

17. ANIRUDH SINGH. Iron & Steel Leader, Bokaro Steel Plant. Bokaro Ispat Kamgar Union, General Secretary.

Date:- 29th January, 2003.

Time:- 3.15 pm to 6.00pm

Venue:- Bokaro Ispat Kamgar Union (BIKU) office at Bokaro city.

Interviewer:- Bobby Poulouse.

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Context:- Anirudh Singh is a man who has seen the real hardships and sufferings of a trade union leader in the sense that he is among the few leaders of BSP workers who has suffered something for his TU life. He has a permanent injury on one of his very important nerves on his brain for which he is under daily medicine and has to be so till he lives. The injury he got was during his leading strike of BSP.

Anirudh Singh began his interview by stating that he was born near Patna in Mokama on 5th Nov. 1949. His father was a kisan and his mother had died when he was young. He got educated in Patna in a school but it was rather bad. Then he said his education continued at B.N. College. Then he worked in the student and youth federations. In July 1974 the JP Movement began and he was a part of it and was arrested and kept in jail for 3 months. Then he was sent to Bokaro where his trade union life began. Initially he entered trade union life of the workers of Bokaro Steel Plant as a youth leader organizing social events like picnics etc. He started his initial work at the Machine shops i.e. Operations Garage, Structural Shop which does repairs. As regards the number of workers he had to deal with he said there were 400 workers in the Machine Shop, 400 in Structural shops, 400 in Operations shop, plus around 500 i.e. a total of about 2000 to 2,500 were the total number of workers under his responsibility. It was a big responsibility as it required good technical knowledge as most of their demands stemmed from the technical nature of their jobs. In fact in the initial period the workers had better technical knowledge of the workings of the various sections than him. But he picked up fast.. As regards the initial problems Anirudh Singh said there were a lot of problems as many people tried to remove him due to his caste. And adjusting with them was really difficult.

As regards the strikes Anirudh Singh said that one of the first actions he got involved in leading was the CISF issue. The problem arose when some CISF jawans captured the arms shop and a military brigade was brought in to attack the rebellious CISF jawans their other people. It was a very emotional issue. Anirudh Singh said that he on the spur of emotions gave a call for Bokaro Bandh. It was a flop.

Then in 1977 there was another strike. A.K. Rai of the MCC came to Bokaro and launched an incentive strike in a very emotional way. Rai headed a union called the Progressive Front and tried to use these situations to establish himself. The demand was for revision of incentive by the BSP. Just prior to this firing had taken place a HSCL over some demands of workers. The third pay commission was coming and it was a period of goonda type of trade unionism that Anirudh Singh faced. At that time the AITUC organization was not so strong and it was more a time of politics than trade unionism as JP andolan was at its peak and trade unionism was totally under politics. Plus there was a lot of trade union rivalry with the CITU. All the left trade unions were attacking his union i.e. BIKU. At that time he was one of the secretaries of BIKU. Then there was another strike in 1985 i.e. 38 days strike of the blast furnace workers who went on full strike. In that strike a question arose of 'incentive reward', which was based on productive capacity utilizing the manpower. He said that during the strike and after AITUC had full control of the blast furnace workers. After the 38 day strike incentive was fixed. The workers demand was that fix the incentive based on production and production capacity. The union i.e. Anirudh Singh who was at that time leading

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the blast furnace workers tried to explain the things to them. They were demanding Rs. 200/- as incentive as each blast furnace had 2 cast ovens and the 17 workers had to move from one cast oven to the other in one blast furnace while the other did so similarly for the other blast furnace. INTUC told them and the workers that they should go on strike and that they would get the deal for them. Then in 1986 one BJP MP Mr. Samresh Singh intervened in this ongoing struggle and made his political capital. He claimed to the workers that if they would close the blast furnace for 72 hours then he would get them the incentive they wanted. Workers went for him and thought he would get them the deal but he went into jail and remained there and the movement got stuck. And the workers had to withdraw the whole struggle. It was a bad show for the workers and they had to go for arbitration.

The other important struggle Anirudh Singh talked about was the 1986 strike which was popularly called 'Ghera Dalo / Dera Dalo' movement by the BSP workers. The issues were many among the workers. The response he said was big i.e. 3000 workers came for this movement. Anirudh Singh said that he was protesting at the main gate and was beaten up really badly. There were a lot of issues involved in the 'Ghera Dalo, Dera Dalo' movement. On 9th August, 1986 there was a major lathi charge on the workers.

Then again in 1987 there was another strike mentioned by Anirudh Singh. In this strike there was hunger strike and satyagraha for getting jobs to the nearest dependents of 88 workers and through the strike they managed to get jobs for about 400 workers. In this struggle according to Anirudh Singh it was better to have a hunger strike and satyagraha rather than have a hartal as it would have been a flop.


In 1988 said Anirudh Singh they raised the issue of bonus and canteen allowance. Before that they used to get Rs. 1/- per day but their demand was that they should get Rs. 4/- per day plus bonus. Ultimately said Anirudh Singh said that INTUC came in support of the movement by AITUC however other left trade unions were against this movement. The final achievement was that BIKU managed to force the BSP management to give four times more canteen allowance i.e. they got Rs. 3/- per day canteen allowance plus a bonus of Rs. 600/- to 700/-. The significance of the canteen allowance is seen by the fact that today it is about Rs. 400/- per month for every employee of BSP. This is a very significant in today's hard financial times. In this the role of Gaya Singh was crucial as it was he who broke the dead lock for the various unions. As regards the relations and struggles with the management Anirudh Singh said the policy of BIKU was that it would not fight or target individuals rather it would fight policies and issues.

In 1989 again there was a movement over providing quarters and providing compensation for those dependents of the workers who died by way of providing some employment. 1989 was also a crucial year as far as BIKU was concerned as Anirudh Singh said that it was the period when Sikh riots took place. Anirudh Singh personally went out and with others managed to save many Sikhs and they were provided place in St. Xavier's College. In the year 1986 Anirudh Singh became General Secretary. In 2002-2003 the management proposed a net-profit reward scheme and it was the time that Anirudh Singh had a bypass surgery. On 18th

October 2002 another strike notice was given on the BSP management by CITU union but it was withdrawn and the management gave Rs. 2,000/- advance to quell the strike but Anirudh Singh said that they had told the workers not to accept the advance and they did not. Thus the management's plan to sabotage the strike did not work. Then he said that another call for strike was given for strike on 25th, 26th & 26th Dec. 2002. But nothing happened .

Then I asked some questions and Anirudh Singh gave some answers and he said answers. As regards the question on the difference between the steel worker in private sector and public sector, Anirudh Singh said that in the private sector there was much less industrial democracy than the public sector steel company like BSP. This is when you compare a steel plant like BSP to TISCO. Then as regards role of women workers, Anirudh Singh said that in BSP there are about 200 to 250 women workers who got jobs due to the help of BIKU. The women were mainly from South Bihar. As regards participation in strikes and hartals and trade union movements in BSP, Anirudh Singh said that no woman would come to any trade union struggle as it was generally looked down upon in Bihar's feudal culture. In fact one unique thing I noticed was the fact that most women in Bihar and Jharkhand were housewives i.e. of the middle and lower middle class. It is only some who work and by and large the culture is to keep women at home. Only the really poor working class and tribals and dalit women work more in number. However they are also influenced by the popular culture.

The union as such gives importance to issues of workers education, social activism, and children's education particularly for dalits and tribals. The NJCES had also been created by then. The 3rd Dec. 2003 strike was the biggest strike after the 1977 general strike. Then I asked Anirudh Singh about the usage of the legal machinery and he said that as far as the average worker was concerned the legal redressal was too long and most of all too expensive. Thus as a trade union they also do not encourage that route and their experience has shown that it is better to use the trade union process of struggle, agitation and direct negotiation with the management than go in for the legal route which they feel is long and complicated and not possible for the worker. As regards a question about modernization of the steel industry and import of new technology the experience of Anirudh Singh is that most new technology is labour destabilizing and ends up removing staff. This is the reality. As regards the question of relationship between politics and trade unionism he said that their political consciousness is not completely not politicized towards working class political struggle due to various reasons. As far as most of the working class most of them are still out of the trade union movement.



No17. ANIRUDH SINGH.

Anirudh Singh was born near Patna in Mokama on 5th Nov. 1949. His father was a kisan. He did his education from B.N. College in Patna. He worked in student and youth federations and it is as a youth leader that he entered trade unionism under the leadership of Gaya Singh at Bokaro. He came to Bokaro after completing jail term for his anti-emergency activity in 1974. Initially he started trade union work by socializing himself among the BSP workers by organizing picnics. Then slowly BIKU gave him bigger responsibility to organize workers at it various machine shops. This he did with great success. In 1970s one of the first struggles Anirudh Singh organized was when military was brought in to control the CISF jawans who were guarding the BSP. He gave a call for Bokaro Bandh and it was a flop. It was his first major trade union experience. Then the next big struggle in which Anirudh Singh was involved was the 1977 struggle by contractor workers of BSP and HSCIL and private and other public sector companies constructing the BSP. There was firing and some workers died in this struggles. Then there was the 'Ghera Daio, Dera Daio' struggle which was under the leadership of Anirudh Singh himself and this finally established his leadership among the BSP workers. But of course he had to pay a very heavy price for it. He got badly beaten on his head and one of the crucial nerves of the brain burst and he almost died. He was hospitalized for a long time. And even today he is on neurological medication for it. Then there were struggles by him in 1988 over bonus and canteen allowance and then in 1989 over giving jobs to those dependents whose parents worked at BSP. In 1990s sometime he had a heart surgery also but he still continues his trade unionism and is today definitely one of the most respected trade union leaders by the workers of BSP.