

5. CH. Gandhi (HMS), GS, East - Coast Railway Shramik Union (AR)

BIO-NOTE

Among the younger leaders of TU movement, CH. Gandhi belongs to West Godavari district (AP), where he studied upto class XII. Then he took up diploma in pharmacy. He joined the railway service in 1968 as a pharmacist.

By nature and due to family background he was inclined to social work and service to the people. His father was a freedom fighter and the family belonged to Congress. Therefore, even as a student, Gandhi took part in the student movement. In fact, he was named "Gandhi" due to his family background. He was an SPL i.e. school pupils' leader. He served in various capacities in the school and in the polytechnic.

After joining the railways, Gandhi at first joined the INTUC-led NFIR because he did not know much about the affiliations. But when he came to know that the INTUC got its instructions from a political party i.e. Congress, he left it and joined the HMS. This was despite the fact that he personally was and is a committed Congressman. But he is opposed to the principle of a trade union being directed by a political party. He was in the INTUC for six years.

It was just after the 1974 railway strike that Gandhi joined the HMS. That means he is a leader of a period when railway strikes are a rarity, and the TUs in this field work differently. He has worked extensively among gangmen and other class IV employees. Gangmen are among the most exploited lot in the railways.

He agrees that the 1974 railway strike was more of a personal conflict between George Fernandes and Indira Gandhi. Yet, in his opinion, it changed the nature of the railway employees' movement.

Among the major contributions of Gandhi are the organisation of women railway workers and among workers. Both these sections have separate committees. Women have been encouraged to separate representation.

Among the specialities of Gandhi is the work in the legal machinery for railway workers eg. PNM, JCM, NC, PREM, etc.

CH. Gandhi has led several movements, among them hunger strikes, recent 6,000-strong demonstration protesting against PF reduction on August 20, 2004, and others.

Gandhi believes that the railway workers' organisations and TUs should take up more and more of management's responsibilities. He is orienting the East Coast Railway Shramik Union accordingly.

TRANSCRIPTIVE NOTE

(CH. Gandhi was interviewed in the union office, in Vishakhapatnam on September 12, 2004 at about 12 O'clock. He is a mild mannered person and serious in his bearings. He cancelled all his appointments, disconnected his phone and asked others not to disturb him during the interview. It was a serious, to-the-point interview. - AR)

CH. Gandhi hails from a freedom-fighter's family, who are traditionally Congressmen. He himself was active among school students and led a boycott of exams protesting against lack of staff in his institutions. He believes in protest against injustice and absence of rights. He opines that the NGOs have a big role to play in this sphere.

After joining railway service, he was in INTUC due to lack of knowledge. But he found that it was politically motivated. Though he himself is a Congressman, he is against party affiliation of the TUs. So he preferred HMS. He has gone into the details of it. He describes how in the last elections he and his family were the only Congressmen in an area dominated by the TDP.

He is the leader of post-1974 railway strike phase of the movement. The strike was political, in his opinion, but its results were to change the nature of the railway TU movement. It became more sophisticated, detailed, work and pressure oriented, result oriented and avoided strikes/actions that would stop work. He describes in detail his role in promoting women's committees in railways, active participation of youth, need to strengthen multi-tier legal machinery for railway workers. Railway TUs have to be responsible, he says. Even the smallest demands are put forward before and discussed in these legal bodies and issues clinched.

CH. Gandhi has travelled a lot the world over. He is on the ICFTU. He is a recipient of the "Shramshakti Award".