

## 9. B Venkat Rao, a Worker in Vizag Steel Plant Union affiliated to AITUC

### BIO-NOTE

A short biographical note on B Venkat Rao, a worker in the Vishakha Steel Plant Union affiliated to AITUC, interviewed at Vizag steel plant, Ukkunagar, Vishakhapatnam on September 11, 2004

Venkatrao was born on June 1, 1958 in Chichinada village in West Godavari district in a family of land less workers. He studied upto intermediate in Godavari and for ITI came to Vizag.

Venkatrao joined steel plant in 1986 when it was still under construction. Venkat was in the youth movement in the CPI led Youth Federation before joining the plant and was involved in the agitation for the house pattas for the villagers displaced by the construction of the plant. The agitation spread over other areas of the city too for all the shelterless families. The movement was launched to get sites for homes as well to spread awareness among the poor about their rights. The agitation was taken back only after distribution of 1200 pattas to the poor of the area.

Venkat belongs to the family of Bushy Venkat Rao, elder brother of Venkat's father and a hero of the Telengana movement. Bushy Venkatrao was killed alongwith five communists in a military attack on his village in West Godavari district. Venkat was named after him.

After finishing his ITI courses, Venkat joined the plant as a technician in February, 1986. Soon the struggle was launched by the workers in the plant for incentives, medical and canteen facilities, and finally for wage hike in 1989-90. However the work was kept uninterrupted as the plant had to go on.

In 1998, the coke battery failed and it was too costly to buy another. The profits of the plant were going down and to save it from closure, the workers mended the battery with their indigenous technological skill and the plant was kept working.

There were losses upto Rs 230 crores accumulating in the plant budget even before production started. There was a survey by Mackenzie company that reported losses upto Rs 4560 crores while the investment was Rs 800 crores. There was a danger of the plant collapsing. It was at this point that AITUC union asserted itself and took the responsibility of saving the life of the plant as well as its workers. Soon the efforts brought fruits and in 2001, the profits started coming with the

earnings of Rs 70000crores. In 2002, it was Rs 521000 crores. Since then the union has not looked back.

In 1998, when the AITUC became recognised as the plant's leading union with 95 percent following, the Joint Management Committee formed earlier alongwith CITU was dissolved and Venkat and others went ahead with their union work.

In 2003, INTUC has come to power in the plant with M Rajshekhar as its General Secretary but they are following the path already charted by the AITUC according to Venkatrao.

#### TRANSCRIPTIVE NOTE

A short transcriptive note on B Venkat Rao, a worker in the Vishakha Steel Plant Union affiliated to AITUC, interviewed at Vizag steel plant, Ukkunagar, Vishakhapatnam on September 11, 2004

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I joined steel plant in 1986 when it was still under construction. I was in the youth movement in the CPI led Youth Federation before joining the plant and was involved in the agitation for the house pattas for the villagers displaced by the construction of the plant. The agitation spread over other areas of the city too for all the shelterless families. The movement was launched to get sites for homes as well to spread awareness among the poor about their rights. The agitation was taken back only after distribution of 1200 pattas to the poor of the area.

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