governments in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in 1960s was a fatal mistake that created the Frankstein we are facing today in the form of communal forces. The Janasangh (former name of the BJP) party which had till then only a regional following was promoted by the cooperation of the leftists and rose up to a national stature."