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T.M.ABU

Was born in Matancherry in Fort Cochin island on 23rd August 1923. Father was a small time contractor handling cargo in Fort Cochin area. He was religious but very much a humanitarian. T.M.Abu then studied in Thiruva Devosam High School. In 1941-42 it was the Second World War and Nehru was arrested. There was evacuation from Fort Cochin island as it was a strategic island where all British military equipment bound to fight the Japanese in the Far East was downloaded. Thus family was moved by father to inland Kerala for the fear of Japanese bombing.

During the World War II period he started working in the Matancheery area along with his father as the war provided lot of employment opportunities. In 1943 his father sent him to write a test in P&T department and he got selected and started working. During the war some British soldiers used to misbehave with local girls in port and docks of

Matancherry. T.M.Abu formed a group and beat up these soldiers and stopped this misbehaviour. Then in 1944 T.M.Abu resigned his P&T job in the govt. His father was very sad and died in 1945. In 1945 he joined CPI as a wholetimer. In 1946 T.M.Abu started work with the legendary TU leader of Kerala i.e. George Chadayamuri in the Cochin Port & Cargo Labour Union. T.M.Abu was made Gen-Secretary and George was the President. It was the time when Achutanandan was the State Gen-Secretary of the party. The first demand over which T.M.Abu began his TU work `was for end of the contract system for the port and dock workers. The British govt. rejected it though they were regularising port and dock workers in UK. Then RIN Mutiny took place and the famous Punarpayalar struggle and uprising took place in the heart of rural Kerala. Party was underground and everybody was evading arrest. After independence on 15 August 1947 all arrest warrants against the communists were withdrawn. But then Calcutta congress of 1949 took place and BTR replaced P.C.Joshi and started the armed revolution against the 'running dog of imperialism' i.e. PM Nehru. In 1948 the GOI passed the Dock Workers Regulation of Employment Act but the party being underground thus they could not do much for workers through it.

In 1949 all including T.M.Abu were arrested and remained in jail for over 2 and a half years. The TU movement was lost in some ways to them due to the fact that much of the main leadership was behind bars. After coming out of jail in mid-1951 T.M.Abu started work in the port and dock workers. From then have been in the struggle of the port workers till today. In 1960s and late 50s became a key functionary of the TUI in WFTU that deals with ports and docks. In 1969 was elected as Councillor of the Cochin Corporation. Later became Gen-Sec and President of the All India Port and Dock and Waterfront workers Federation and remained there for many years. Apart from the Port and Dock workers T.M.Abu was also President of the State Headload Workers Federation and also Cochin Fishery Factory Workers Union. Also was office bearer of many Shipping and Transport companies workers. Now trying to influence the State government to declare the Cochin port as an international port like Vizag because Cochin is only 8 nautical miles from all the major world sea routes that pass from the East to the West. This according to Abu would help the population in Kerala gain lot of jobs. T.M.Abu was once also the Mayor of Cochin. Overall T.M.Abu is one of the towering leaders of the port and dock workers of Kerala and being from the Muslim community and a committed communist makes him one of those rare TU veterans.

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He was interviewed on 30th June 2001 at Matancherry on Fort Cochin island. Interviewing him was important because he represents one of oldest living port and dock TU leaders in Kerala and his importance also being from the fact that he belonged to a minority Muslim community and to have a leader, a trade unionist of such a stature from the community was something significant. In his interview he revealed many historically significant facts of both the trade union and political life of Kerala as well as revealing a lot about life in the very cosmopolitan island of Fort Cochin which he revealed was during the British days the military base of the British military forces and played a significant role in the first and second world wars.

He revealed in the interview that he was born into a family where his father was a small time contractor in the loading and unloading of goods. In the interview he revealed many other details of his childhood and youth and how the period of World War II brought of business to the Fort Cochin island area and Matancherry. Then he also revealed how on getting a job in P&T he worked and left it after one year in 1944 which dismayed his father so much that he died after that in 1945. Then he revealed about after his father's death he joined CPI and started full fledged TU work. Comrade George Chadayamuri the legend of trade unionist took him over and made Abu General Secretary of Cochin Port and Cargo Labour Union in 1946. He worked along with these senior leaders and learnt the TU work and mobilized workers on the issue of "casualization" which was started by the British govt. But after the Calcutta conference of the CPI when it was decided to go for armed revolution against the Nehru govt. he got arrested in 1949 and was thrown into jail for over two and a half years. After his release in 1952 he started TU work in Fort Cochin area once again but Abu saheb said though he supported BTR's line of armed revolution however once it got crushed the reality on the ground was that in all mass fronts where communists were leading before after release he found the dominance had gone and INTUC, HMS etc had developed even among the cargo workers. So AITUC has lost its old mass position after BTR's line failed to catch on. Then Abu saheb said he led the Cochin cargo workers in a 75 days struggle against casualization. Talking about other aspects of his political life Abu saheb said the in 1969 he got elected as Cochin Councillor for a seven year period. Abu saheb narrated his other political experiences when he became General Secretary of the All India Federation of Tus of 11 major ports of India called the All India Port & Dock Waterfront Workers Federation of India. Inderjeet Gupta was the President of the same. Then he narrated his work as TUI Chairman of WFTU of Port and Dock Branch. Then he became president of State Headload Workers Federation and Cochin Fishery Factory Workers Union. He says now since the 1980s he has been agitating to the central and state governments that and International Container Terminal be constructed in Cochin as in Dubai, Colombo and Sale. An international delegation came to Cochin and researched and its report said Cochin is just 8 nautical miles from the main international shipping highway from East to West and has the best natural harbour. All that is needed is government approval.