

## Transcriptive Note

### ***P.R. Menon***

We met P.R. Menon in the office of the Northern Railway Mazdoor Union (NRMU), in Mumbai on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2004. It is a big office, and we had a detailed talk and interviewed with Mr. Menon in his chamber. He is an amiable and gentle person, ready to answer questions and to respond.

After mentioning his date of birth (18-4-1933) etc, he described that he hailed from Kerala and as to how he came to Bombay. He happened to be in the Boribunder area of the city, which was the second biggest railway depot in Asia. He joined the railway service.

That was the time (early 50s) when the till moment is the railway was just recovering from underground activities and splits. Menon began as a humble activist of the till movement, gradually building up the T.U. in the railway in and around Bombay. He became, since then, an inseparable part of the NRMU.

He participated in the major movements of the railway workers. Eg. 1960, 1968 and 1978. He expressed strong opinions against category-wise unions e.g. loco, gangmen, station masters, etc.

He gave interesting details of his conflict with George Fernandes. The latter was brought, to replace him, as he described. George displayed uniliteracy in 1960s and this was an advantage for him. Menon agreed to George's inclusion; the latter was made the president while the former the working president. Some people walked out. George later formed his own union.

Menon describes the 1974 strike as both successful and a failure. Lasting 20 days it ultimately fizzled out. It was a big clash with the central government, and left its marks on the subsequent events. 1974 was also a setback as the movement petered out. George isolated himself from the movement and the organisation, as stated by Menon.

Menon described the various pressures and movements by NRMU forcing the railway to partially or fully concede various demands including cheque payment. Though there have not taken place large scale movement, there have been substantial gains without them and with the help of negotiations. This is one of the results of 1974. Manon mentioned a recent demonstration of about 10 thousand railway workers in Bombay.

He has a good team of co-workers to carry the work.

## Bionote

### ***P.R. Menon (NRMU – Northern Railway Mazdoor Union), at Mumbai***

He was born on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1933. He joined the railways in 1951. He began his T.U. activity in the second biggest depot in Asia i.e. Boribundar, which is very important. An election took place there in 1955, in which he got elected as one of the office-bearers. There were in all some 2500 workers there. Menon continued his activity till he was suspended in 1960. In all 21 were suspended. This was in connection with the all India agitation of railway and central govt. employees. But he continued to work. The Union did not lot of work among the casual workers. In 1960, there were lots of militant struggles, which created conditions for the later all-India struggles leading to the 1974 strike. In the meantime George Fernandes was made the president of the Union. P.R. Menon was made working president. There was conflict between the two groups for some time.

Menon had to go underground during the 20-days 1974 strike. It was a success, but ultimately fizzled out. Formation and activities of the category wise unions was self-defeating as well as disruptive from his point of view.

Though there has been no major movements since 1974, P.R. Menon has been engaged in getting various demands met through gradual and organized pressure. These concern cheque payments, bonus, wage rise, regularization, re-statement and so on. There was a big demonstration recently of 10000 workers in Bombay, and Menon was an active organizer.