

## **Kanai Banerjee, Secretary CITU, Railways and Cement, Delhi**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Kanai Banerjee, Secretary CITU, Railways and Cement, Delhi.</b>
<b>Date of Interview</b>	Oct 26, Oct. 29, Oct. 29 and in November
<b>Time</b>	It was held usually in the afternoon.
<b>Place</b>	CITU Head office, in Delhi.
<b>Context</b>	He is a simple and very affectionate person. Some what idealistic and very humane in his ways. It does not seem he could be such a firebrand leader. He is old now and not that active but still his eyes reveal that sincerity. He remains unmarried and committed to his work.
<b>Interviewers</b>	Bobby Poulouse

### **Biographical Sketches**

He was born in present day Dhaka in Bangladesh on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1926. He got influenced from his childhood into left politics. He launched a historic students civil liberties struggle in the then native state of Cooch Bihar where nobody was allowed civil liberties. He launched an agitation over the issue of killing of one student by the native state's royal police. He joined railways in 1949 just after the historic railway strike call by BTR which never took place as it got totally crushed. He joined the rail workshop at Dibrugarh in Assam which was previously a center of left. The mood was very sad and demoralised as the crackdown in leftist areas of the strike was immense. He became active in the All India Labour Organization (AILO) whose Gen. Secretary was Sibani Lal Saxena and president was Benoy Sarkar. Kanai Banerjee was also with them. In 1958 after the reorganization of the zones Kanai got involved in the leadership of a struggle in Calcutta to keep the head office of the North Eastern Railway in Calcutta and not move it to Assam. He succeeded. In 1967 he launched an agitation in Calcutta's Eastern Head Office against computerisation. He participated in the 1960 strike. But was ill during the 1968 strike. He was very active at the leadership level in the Calcutta region in the Loco Running Staff strikes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He also was the one who suggested to the AIRF leaders to hold a national level convention of all rail trade unions before going for the 1974 rail strike. He was involved in the formation of the NCCRS. Later he moved to the center and is currently one of the office bearers of CITU head office.

## Transcript Summary

Kanai Banerjee was born on October 10<sup>th</sup> 1926 in a village in Dhaka district of then undivided Bengal. He came from a lower middle class family. From his childhood through his sister who was influenced by USSR and literature he got attracted to communists. His father was a P & T employee but he did not like his son's growing political interest. In 1946 there was a postal strike and in that he helped in organizing some meeting in which his father also attended and there he also spoke and his father felt impressed. In April 1950 his father died of a heart attack and only in March 1950 did Kanai Banerjee explain that he got a job in the railways with posting in Dibrugarh in Assam in the railway workshop. There the atmosphere was bad after the failed 1949 left call for revolt through the railways. In his college days also Kanai said he had been politically active and organized student's struggle in the Cooch-Bihar state after some student was killed due to beating by the royal police. The case was won. It was a historic contribution to the fight for civil liberties in native states. Kanai Banerjee was one of its main leaders and did not know that this was a historic struggle.

As far as his activities in the railways Kanai Banerjee said when he entered railways in 1949 it was after the fall of the failed March 1949 rail strike call of B.T. Ranadive. The mood was very demoralised in Assam. Between 1949 and 1952 Kanai Banerjee was active in the railway unions though there was no major struggle. He was just learning the ropes. Jyoti Basu was a big leader and Kanai Banerjee liked him. Kanai Banerjee became the Assistant General Secretary of the All India Labour Organization (AIRLO) in which Shibani Lal Saxena an MP was the President and Benoy Sarkar was the General Secretary. He also worked in the Accounts and Ministerial Staff unions. After the creation of railway zones in 1958 Kanai Banerjee got involved in struggling to keep the headquarters of the North Eastern Railway Headquarters in Calcutta as there was a move to shift it to Gauhati after the zone creation. Finally due to the struggle Kanai Banerjee and others managed to keep the head office in Calcutta and he shifted to the Eastern Railwaymen's Union (ERMU). In 1967 Kanai Banerjee along with other leaders lead an anti-computerization movement in the railways in Calcutta. Kanai Banerjee participated in the 1960 railway strike along with central government employees. In the 1968 strike he was ill and in hospital. Then in the 1973 Loco Strikes organized by the All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) Kanai Banerjee was involved with big leaders like S.K. Dhar and Sabapathy. It was a success as for the first time the govt. negotiated with an unrecognized union and they got a good settlement. The success led to many more category-wise unions going on local strikes. The AIRF and NFIR got insecure and jealous. In 1970

Kanai Banerjee was the branch secretary of the ERMU as well as the central council member (ex-officio) of the ERMU. He was also involved in the 1974 strike at all levels at the top level though behind the scenes. In fact he had suggested the idea of holding a national convention in February 1974 of all rail trade unions through a resolution in the name of one of the AIRF leader. He was also involved with category-wise union leaders in forming the NCCRS. He also suffered in the 1974 strike. Later in 1984 he shifted the CITU as its VP dealing with railways and cement and others generally. That is where he is today.