

Bishu Mukherjee, Benares

Bishu Mukherjee is now in his 80s and was born in 1928 at Benares. He belongs to a Koolin Brahmin family which has settled in Benares for many generations. Bishu Mukherjee from his school days itself came into contact with Bengali revolutionaries and slowly drifted to the left and started his TU work in Benares. He and many other leaders of his generation who joined the CPI were all products or followers of the great communist and working class leader of UP who built up the party and TU in that state i.e Rustam Setin.

Once Bishuda joined the AITUC then the first union he was told to organise was that of the safai karamcharies. It ment working with the SCs and this was the foundation of Bishuda's TU politics. He worked for several years organising the safai karamcharies of Benares. In those days for a Brahmin to associate himself with such lower castes resulted in lot of abuses from fellow Brahmins. Bishuda managed to also rope into the AITUC one panda of Ahilyabhai Ghat i.e. one Kannahiya Tiwari Tirth Purohit who also worked among these bhangies. Both had to face abuses and even discrimination from fellow high castes.at this mingling and polluting onself with bhangies. Kannahiya Tiwariji is the only Panda of the Benares Ghat who joined the communist party and while doing his religious affairs under the leadership of Bishuda joined and worked amongst the working class.

Bishuda then organised the Water workers of Benareas and led many militant and sometimes even direct clashes with the police in the heart of the city. Then he worked among the textile workers of Benares, the Printing press workers, then the railway workers when BTR gave the famous call for railway strike. Bishuda and the Benares AITUC unit opposed BTR's call. He also built the Cinema Workers Union which is still functioning well in Benares. Bishuda became member of the General Council of AITUC in 1970. Bishuda is the oldest surviving member of the UPTUC as of now. Bishuda organised almost all the various sections of the working class in Benares city. The Benaresi sari workers which is made by Muslims but sold by Hindu traders. He also worked among Bunkars i.e. the tailors of the muslims community. Many a time when there was communal tension in Benares Bishuda had the reputation among both the communities to walk into a mob be it Muslims or Hindus. There were so many occasions where he played that role of trying to bring communal harmony. Apart from Benares city Bishuda also is one of the pioneer builders of union in the whole Mirzapur belt and then into Chunnar and Renukoot where he organised unions in HINDALCO, and Dalla Cement works, and other industries in that whole industrial belt where he was leading and was involved in numerous struggles. It is to be noted that the cement factories in Chunnar is the biggest in Asia. There he built unions in Kanoria Chemical Plants, the Colliery Mazdoor Sabha in 1980, NTPC workers union, Renusagar Thermal Power Workers Union, Annapara Power workers union, the Rihand Dam\Workers Union and others in that belt away from Chunar. In Benares the other unions he built were the Engineering and Metal Workers Union, Press Workers Union, Jute Workers Union, Shop Assitants Union.

Thus Bishu Mukherjee's list of unions he worked and singlehandedly created and built up or took over and expanded is too long to list. All that can be said about him is that he is one of the tallest leaders in the Benares, Mirzapur, Chunnar, and Renukoot belt of industries and one of the big leaders of UP.