

## Com K Subbarayan

A short biographical note on Com K Subbarayan based on his interview taken on July 17, 2004, in Delhi

Com K Subbarayan was born in a mill worker's family on 10 August, 1947. His father was in Dhanalakshmi textile mill in Tirupur and was a member of the All India Trade Union Congress. Subbarayan was deeply impressed by his father's thinking and activities and joined early the All India Youth Federation and worked on the cultural as well as literary front. He became a member of the Communist Party soon after passing out his school final in 1965.

Subbarayan joined trade union movement in 1970 and became a whole time worker in 1971. Since 1972 he has been either the secretary or the president of Banyan Workers' Union in Tirupur.

In 1970, Communist Party launched a country wide land struggle. Subbarayan joined the struggle and in Erode district of Tamilnadu, organised workers against a landlord called Pallai Kottai Pattalkkar and grabbed three thousand acres of land. Soon the police came and arrested all the agitationists. Subbarayan was kept in Coimbatore jail for twenty days. Subbarayan has not looked back since then.

In 1972, the wage revision issue was raised. In 1974, the call for general strike was given by the AiTUC and all other trade union organisations like CITU, LPF (Labour Progressive Front of DMK) and Anna Trade union (AIDMK) joined in.

Again in 1984, struggle was launched for wage revision and Dearness Allowance. The hoisery workers were not entitled to get DA till then. The agitation continued for 127 days. The workers were harassed, beaten up and sometime even set afire. But the undeterred workers got their demand accepted led by AITUC. Agreement was signed for fixed DA not variable.

Through these struggles, Subbarayan learnt many lessons. As the movement was getting stronger, the management started shifting the production units to far off places to crush the agitation. But the workers accepted the challenge and reached the factory units cycling for 20-22 kms to persuade the workers to stop working.

There used to be a small unit of Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh and management used them to spread anti-communist ideas to dissuade workers from joining AITUC. It was stopped by the AITUC and other unions supported the step.

In Tirupur, a small unit of hoisery factory was opened in 1930s by two friends, one was a Hindu and other Muslim to cater to the local market inside the country. They used to produce only banyan. But soon as the demand started going up, the factories were setup to produce various cotton undergarments. Today more than Rs 600 crores worth hoisery goes all over the world.

As the business was growing, workers started coming from other areas to Tirupur in search of employment. Majority came from southern part of Tamilnadu, like Thanjavur. These areas of Tamilnadu are not only poor but backward also. Suffering from feudal exploitation, the workers accepted any wages that the management in Tirupur offered them. As they hardly got Rs 10 to Rs 15 as wages in their native places, a wage offer of Rs 90 was more than welcome. Thus the struggle for minimum wages is losing its support.

The management is playing on the tension and trying to create a rift between the local and outside worker. There are two lakh workers in Tirupur alone with horrible living conditions. AITUC is taking up these demands. In hoisewry, half of the working population is women. The feudal background does not allow them to come out in the open and join the trade union movement.

Subbarayan is active among the Municipal workers, Private transport workers and led several struggles for their cause. There are 12 private transport companies employing 1200 workers. Subbarayan raised their issues in the Tamilnadu Assembly where he was elected twice.

Com Subbarayan has been elected as Member of Parliament in 2004 polls.

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