

Biographical note

K. Vaidyanathan, CITU leader, (Tamilnadu)

He was born on 13 January, 1929 in Travancore. He studied upto class tenth. He lost both his parents early. He went to Pune in 1944 and joined the army. After war, he joined a school. In Pune, he heard and saw many national leaders. He used to attend Gandhiji's prayer meetings which helped him formulate his political ideas later. He had also seen C Rajagopolachari.

During 1946-48, one of his classmates drew him into politics. He had already a feeling that Congress policies were wrong. He slowly moved towards Communism and trade unionism. He joined commercial clerks' union in 1948. Later he became active in the labour movements of teh French territories of Karaikkal and Pondicherry where he worked under V Subbaiah. He was also active among the workers of textile and other units.

Vaidyanathan became a wholetimer in 1960. He was one of the organisers of the Aurobindo Ashram Housekeepers' Association. Pondicherry had its own distinct system of working discipline.

After the party (CPI) got split, he had serious differences with both the parties, particularly with the idea of formation of a separate trade union. So he withdrew to Karaikkal in 1968 to work among the grassroots workers in the sectors of bidi, cigar, electricity etc. He ultimately joined CPI(M) and CITU in later years of 1960s.

He has been since at the top levels of CITU leadership.

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Transcriptive note

K. Vaidyanathan (CITU), Chennai

(The interview took place in the state headquarters of CITU in Chennai on the morning of March 13, 2005. K Vaidyanathan had a fracture and was confined to his room, hence getting his consent for the interview was not difficult. —Krishna Jha, Anil Rajimwale.)

My father was a lawyer in Travancore. I lost my parents early. It was while in Pune in the decade of 1940s that I saw and listened to the national leaders. I was in the army then. I saw Mahatma Gandhi and Mahadev Dasai among others. Gandhiji was staying in Dinshaw Natural Cure Clinic. His prayer meetings instilled politics in me.

I had also seen how C Rajagopalachari was being kept away from official meetings and how he managed to address parallel meetings.

Later I shifted to Travancore and took up a job in a ration shop in 1946. One of my schoolmates made me a subscriber of “Janashakti” here. Another friend brought me a copy of Trotsky’s “Moscow Path”. It was in this period that I was introduced to more literature on working class politics. I joined and organised Communist Clerks’ Association, and was initiated into practical trade union work. I met Com A M Gopu who was a brilliant student then and also a trade union leader.

Becoming a wholtimeer in 1960, I worked mostly in Karaikkal and Pondicherry which were under French occupation. There were several textile mills in Pondicherry, and I worked among the workers there. Com V Subbaiah was a great inspiration for all of us. We fought for eight-hour working day. We had among us many women workers too. I also worked among the toddy tappers. There was the Aurobindo Ashram House keepers’ union, with the French system of work place discipline prevailing all over Pondicherry.

After party got split, I decided to go away to Karaikkal to work at lower level as I had lot of differences with the leaders. Particularly difficult was the issue of forming another trade union body. In 1969-70, ultimately I decided to join CPI(M) and CITU. Since then I have been working in several capacities among the workers of different unions of CITU.

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