

Baba Kartar Singh, Chandigarh, Punjab

Baba Kartar Singh was born in 24th Sept. 1915 at Attari in Distt. Amritsar on the border of today's Punjab and Pakistan. He was born in a poor family and studied only upto matric after which he couldn't study due to financial problems. He began his life as an unskilled worker in Dhariwal Mills as a lower grade weaver. When the 1st General election took place he was dismissed from the mill for organising the workers and then he joined the Kirti Party i.e. the local or a regional Communist Party which later merged into the CPI. Then he worked as an unskilled labourer at the railway workshop at Mugalpura in present day Lahore. There was a union headed by a man called N.A. Khan to which Babaji joined. That union conducted two good struggles in 1920s and 1930s. Babaji also sold the communist paper named Lal Dhadora which was an illegal paper then. In 1940 Babaji along with N.A. Khan's union conducted a fairly successful strike on the issue of D.A. at Mugalpura near Lahore. Babaji also worked in those days under the then famous leader Mr. Mohan Lal in Lahore. Under his union Babaji organised the Press workers Union, Shop Asst. Union, Newspaper Staff Union, Engineering Workers union. In 1939 under Sir. Chotu Ram who was a minister under the Unionist party Babaji and his union managed to after 2 to 3 days strike get the Shop Asst. Act passed in 1939. After sometime Babaji formed the Northern Railway Workers Union and held its first conference in Lahore with a membership of over 80,000. Then there was RIN Mutiny and massive political upsurge and partition. Prior to 1947 Babaji had managed to expand this railway workers union right upto Saharanpur and Peshawar as they all came under Northern Railway. Babaji said the first communal killings prior the partition killings took place of the railway workers in Mugalpura in Lahore deliberately by the British to destroy the strong left presence in the railway workers. The partition according to Babaji totally destroyed the unions and TU movement as controlled by the left. Then when with great difficulty they tried to rebuild the railway unions BTR's adventurist line smashed whatever little communist influence that remained in the TU movement as all communists in the BTR era got alienated from the masses who saw the freedom as real and not as the communists who rejected Nehru.

After the 1st general elections Babaji joined Bhupendra Cements Union near Kalka and worked in the union for 3 years. Then shifted TU center to Jullunder. In 1953 when Satish Loomba became Gen-Sec of PTUC Babaji became its Jt. Sec of the PTUC. In 1960 Loomba shifted to Delhi while the PTUC center shifted to Chandigarh and Babaji built unions in HMT, Patiala Transport, Kharar Mills. 1966-67 was period of reorganisation of PEPSU and the creation of the new state of Punjab as it is today. This period Babaji was part of organising big strikes in Amritsar textiles, Dhariwal Woolen Mills, Bhakra Nangal Dam Workers. 1968 organised Punjab Roadways strike. Then joint strike along with INTUC in Bhiwani Textiles. The 1964 party split really weakened the left TU

movement for sometime. Also had launched struggles for Gratuity Act and Festivals and Holidays Act. Then finally in 1985 asked the party to retire him due to old age. In this long period Babaji along with Madanlal Didi who was his junior politically was the few TU leaders who rose directly from the position of worker to national level and state level leader.