

Manohar Gopinath Kotwal (HMS)

A **short biographical note** on Manohar Kotwal interviewed by Krishna Jha on June 17, 2003 in Mumbai

(Manohar Kotwal, one of the tallest leaders of the HMS, looks after Dock and Port Workers' Union which he had joined on 21 January, 1949. He was a member of the Servants of India Society established by Gokhale.)

The union has a centralised fund and inclusive of transport and port workers. It was an organisation that was helped by the British trade union in its formation in 1926 and NM Joshi was its the then President.

I was born on December 4, 1915 in a place called Dule in Khandesh in Maharashtra. My father was an advocate in Akola estate from where I passed my school final and for one year was in Nagpur in college. Soonafter I shifted to Bombay from where I did my masters in economics. I had organised a strike in my school for three months when I was in fourth standard against the rise in school fees.

I used to visit Nashik frequently where I arranged lectures by MN Roy, Acharya Atre and others. To meet the challenge of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), I used to organise meetings and lectures on communalism and other evils.

Later I organised volunteers' organisation called Lok Sena with 5000 youth and trained them in various ways. These volunteers were trained for 35 days and the flag was with a red star. By then I had got a job and dedicated my entire salary for this cause. These activists were offered books on various themes and were free to opt for any political ideology they felt justified their cause. Prominent leaders like Jagdish Ajmera and many others were in this group.

I had organised food grain workers, head load carriers, saltpan workers among many others. I had launched the mathadi workers agitation in the decades of 70s, 80s and 90s and now the head load carriers get even Rs 15,000 to 20,000 as salary and Rs 35000 as bonus.

I believe that trade union work has nothing to do with politics and in my organisation all shades of political workers are even in the leadership.

I am a member of the Congress party myself though I work for Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

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Manohar Kotwal himself is a member of the Congress party.