

## **Com Ratan Roy (Interviewed in Patna on December 29, 2000)**

Com Ratan Roy has been the veteran of trade union movement in Bihar and was general secretary of the Bihar Pradesh Trade Union Congress (BPTUC) for a long time.

He was born on April 28, 1923 in Munger and brought up in Jamshedpur where his family was settled. He entered student movement in Munger itself. Later in school, he joined Yugantar group, a secret national revolutionary group active among youth and students. There were only a dozen members including Com Ratan Roy who tried to organise and mobilise others on various issues. But he was getting disillusioned about their methods and wanted to work in the trade union.

Meanwhile Communist Party was formed in 1939 in Bihar and he became one of its founder members. In 1940, the party gave a call for general strike and Com Roy was arrested. In 1942, he was released and joined railway workers movement. The communist participation in trade union movement in this period was divided and the railway workers' union was presided by a Congress leader.

Com Roy was also involved in collecting arms for Telangana struggle and made other contributions on behalf of BPTUC.

When the famous March 1949 strike call of railway workers was given by the party, he had to go underground and was again arrested in 1949.

In post independence period, there was a surge in trade union movement and workers were organised in various sectors. Com Ratan Roy was the deputy secretary of BPTUC in this phase.

In 1957, general elections were held and CPI won the Jamshedpur seat that gave a fillip to the movement. The trade union in TISCO led by communists staked claim to represent the workers there and organised a token strike in 1958. The strike spread over various units and was extremely successful. However, the Congress government and TISCO management joined hands in suppressing the workers brutally. One worker was killed in the police firing. Com Kedar Das and Com Amjad were arrested. But the strike continued.

Com Ranadive and Com Dange arrived and decided to call off the strike as the leaders were all in jail. At least 600 workers were dismissed from TISCO and 1500 were suspended. Strikes were organised in other sectors and in the city itself in solidarity with the TISCO workers.

In this phase another strike was organised in Barauni under the leadership of BPTUC which was again suppressed by the Government. In police firing, Com Chandrashekhar

narrowly escaped but several others were injured. By this time most of the leaders were in jail.

As the unions were coming up creating a working class base for the party, Ratan Roy started concentrating in coal fields. Giridih became the centre of his activities.

In 1959, BPTUC conference was held in Jamshedpur. Com Roy was elected general secretary. At least 20 cases were forced against him. The leaders were in jail for as long as seven years. In fact the trade unions in Bihar were initially monopolised by the INTUC which was largely functioning to promote the interest of the management. The AITUC had to fight their collaborationist tendencies. But for struggle as well as trade union unity, it was imperative to establish the communist hold among workers.

The achievements in this period were significant. There was no concept of variable DA and AITUC struggled in 1958 and got it implemented by mid 60s. Wage revision was also introduced at the behest of AITUC.

In 1972-73, massive strike was organised in Bokaro of both regular and contract workers. All the factories in the city were closed and section 144 was imposed. INTUC gave the call to prevent outsiders from entering the movement indicating that the communists were not exactly workers. But the initiative failed.

Communist trade unionists were having regular meetings. In one of such gatherings addressed by Com Chandrashekhar, at least one lakh workers participated. The AITUC was invited for negotiations and demands were conceded.

BPTUC has a history of organising political strikes as well and Com Ratan Roy has his own contributions towards them. In January 1974, a call was given for Bihar Bundh against the professional tax and the bundh was overwhelmingly successful.

According to Com Ratan Roy, trade union movement in general is suffering today with a downfall. The factors, according to him, are multiplicity in trade unions, the changing character of wages and many others. After nationalisation, little progress could be made in the industrial sector as the negotiations were always held only at national level. Only in central coal fields, AITUC could expand. Besides, the role of mafias also cannot be underestimated.