

## **Umraomal Purohit, HMS**

Not sure of his date of birth; either it is 1 march 1928 or 29 March 1929. He was born in Jodhpur. Practically all the members of his joint family were in the police force. His mother died when he was 2 years old and father when 14. As a student, Umraomal somehow wanted to become one.

### Into trade union movement

It was in this course that he came in contact with the railway workers. He had joined Jodhpur Railways, BBCI, and when western railways in 1951. But he repeatedly dismissed from work, which hardened his attitude. These dismissals were connected with a 15-day strike and other activities.

He worked to organise HMS union in Mehsana branch of railways. By 1953 western railway employees union had units all over the western railways. Umraomal and family were also influenced by the Lok Parishad movement against the princely state at that time. At one time, an entire family including children were in jail. He had great influence of Harish Joshi and Jainarayan Vyas.

The INTUC and HMS – led railway workers' union merged in 1953. Umraomal became the vice-president of the western Railway E.U. He worked very hard for several years building railway workers union. He virtually worked as a whole-timer.

In fact, Umraomal Purohit was the first to work as a wholotimer under an agreement with the railways under which the unions would pay the full compensation: wage etc. to railways. Job would remain intact. Since then, he never looked back at the railways. Workers welcomed such kind of agreement because it was to their advantage.

He became the General Secretary of the Western Railway Union in 1958, and was on the post till the last year. In his direction, the union has become a huge organisation with strong financial base.

In 1960, there was a big strike of the central govt. employees. At that time, Umraomal was the Gen. Secy. Of the Western Railway Employees Union. 5 persons were killed in Dahod workshop in police firings. Umraomal was convicted for 9 months in jail. But it was done in a very strange manner. He was arrested in Abu Road, kept in Mt. Abu, Sirohi was the Police Station, was sent to Central Jail, Jodhpur. He was acquitted in appeal. Final hearing was done in an abandoned 'Piao' (place of drinking water) on an off day, near Mt. Abu. The court was especially summoned for proceeding: not only the convict, but the lawyers and even the judge kept standing as there was no chair to sit.

Purohit worked hard to strengthen the official legal machinery like the JCM and PNM. Initially, he opposed setting up of two such machinery because the Railways were not just an extension of the govt. but an independent industry. But later when it became an established fact, he pressed for AIRF / HMS joining it.

Purohit was assistant Gen Sec of the AIRF in 1962. He was always in favour of a democratic functioning of the AIRF and HMS. On this question, he developed serious differences with Peter Alvares and George Fernandes, but never allowed personal wishes to dominate over the needs of the organisation.

At present, AIRF, HMS and Western Railway Employees Union are doing lot of social and relief. The western Railway E.U., are doing lot of social and relief work too, eg. In Gujarat earthquake relief. The Western Railway E U, under Purohits guidance, is running 20 schools in Gujarat, whose expenses including for books, Teachers' pay etc. are all borne by the union. Purohit is equally busy in the ICFTU at world level, and played an important part in getting the Asian and other developed countries' representations a greater say in it.