

## 2. B.C. Masen, Harbour and Port Workers' Union, AP

### BIO-NOTE

He is the general secretary of Harbour and Port Workers' Union. Born in 1947 near Vishakhapatnam. He belongs to a family of fishermen, though his father joined as shipyard employee. Masen did his post-graduation in public administration. In his childhood and student days, he was associated with "Abhyudaya Mandali", a social organisation doing literacy and other works. It is in this organisation that Masen was radicalised. He was actively involved in student-youth movement in the 1970s. He joined port thereafter, and became communications inspector (Traffic). This enabled him to communicate with workers and employees. He gradually joined the TU activities and ultimately became the general secretary of the Harbour and Port Workers' Union in 1983, a post he held till today. Immediately after, he led a 16-day strike of dock workers. He is one of the four workers' representatives on the dock board, a tripartite body which is comparatively a more autonomous body.

He has participated in and led a number of agitations of the port and dock workers on various issues like wages, uniform, washing allowance, etc.

B.C. Masen is one the top AITUC leaders in Andhra Pradesh.

### TRANSCRIPTIVE NOTE

(The interview was conducted in the office of Harbour and Port Workers' Union, Vishakhapatnam, on September 9, 2004 at 4 pm. A person of gentle disposition, he at once agreed to answer our questions.)

He said that he was born in the year 1947, though he did not remember the exact date of birth. "Masen" is the name of the fishermen's community. His forefathers were fishermen. It was his father who joined as shipyard employee, thus opening up the way for his son to join the docks.

Masen joined the docks while in college. It was while in job that Masen did his post-graduation in public administration.

B.C. Masen narrated some interesting facts about and milestones of the history of Harbour and Port Workers' Union. The union was founded in 1936, not long after the establishment of the port itself. At that time, the workers were not allowed to gather in more than three to four numbers. They used to be dispersed, even arrested. There were no rights for the workers, no facilities and work hours. The workers had to work from sunrise to sunset.

The port was at first under the defence ministry, then railway and then transport ministry. In 1946, there was a long 16-day strike. It was a success. The union has a distinguished record. The grandfather of Masen's wife, M. Jagga Rao, was one of the vice-presidents of this union along with V.V. Giri. Masen's father also was in the union. In 1948, Pt Nehru laid the foundation stone of this building of the union. Among the other prominent personalities who helped formation of the union was C. Rejeswara Rao.

Masen explained how he was influenced in his early years by the radical ideas. He came in contact with an organisation called "Abhyudaya Mandali". It was a social reform movement doing work like literacy, etc. Masen was influenced by student and youth organisations like Students' Federation and others.

Masen described how he gradually came in contact with dock workers' union activities. His position as a communication inspector helped him to contact workers. In fact, he says that inspectors become good leaders. He led a 16-day strike immediately after becoming the general secretary of the union in 1983.

Masen described in detail his role and that of the union in securing legal positions for the workers' representatives in the tripartite body of Vishakhapatnam Dock Labour Board. The Dock Board has four workers' representatives, Masen being one of them.

The union, under the leadership of Masen, is resisting the proposals to merge the bodies of Port Trust and Dock Board. Such proposals will offset the advantages of separate bodies and their autonomy, even if limited.

Masen described how, earlier, the loaders/unloaders had to carry bags of 100 kg or even more on their back. This load was reduced to 50 kg and less through struggles and mechanisation. Now this type of work is much lightened.

Masen pointed to the changes in the nature of work and workers through the years.