

## **Badri Prasad Sharma, Railways, AIRF, Delhi**

### **Biographical Sketches**

Badri Prasad Sharma was born on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1928 in Punjab. In his childhood days he got influenced about politics and left. He started working in a garment factory in February 1953 where he joined Jagjit Singh Industries Phagwara as a piece maker and sample maker. Then on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1957 he got a job as a clerk in the head office of the northern railways at Baroda House in Delhi. There he joined AIRF and the NRMU and for the first time came in touch with trade unionism. He participated in the 1960 strike on July 11<sup>th</sup>. However his real initiation into trade unionism came with a strike he personally led with some other colleges at Baroda House from 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1965 for nearly four months for an employee who was victimized for not wearing office clothes. It was a failure but Badriji learnt his first lessons in trade unionism from there. Then he participated in the 1 Day Token Strike on the minimum wage and bonus issue on September 19<sup>th</sup> 1968. Govt. repression heavy and railwaymen were martyred in Phatankot. In May 1970 Badriji became zonal secretary (north) of the AITUC affiliated union. Thus he left AIRF and participated in some independent agitations in early 1970s especially a strike at Kalka (J&K). For this he got transferred from Baroda House to New Delhi railway station. Then he participated in the 1974 railway strike and lost his job and only got it back when Janta party came to power in 1977. In 1991 AITUC dissolved its affiliated unions and federations and Badriji went back to his AIRF position in Baroda House once they merged back into AIRF.

## Transcript Summary:

Badri Prasad Sharma was born on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1928 in Punjab. He came into the left movement through Harkrishan Singh Surjeet and Joginder Singh in the early 50s in Punjab. His initiation in politics began when as a young boy he campaigned for the 1952 general elections and it really inspired Badriji. In February 1953 he joined Jagjit Singh Industries at Phagwara in Punjab as a piece checker and sample maker however he did not get active in trade unionism as yet.

On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1957 Badri Sharma said he joined as a Clerk in the Head Office of the Northern Railway at Baroda House where he joined AIRF.

As regards Badri Sharma's trade he participated in the 1960 11<sup>th</sup> July Railway Strike. Then in 1965 Badri Sharma himself along with some friends led a four month strike at Baroda House. It was not under the guidance of the AIRF or the NFIR rather it was kind of independent therefore it was opposed by the AIRF leadership of D.D. Vashist and Nathpai the then President and Gen. Secretary of the AIRF. The issue was victimisation of a Class IV employee who was transferred and not given leave as he asked for. In this strike which Badri and some his friends led at the leadership he was arrested and released 4 times during the four month period of the strike at Baroda House. The strike of course failed and in fact they made some mistakes as regards the negotiations and thus all landed up in jail and the victim was ultimately transferred and they could not save his case. It was for Badri the first major strike in which he himself was personally in the leadership and deeply involved and its failure left a deep mark on him. He said he learnt a lot of lessons from this failure. Thus in a way Badri said he had decided not to make other strikes also end up in failure like this one.

The next major strike that Badri Sharma said he was actively involved in was the 1 Day Token Strike on the Minimum Wage Bonus issue on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1968. This unlike before was a completely successful strike at an all-India level. Its leader was S.M. Joshi the s/o N. M. Joshi. S.M. Joshi was the chairman of the Action Committee. In this strike 3 railway workers were martyred when they were shot by the police in Pathankot during the strike. While the issue was accepted by the government, the repression unleashed was ferocious. 300 permanent employees in the headquarters were terminated and 48,000 temporary staff at the all-India level were also dismissed. The bonus was accepted in the Pay Commission which was appointed after 1968 and whose report was submitted in 1973 i.e. 5 years after the agitation.

In May 1970 Badri Sharma narrated he became the Zonal Secretary (North) of the AITUC affiliated newly created rail unions i.e. the Northern Railway Men's Union (NRMU) of which Sri. Krishna was the Gen. Secretary and Satish Loomba the President. Similarly, J.M. Biswas was made the Gen. Secretary of the South Eastern Railway Men's

Union (SERMU). Though the newly created AITUC affiliated unions were not given recognition by Mrs. Gandhi, some agitations were started on some local issues under this union for e.g. in Kalka (J&K). It was in the course of this agitation that the government transferred Sri. Krishna from Bikaner to Allahabad and Badri Sharma was transferred from Baroda House headquarters to the New Delhi Railway Station. In February 1974 all these AITUC affiliated unions were brought under a newly created federation i.e. Indian Railway Workers Federation (IRWF) of which Dange was the President and P.K. Kumaran was the Gen. Secretary and Badri Sharma the one of the Secretaries of the North Zone.

Then of course Badri Sharma got deeply involved in the 1974 railway strike which he argues was perhaps his biggest involvement and after that he was dismissed from service and then he along with several other strikers had to fight a long legal and political battle to get back to job. The 1974 strike was a big failure though it was definitely the biggest mobilisation of working class after the independence movement. The crackdown was really hard and Mrs. Gandhi's government crushed the strike more so because she had information that the strike was a vehicle of some political elements whose only aim was to remove her. Of course it came true and after the Emergency the Janta Party came to power and then when Madhu Dandavate became the rail minister that Badri and many like him got back their jobs. After the 1974 Railway Strike till today there has never again been such a mobilisation by the rail workers. The average workers' back had been so badly broken and they lost faith in the strike leaders who according to Badri fizzled out in the face of the government onslaught.

In 1991 AITUC dissolved its rail federation and affiliated unions and merged back with AIRF and Badri Sharma got back his position as President of the AIRF unit of Baroda House when he left service.