

RG Karnik (Chairman, All India Government Employees Federation)

A short biographical note on RG Karnik interviewed by Anil Rajimwale on June 25, 2003 in Mumbai

I am not sure about my exact date of birth, but it was some time in 1929. My first organisation was Secretariate Employees Union which was formed in 1948. Under my leadership allied officers and language section too joined in. Later Employees of Sales Tax department also their union.

I had organised the union in Mumbai but in January, 1960 was invited to attend the All India body which was organised in Hyderabad by Sriramulu. Later a decision was taken by the Secretariate Employees Association, led by me, to organise a joint conference with the state government employees. Due to Chinese aggression the step was not taken and instead a body was formed. On November 6, 1962 a rally of one lakh workers was organised in Mumbai which was inaugurated by Chief Minister YB Chavan. He also offered accommodation to the organisation in the secretariate building itself.

After 1962, movements were organised on various demands in the districts and Mumbai city itself. In 1964, a state level conference was organised at Aurangabad and Vasant Rao Naik, the then Chief Minister, inaugurated it as he visited the Marathwada area for the first time. He assured that DA would be sanctioned according to the Central Government standards.

It was a time when DA was fixed according to British pattern and city allowance was paid. The other allowance was for those posted in Mufassil areas and for the secretariate employees it was even higher. It was an issue where stressing for the demand amounted to decrease in the allowances. I resigned. But other team members wanted homogeneity and succeeded. Everybody gained finally. Increase in the pay was achieved.

On 11 August, 1966, a decision was taken to give a call for strike which was deemed illegal. A unique form was invented. We printed forms for casual leave application stating the demands. Yashwant Rao Mohite was Finance Minister and labelled the strike as communist conspiracy. Lok Sabha Member Raju Kelkar was asked to request Mohan Dharia to talk to the union leaders. The strike was going on for three months. Finally Vasant Rao intervened and promised to give three months salary as advance loan and 7 to 8 percent increment.

After 1966, government decided to retrench the family planning department staff and instead appoint agents to do the job. The union decided to stage a dharna in front of the minister's house. Finally the retrenchment was stopped.

In 1970, when the strike was illegal under ESMA, mass casual leave was taken by the employees. It was a total strike. Police was in a fix. Daily there used to be meeting at Shivaji Park. But the government decided not to yield and issued orders to terminate the rioting temporary workers, two increments for those who did not take part in the strike. Chief Minister Vasant Rao Naik warned them not to cross the limits. In reply, the organisation gave a call for Bharat Bandh which resulted in break in service. Finally in May, 1975, Shankar Rao Chavan intervened and agreed to the demands.

It was a time when Emergency was declared which meant, "no union, no demands". In 1977, the organisation had already spread among municipal workers, Zilla parishad workers and teachers and a strike call was given. A delegation of 200 persons went to meet Dada Patil. This time the strike was wide spread and in places like Kolhapur, continued for 57 days. Finally on February 5, 1978, it was announced in legislature that Maharashtra would follow the central government standards.

I am chairman of All India State Government Employees Federation since 1990 and before that I was one of the secretaries.

I have floated two NGOs on behalf of the Maharashtra unit for training and research on the labour issues. The union has demanded that the workers should be sent on duty to attend the training camps here.

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