

## **Bionote**

### **George John (Railways), Mumbai**

George John was born in Kerala on November 17, 1922. He shifted to Bombay in 1944 and joined the ordnance factory. Two years later, he joined the railways. It was while in service in the GP Railways (now Central Railways) that he came in contact with the prominent railway workers' leaders like D.S. Vaidya, Khedgikar, Julmi Ram Chowdhary and others of the GP Railways union.

According to John, it was a marvellous union containing different shades like the Communists, Congressmen, Socialists, Royists, a small group of Hindu Mahasabha people, etc. Many of the leaders had joined the union as ordinary workers and went on to become figures. Many were dismissed from services and joined the union as wholetime cadres.

The Pay Commission announced D.A. for railway workers on Jan 1, 1947. The government did not want to pay full D.A. recommended by the Pay Commission on the grounds of the difficult conditions in the country. Jaiprakash Narain, one of the leaders of the AIRF, agreed on Rs 5 but we did not agree. It was one of the major issues of the 1949 strike.

In 1946 John was in management committee and in 1948 he was elected as a member of the standing committee. In 1953, John joined the Central Railway Mazdoor Panchayat. In 1954, he joined the NRMU. In 1955, he shifted to and worked in Matunga area among the railwaymen. In 1962, he was the assistant secretary of the NRMU when Peter Alvares was the president. In 1968, he was one of the organisers of the railway strike, and it went on, in his section, for 29 days.

George John, along with others, often toured the whole length of the railways on foot and cycles organising the workers. The fact that he was a gangman helped him. It gave him a great freedom to organise the workers.

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## **Transcriptive Note**

### **George John (Railways), Mumbai**

(George John was interviewed by Anil Rajimwale on June 26, 2003 in the union office in Dalvi Building at Parel in Mumbai)

I was born on Nov 17, 1922 in Kerala. In 1944 I came to Bombay in search of job. On April 24, 1944 I joined ordnance factory in Bombay. On September 31, 1944 I joined the railways. At that time, the GP Railwaymen's Union was the only union. This railway is now called the central railway.

I came in contact with big leaders like D.S. Vaidya (general secretary), Khedgikar (president) and Julmi Ram Chawdhary (treasurer). Many of these leaders had joined as ordinary workers like gangman, waterman, etc. For example, K.N. Joglekar was a waterman, V.V. Giri was a gangman. I joined as gangman. It gave me an opportunity to travel the whole lengths on foot and cycle, organising the workers and holding their meetings.

The GP Railwaymen's Union was a marvellous union, highly organised, with different political trends of opinion — Communists, Socialists, Congressmen, Royists, even a small group of Hindu Mahasabha workers and some others. Khedgikar was a victimised worker and later the president of the HMS. He was a signaller in the railway service. Joglekar and Ruikar had taken a morcha of railway workers to the pandal of the AICC session in 1929 and Joglekar had moved a resolution on full independence. He worked as a waterman at the Sandhurst Bombay local railway station.

I joined the railway management committee member in 1946. On Jan 1, 1947 was announced the Pay Commission recommendations on D.A. It gave Rs 15 to the workers. But the government pleaded that it was a difficult situation in the country, and, therefore, it could not give more than Rs 5. Jaiprakash Narain, a prominent all India leader of railwaymen at that time, accepted it, but we did not. It ultimately led to a split in the organisation and an unsuccessful call in 1949.

In 1948, I was elected member of the standing committee. In 1953, I joined the Central Railway Mazdoor Panchayat. In 1954, I was in NRMU. In 1955, I began working in the Matunga area among the railway workers. In 1962, I became the assistant secretary of the NRMU, with Peter Alvares as the president. In 1967, I was the secretary of the head office.

I participated actively in the strike of 1968. Repression was particularly severe and the government did not like the strike. In our area, the railway strike went on for 29 days.

Category-wise councils were formed within the union in 1972, at headquarter level.