

## **Ranen Sen, Calcutta, Hyderabad**

(Interviewed in Calcutta on December 24, 2000)

One of the early builders of the Communist movement in Bengal, Dr. Ranen Sen has spent 75 years of his life in organising the party in the state. At the age of 93, he still takes part in ideological discussions in the party organ and gives his valuable suggestions whenever comrades come to him.

"Building up a party is an art," he said and added that "to learn from mistakes is a process, for which criticism and self criticism are imperative." While conversing with him, one realised how closely his entire life was woven with the Communist movement itself.

As early as in 1925, he started his political career and joined a secret organisation called Yugantar. These organisations were operative in most of the educational institutions and his school was no exception. Same year he had appeared for matriculation examinations also.

In 1926-27, when he was in college, Com Sen found a book called "Karl Marx, a modern rishi" by Lala Hardayal in the library. Another book that influenced him at this stage was the biography of Lenin by Krishna Murthy. There were some other books also like "Life and Teachings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels" and "Karl Marx, a thinker and revolutionary".

It was around same time that Shapurji Saklatwala came to India to attend a meeting of trade unions in Delhi and visited Calcutta also. Being a member of the Parliament in England, he enjoyed unrestricted mobility within the country. Saklatwala was a powerful speaker and a prominent member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). His meetings were attended by large gatherings.

Com Sen was deeply impressed by his speeches and realised that communism was the only way out. By this time Com Muzaffar Ahmed had already formed a communist party and Com Sen was introduced to one of its members called Abdul Halim who took him to a study circle led by Philip Spratt. Com Bhupen Dutt, younger brother of Swami Vivekanand, was also in the group and took classes.

He came in contact with the Workers' and Peasants' Party (W & PP) also at this time which did not have a proper organisation. When the comrades were arrested in 1928 in connection with Meerut Conspiracy case, Com Sen remained in touch with W & PP and other comrades who were not arrested. It was decided to reorganise the party in Bengal at this time.

In 1930, the famous carters' strike took place under the leadership of Com Bankim Mukherjee. Six carters were killed in police firing and Bankim and Momin were

sentenced for four years each though later reduced. Halim came out after nine months and they formed a Communist group in early January, 1931. There was another group in Bombay led by VD Deshpande and BT Ranadive which was recognised by the Comintern. The comrades from Bengal appealed to them for affiliation but they refused and picked up some other fellows who later proved to be doubtful characters.

In July, 1931, AITUC session was to be held and the Congress led trade unions launched a campaign against communists. Deshpande was in the leadership and moved a no confidence motion against AITUC president Subhash Chandra Bose. Eventually Bose was thrown out and Com Bankim was made president. Media supported Bose who held a separate meeting at Town Hall.

In July 1932, Somnath Lahiri joined Com Ranen Sen and others though Abdul Razzak Khan was arrested and detained.

The situation demanded an organised communist group and the comrades managed to send their memorandum to the Communist International through an European sailor who was a party member and promised to deliver the document in Moscow. It was only after six months that the message was delivered to the Comintern.

Soon after a note by the Communist parties of China, Russia and UK was published in The Inprecorr, the journal of the Comintern calling for communist unity in India. The Chinese party wrote a letter also calling for unity and Bengal unit was mentioned there.

Meanwhile Com PC Joshi and Dr Gangadhar Adhikari were released from jail and decided to have a conference of the party in Calcutta. The Bombay group was asked to join them.

In Calcutta, Com Ranen Sen and others organised meetings of workers in various parts of the city and prepared for the conference. The trade union groups were formed and large scale mass activity was planned.

In the party conference, a central committee was formed and Dr Adhikari was elected General Secretary in 1933. There were three members from Bengal in the committee including Com Ranen Sen.

Contacts with the international communist movement were established and communication with Comintern was regularised.

One of the comrades Mohammed Abdul Zakaria was sent to Moscow, then Paris where he worked underground. Later in Germany he was arrested by Gestapo and killed.

In 1935, a central committee meeting was organised and Ranen Sen met Ajoy Ghose and P. Sunderaiyya for the first time. It was around this time a move to join Red TUC with the AITUC was initiated and both were merged.

By this time the Nazi German forces had entered Soviet Union and the party decided in 1942 to characterise the second world war as "people's war". The communists were isolated as they had disassociated themselves from the "Quit India" movement.

According to Com Ranen Sen the course of Indian history would have been different had the communists not decided to isolate themselves.

The other landmark came after independence. The second party congress was held again in Calcutta in February 1948. Com BT Ranadive brought his thesis and a decision was taken not to cooperate with the Congress. Soon after INTUC was formed and AITUC became identified with communists and other leftists.

The conference focussed on fight against reformism and BT Ranadive became the new General Secretary.

In summing up, it was a period when in Bengal communists groups came up among all strata of society. Apart from workers, students, teachers, writers and many others joined in the movement and Com Ranen Sen made his own contributions in the process.