

Vijay Kumar, Andhra Pradesh

(Born 15 September 1918, Educated in Guntur District)

Entry into Politics

He was in anti-Simon Commission activities as a young boy and was very impressed by the speeches of the various Congress Leaders. This left a deep impression on his mind, and with the passing of time, he developed anti-British feelings. The news of the hanging of Bhagat Singh also left a deep impression on him, and he later on came in contact with the Bengal revolutionaries, as also of Andhra.

By 1935 Vijay Kumar joined the Students' Federation and conducted district-level students' strike in Chittoor.

He joined as a clerk in Deputy Collector's office, but due to contacts with Congress leaders was discussed. Then he shifted to Vizag (Vizianagram, now Vishakhapatnam) in 1937 and joined the College; he helped organise students.

Into TU activities

In the meantime, he came in contact with the Communist movement. He was also underground. He was asked by the Party whether he wanted to continue his studies further or wanted to work as political activist whole-time. He gave up the studies and joined whole-time politics on his own. Otherwise, he would have continued his post-graduation in Chemistry and industrial chemistry.

Vijay Kumar was assigned both the student and working class fronts. He worked in Vizag area, which now is divided into three districts.

One of his early activities among the working class was organising and taking their classes, particularly on economics. He made a thorough study of Marx's Capital, and is one of the few persons to have really studied the work. He used to take workers' classes even as early as 1942. He was accused of conspiring to burn jute mills in the Vizag area; these mills were also spread to Chittavalsa and Yellamangala areas. He came in contact with the port and Harbor workers in 1943-44 and formed their union, which continues to function to this day, and with which he continues to be in contact even today. He did lot of organisational and agitational work among the jute workers.

In fact, some of these unions were in existence prior to his coming onto the scene. His work helped them expand. A congress leader in jute because of ill-health requested that the union be looked after by Vijay Kumar. Socialist leaders agreed. Something similar was the situation in Port and Harbor where a Congress Socialist leader gave up presidency in his favour. Such was Vijay Kumar's reputation.

Vijay Kumar even wrote a textbook on political economy. His classes were very popular among the workers. Many of the worker-students later became prominent leaders. Vijay

Kumar used to organise daily evening political classes, which could come regularly. He participated in port and dock workers' strike in 1942, and was arrested for "anti-British" activities. But he succeeded in getting pay-rise for the workers.

When the Japanese bombed the Vizag during the middle of the Second World War, most of the leaders fled the city fearing for their lives. But Vijay Kumar and his associates remained at port among the workers. 32 workers were killed when a bomb fell on a big pipe, in which several workers had hid themselves.

During the war, harbour and other workers raised the demands of proper ration, wartime allowance, additional pa for additional work, 8-hour day, etc. Vijay Kumar actively struggled for them.

He and his colleagues led a strike of the workers of Sciendia Steam Navigation Co. which had begun construction of a shipyard there in 1943. They were threatened with dire consequences but the Union led by Vijay Kr. refused to be cowed down. That union is with AITUC even today.

He along with others, led a "Hunger March" of the jute, port and ship workers from the jute area to Vizag, a distance of 18 miles. The leaders including Vijay Kumar were arrested and sent to jail near Bellary.

During 1942-43 he organised a number of TUs in the Vizag area, i.e. among harbour, Jute, hospital, motor, rickshaw, press, railways, etc. At that time MSM (Madras-Southern Maharashtra) Railway used to run in the area. Vijay Kumar became the vice-president of Madras Provincial TUC; the famous TU leader Chakkarau Chettiar was the president.

Vijay Kr. organised the various categories of employees in the railways e.g. gangmen, guards, drivers, porters, etc. He toured far and wide for this purpose.

He was arrested in 1947 and again during 48-51. He was in Vellore and other jails. At first, a large number of workers – 102, were also arrested and were with him. He also attempted jail escape.

On release, he worked in various capacities during 1953-66. In 1966, there was a historic mass movement of Andhra working class and the people in general demanding establishment Vizag Steel Plant. It spread far and wide for several days as a mess upsurge. Vijay Kumar was one of its front-ranking leaders. 8 people died in police firings, ultimately, the govt. had to concede the demands and agreed to build the steel plant in Vizag. Vijay was the president of A.P. state TUC from 1987 to 1998. He was also the vice-president of the AITUC for two terms.