

(19) Com Vinoy Lahiri (Interviewed in Shillong on June 6, 20001)

Com. Vinoy Lahiri has been among the founders of Communist Party in Meghalaya and is still active in the AITUC even at the age of 77.

Com Lahiri was born on August 15, 1924 in a village called Madaripur in Faridpur ditrict, now in Bangladesh. His father was a practising lawyer and belonged to a landed elite family with a tradition of not joining the government services. The patriotic sentiments led several of the family members to join the Congress party while some of them had links with the revolutionaries also in the area.

In 1942, Com Lahiri was in college and joined the Quit India movement as a volunteer of Forward Bloc. He was arrested later and interned for two years. After completion of the term he resumed his studies. Meanwhile he took part in various activities like setting fire to the post office building and police station etc. But he got disillusioned soon when the news came that Mahatma Gandhi had disowned the movement. "I cried the whole night and decided not to have any connection with political parties thereafter," Com Lahiri said.

Com Lahiri joined the army and was sent to Imphal which was deserted except the soldiers. Com Lahiri was assigned to maintain accounts which made him work till late night. One night he noticed several British soldiers entering a tent and spending hours inside. The incident was repeated almost every night and when he could not restrain himself anymore, Com Lahiri went inside the tent once the occupants were out. In his search of their belongings, he found Communist Manifesto and some works by Marx and Lenin, though he could not understand the significance. Later when he asked those British officers about the literature and the meetings they held in their tent, they told him about the Communist Party of Great Britain. All those officers were the members of the same and asked him also to join them. He had not understood much at that time the theoretical aspect of Marxism, but the class antagonism and exploitation were clear to him and he dedicaated himself for the same.

Com Lahiri has not looked back since then.

It was war time and Japanese were at the border. Soon Com vinoy was transferred to upper Assam and by the end of 1944, he was posted in Shillong where he formed an association of class two and three officers. They were told that the government was considering retrenchment for some of the officers without alternative job offers. The association served a strike notice on the issue. There were attempts to break the strike by offering lucrative jobs to the leaders which were even accepted also by some of them. Com Lahiri was offered a post in the Imperial Secretariate but he asked the government telegraphically if each one of them had been provided with such alternatives. He informed them that he would join only if all of them were taken care of. without replying to his query, they again offered him a post in Dhacca. When he refused again, he was dismissed from the post within twenty four hours. Strike also had fizzled out by then as many of them had accepted the offers made to them.

# TRANSCRIPTION SUMMARIES — PHASE III (1)

(1) (Transcriptive notes based on interview) (Phase-III) 2-Full Transcription  
Com Vinoy Lahiri (Shillong, June 6, 20001) — CNPT

"I was born on August 15, 1924 in a village called Madaripur in Faridpur district, now in Bangladesh.

My father was a practising lawyer and belonged to a landed elite family with a tradition of not joining the government services. The patriotic sentiments led several of the family members to join the Congress party while some of them had links with the revolutionaries also in the area.

In 1942, I was in college and joined the Quit India movement as a volunteer of Forward Bloc.

I was arrested later and interned for two years. After completion of the term I resumed my studies. Meanwhile I took part in various activities like setting fire to the post office building and police station etc. But I got disillusioned soon when the news came that Mahatma Gandhi had disassociated himself from the movement. I cried the whole night and decided not to have any connection with political parties thereafter.

I joined the army and was sent to Imphal which was deserted except the soldiers. I was assigned the job of maintaining accounts which made me work till late at night. One night I noticed several British soldiers entering a tent and spending hours inside. The incident was repeated almost every night and when I could not restrain myself anymore, I went inside the tent once the occupants were out.

I searched their belongings, and found Communist Manifesto and some works by Marx and Lenin, though I could not understand the significance. Later when I asked those British officers about the literature and the meetings they held in their tent, they told me about the Communist Party of Great Britain. All those officers were the members of the same and asked me to join them.

I had not understood much at that time the theoretical aspect of Marxism, but the class antagonism and exploitation were clear to me and I dedicated myself for the same.

I have not looked back since then.

It was war time and Japanese were at the border. Soon I was transferred to upper Assam and by the end of 1944, I was posted in Shillong where we formed an association of class two and three officers. They were told that the government was considering retrenchment for some of the officers without alternative job offers.

The association served a strike notice on the issue.

There were attempts to break the strike with offers of lucrative jobs to the leaders which were even accepted also by some of them. I was offered a post in the Imperial Secretariate but I asked the government telegraphically if each one of us had been provided with such alternatives.

I informed them that I would join only if all of them were taken care of. Without replying to my query, they again offered me a post in Dhacca. When I refused again, I was dismissed from the post within twenty four hours. Strike also had fizzled out by then as many of them had accepted the offers made to them.

I was now jobless. Meanwhile I had contacted the CPI and had

1  
Total for Phase III - 20

18 - Transcription Summaries

2 - Full Transcription (1) Vellanki Subba Rao - submitted  
(2) S.C. Krishnan - also submitted



joined the party by September, 1945. I opted to work on the trade union front. Since there was no industry in the area and in the outskirts of Shillong, it was tribal rule, I started organising the Safai Karmaacharis and got their organisation registered in 1946. Soon strike call was given. The Congress government formed a committee to solve the crisis. I told the workers to give them a chance though only partial demands were met.

Later I started organising the hydro-electric workers and after launching several movements, and involving the labour department, managed to get some benefits.

In fact trade union movement teaches reformism also since most of the workers remain attached to the union only through gains.

In 1948-49 period I was arrested and was in jail for four years because of agitations launched by either tea plantation workers or railway workers. The police had destroyed our office, burnt our libraries and attacked all the places where the communists use to frequent. When I was released my his friends and relatives were instructed by the police not to have any contact with me.

I had neither shelter nor money and was starving when finally managed to get a tuition though soon, police intimidated the family and I had to quit.

Somehow the comrades got together and formed a group. By this time, INTUC had started its activities.

The comrades in Shillong wanted to organise the transport workers and asked the Guwahati office to help but by then INTUC had already pitched in.

The hydro-electric workers were with the AITUC before nationalisation, but soon all the comrades were put behind the bars and INTUC created a fear psychosis among the workers. With the help of middle class employees they formed their union also. In fact, the class character of Indian working class has to be analysed properly as they are exploited in the urban areas but adopted the role of exploiters in rural parts where they actually belonged.

It may be noted here that the left lost its hold over the working class because of several factors like police repression, opportunism of the workers themselves, failure to provide ideological and theoretical input and no attempt to create rank and file workers for the party.

I had also organised the Electric Supply Workers Union apart from tailors and laundry workers union.

In 1972-73, I came in touch with the limestone workers who were paid only Rs 3 a day and the comrades wanted to launch a strike on the issue taking up several other demands also. I had formed AITUC union here. However, there was a contradiction with the CITU activists and the INTUC fished in the troubled waters.

It was also a period of developing contacts with the agricultural workers who were mainly Khasi. They translated Communist Manifesto into their language.

When the CPI gave a call to organise the unorganised sector, it was realised that the state was the biggest employer of such workers. I started organising them in the AITUC alongwith others and started working among them. We obtained a rest day in a week. The next in the agenda was to fight for regularisation of jobs.

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Benoy Lahiri (Phase III)

After years of organising workers, I have realised that just because they are proletariates, workers are not saints and unless ideology is given to them, the movement would get restricted in economism only."