

## **Prabhakar Kunte (INTUC), Bombay**

A short transcriptive note on Prabhakar Kunte (INTUC) interviewed in Bombay, on July 27, 2004

I was born on 29 September, 1922 in Raigarh. My father Kashinath Vaman Rao Kunte was a graduate and lawyer at Alibagh near Bombay where I received my school education after which I was sent to Bombay for college.

I got involved in student movement launched by the communists and became party member in 1939. Soon after the second world war was declared. In 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union and communists wanted to strengthen the hands of the Allied forces to fight against Hitler. They named it as "Great Patriotic war" and opposed the Quit India movement launched at the time to pressurise the Britishers to leave the country since the colonial regime was trapped in the war efforts.

I was opposed to it and supported the "Quit India" movement. I resigned from the party on December 22, 1941 along with hundreds of other students and joined the Quit India Movement. I was later jailed along with my elder and younger brothers while my cousin was asked to report to the police station everyday.

Few months after when I was released I joined college and graduated with economics. I joined AITUC the only trade union organisation that was the umbrella for all other trade unions as well. My trade union career started with the workers of a union in a small hotel. I was sent to Nagpur as a delegate to the AITUC session. I call the session as a "communist show" though there were non-communists too and in large number. A resolution was passed to offer assistance to the British Government in its indirect fight for the Soviet Union. Despite opposition from Congress and several other delegates, the resolution was accepted. I was deeply disappointed.

NM Joshi, the president of the organisation interfered and announced that the resolution must be treated simply as an expression of opinion. He said that any political resolution had to be passed with two third majority while this resolution had only a simple majority. Any way, NM Joshi declared that the resolution on the anti-imperialist struggle of Indian people stands valid.

After I came out of jail in 1944, student movement was already split into MM Shah and Farooqui group. The former was with the Congress while the later was with Communists.

In 1944, more than hundred students gathered at Nagpur without any formal information and formed a third front with students from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Sindh and many other parts. I toured all over the country. I had the active support from several comrades like Ramsumer Shukla, Ravindra Verma, Ramunda Menon, Jose, BN Rajhauns and Prabodh Chandra. This group was not affiliated to any political party except the Congress as the Shah group had wound up.

In 1946, I left student movement and joined trade union and started working with Sassoon dock workers. When INTUC was formed I joined it.

By this time Hind Mazdoor Sabha was also formed. I was active in INTUC for five to six years and then formed a separate union while working in a union at Mukesh Textile mills. I was elected as municipal councillor from the area. The workers of the textile factory developed serious differences with the Majoor Mahajan (INTUC). However, I maintained my ties with the leadership.

As general secretary of the engineering workers' union, I was also looking after Godrej workers in Vikrouli. Rajni Patel was Congress president at the time. Raja Kulkarni was the general secretary of Godrej factory union and Datta Samant formed his union there. Raja Kulkarni had signed some papers but the final agreement was yet to be formulated. These papers came to me that had Raja's signature. Datta Samant, being a Congress member then raised hue and cry alleging that I had signed the papers that had anti-worker clauses. I asked Rajni and Vasant Mengde, the leaders of the INTUC to call Datta and explain the confusion to him.

It was a time when I had to visit Berlin to attend an ILO meet. Indira Gandhi was also there. She asked our ambassador to convey the message that there was trouble at Godrej factory as Datta had already got killed a sub-inspector and several others on the issue. I realised that Rajni and Mengde had double crossed me and did not explain to Datta that I was not involved. Datta had from the beginning believed in forming unions that were based on individual influence.

In fact Jawahar Lal and Sardar Patel believed in direct negotiations with the workers but that kind of initiative failed. It was only when Gulzari Lal Nanda formulated an Act called Bombay Industrial Relations (BIR) Act, that providing for compulsory arbitration became compulsory. He did not realise that it became a statutory compulsion for the management to provide such platforms. However, Communists like SA Dange called it "Kala Quaida"

At the end of the day, I do not think that trade union movement has contributed much towards national development. I have been away from the Socialists as well as the Congress. I believe that progressive movement in the country has received a set back.

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A short biographical note on Prabhakar Kunte (INTUC) interviewed in Bombay, on July 27, 2004

Prabhakar Kunte was born on 29 September, 1922 in Raigarh. His father Kashinath Vaman Rao Kunte was a graduate and lawyer at Alibagh near Bombay where Prabhakar received his school education after which he was sent to Bombay for college.

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Prabhakar was opposed to it and supported the "Quit India" movement. He resigned from the party on December 22, 1941 along with hundreds of other students and joined the Quit India Movement. Kunte was later jailed along with his elder and younger brothers while his cousin was asked to report to the police station everyday.

Few months after when he was released he joined college and graduated with economics. He joined AITUC the only trade union organisation that was the umbrella for all other trade unions as well. His trade union career started with the workers of a union in a small hotel. He was sent to Nagpur as a delegate to the AITUC session. He calls the session as a "communist show" though there were non-communists too and in large number. A resolution was passed to offer assistance to the British Government in its indirect fight for the Soviet Union. Despite opposition from Congress and several other delegates, the resolution was accepted. Kunte and his friends were disappointed.

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In 1944, under the leadership of Kunte and several others, more than hundred students gathered at Nagpur without any formal information and formed a third front with students from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Sindh and many other parts. Kunte toured all over the country. He had the active support from several comrades like Ramsumer Shukla, Ravindra Verma, Ramunda

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According to Kunte, Jawahar Lal and Sardar Patel believed in direct negotiations with the workers but that kind of initiative failed. It was only when Gulzari Lal Nanda formulated an Act called Bombay Industrial Relations (BIR) Act, that providing for compulsory arbitration became compulsory. He did not realise that it became a statutory compulsion for the management to provide such platforms. However, Communists like SA Dange called it "Kala Quaida"

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