

## **R.D.C.P. Rao - Bio-Sketches**

R.D.C.P. Rao was born in Ganjam district in Orissa fifty-six years ago in the year 1947. Early in his childhood during his school days his father shifted to Andhra Pradesh as his father joined a company named Ferro Alloys Ltd in Vijaynagar district. His father was the first important influence in his life. He saw from childhood that his father was a popular person and the most unique aspect that made him wonder and look up to his father was that though he was belonging to the officer class he was constantly visited on by the poor workers of the company regarding their problems. Rao saw his father being respectfully being looked upto. The fact that though being an officer, unlike others of his class Rao saw his father had this unique and differentiating quality. He saw his father getting elected as the Panchayat Board Member and that too from the workers' constituency though he was himself not a worker but an officer. It proved to Rao that his father was indeed unique and so his way of life proved to be the first powerful influence in Rao's life. His mother was a simple god-fearing housewife and was to Rao a symbol of affection, love and warmth. These factors perhaps made Rao take leadership positions from his school life itself. In school Rao became an elected School Peoples Leader. In the middle school too he took a leading role in being a member of the ACC (i.e. like the NCC) and was again elected as a class representative. Then his father again shifted to Machilipatnam and there Rao did his pre-university (class11 & 12) and then he did engineering at AMIE which he later discontinued. Next Rao joined Noble college and did Maths and Economics from there. Noble college proved to be the place where R.D.C.P. Rao first came into touch with politics. At Noble college there was a student who used to distribute a magazine named "PrajaShakti". It was a magazine that had materials on workers and peasants and this attracted Rao. It inspired him to do something for these sections and himself also become an activist like person. Rao thus along with friends organised a Planning Forum with the support of the principal of Noble college as there was no student's union there and so Rao started work among the student community. This was a powerful learning experience for Rao. At that time in AP a movement was going on by various sections including students demanding the central government to set up a steel plant in their state and Rao too joined this general movement going on in the state and finally the GoI gave a steel plant to AP at Vizag. In 1970 Rao joined his father's company in the computer department. Rao worked for six years in this company and in that period he got active also in the social field with one man Mr. Deshpande who had left the company and created an organisation Social Evil Eradication. Rao in these six years while working for the company also worked for Mr. Deshpande. After six years of working in his father's company in 1976 he got a job as a Punch Card Operator in National Minerals Development Corporation (NMDC) and was posted at Kirandul in Bastar district of the then Madhya Pradesh state. Initially he kept out of any social work as a conscious work as he felt he wanted a peaceful life. However he was pulled into trade union work as one day he found one Inderjit Singh the then president of SKMS was standing at his office door when he was coming out after a day's work. He talked to Rao and asked him to join the union, he obviously got information through some common friends in the left circle about Rao's activities in Vijaynagar. Rao took some months to decide whether to join and finally after a year in 1977 he joined as an executive committee member of SKMS at Kirandul. Within a year

Rao's trade union life suddenly took a historic turn with what is today remembered as one of the most historic struggles by the iron-ore mine workers of Kirandul in 1978. The issue SKMS was fighting for at that time was of the contract workers working in the mines at Kirandul. The police cracked down very heavily and 11 workers were shot dead. The contract workers numbered in the thousands and the Steel Minister then under the Janata Party government in the center had decided to retrench all of them. The strike went on for more than a month initially as relay hunger strike and then as indefinite hunger strike. After a month's such activity the situation had become very tense on April 1, 1978 and on April 5, 1978 the police and CRPF resorted to firing killing 11 contract workers in Kirandul. Even today there is a memorial build at the site where they were shot. Suddenly R.D.C.P. Rao's trade union work had become too hot and all the union leaders and those involved with the strike had to go underground. All the SKMS leaders were jailed for over one-and-a-half years and Rao went underground. From 1978 to 1984 the SKMS union went into crisis over the issue of the role of some leaders mishandling the strike action leading to the firing and Rao too developed serious differences with the leadership and left SKMS/AITUC and joined CITU. In 1984 Inderjit Gupta came personally to Kirandul and persuaded Rao to come back and he did. Inderjit Singh the other leader of SKMS died in a dumper accident in 1975 and the leadership mantle fell on Rao from 1985 onwards. By 1991 Rao had become the Secretary of SKMS. And from 1991 Rao this time as the unquestioned leader of SKMS had to lead the second historic struggle in NMDC's trade union history i.e. the fight to get back the 11B mine which had been secretly sold by the then steel minister Santosh Mohan Dev to Mittal an international steel magnate and NRI. The struggle was widely reported in the press and people knew it as the struggle to bring back to NMDC the Bailadila mines. This historic strike also saw the INTUC supporting it though the government at the center was Congress. However the main leadership was provided by SKMS and that too in it R.D.C.P. Rao. The struggle went on for over eight years and finally in 12<sup>th</sup> year in 2003 the Supreme Court gave a decision in favour of keeping the mines with NMDS. This was the second big struggle which Rao won and led.