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**All India Railwaymen's Federation**

(Estd, 1924)

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## 90 YEARS OF STRUGGLE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF AIRF

**All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF)** was formed in 1924. Prior to that several unions of the Railwaymen had been formed on various Railways and had conducted several agitations and strikes for the rights of the working class - since later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (starting from 1862) and thereafter – including those from 1919 to 1922, 1925 to 1927 as well as in 1930s and 1940s. AIRF continued this legacy and took steps to unify Railwaymen's struggle and Railwaymen's unions through merger of small unions into one union on each Railway.

Railways being a strategic industry, it was very important for the freedom struggle to involve the Railwaymen in the agitation against British Imperialism. British Government started negotiations with the Federation from 1928 and half-yearly meetings were held between the AIRF and the Railway Board which was then headed by the Chief Commissioner of the Railways. During these negotiations, **there were several achievements to the credit of All India Railwaymen's Federation and its affiliated unions - to improve the service conditions of the Railwaymen.** During the Second World War, the inflation heavily eroded the real wages of the workers. **AIRF agitated and struck work and consequently, for the first time Dearness Allowance was introduced and paid to the employees.**

AIRF was bitterly opposed to racial discrimination. It opposed the lower pay scales being granted to Indian Workers than the pay scales of the Europeans and the Anglo Indians for doing same work as Indians. As a result, **First Pay Commission** was formed in 1946 and it gave its report in 1948. It removed the said discrimination between Indian and Anglo Indians scales, but provided only minimal relief – leaving serious anomalies and disparities.

**Until 1947 AIRF was able to unify the entire Railway Trade Union Movement into one union on each Railway and one Federation for the whole of the Indian Railways.** It was after 1947, that the Congress Party floated its own Central Trade Union (INTUC) and formed a Federation in the Railways, i.e. NFIR in 1948.

**AIRF went on its first post-independence strike in 1949 against the retrograde recommendations of the First Pay Commission and got some reliefs for the Railwaymen.** NFIR opposed the strike and supported the management – an approach which got it its recognition and which it continued all through subsequently as well over the last 65 years. It is pertinent to mention that this approach to the struggle of the working class due to which NFIR was recognized by the Railways initially and continued its subsistence in the subsequent years.

In the post-independence period, the government did not relent on many basic issues – thereby provoking several agitations and even Tool Down Strikes at several places, especially in the Workshops. 5 workers were killed in police firing at Kalka only for seeking to present a Memorandum of Demands to the visiting Chairman Railway Board. **AIRF continued its unstinted struggle for the betterment of emoluments and service conditions of the Railwaymen. Consequently, Permanent Negotiating Machinery (PNM) was established** - with 3 tier set up to deal with the staff grievances through the two Federations and their affiliated unions. In this period, some demands were conceded. A Tribunal was set

up under **Justice Shankar Saran** – which provided upgrading to Technical Staff besides some other reliefs, **but the AIRF had to agitate continuously even for getting each installment of DA or other demands.**

**Second Pay Commission**, formed in 1957-59, did little - except merger of the nominal DA with pay and to eliminate or merge some scales. It totally ignored the demand for “**Minimum Need Based Wage**” – as per recommendations of the 15<sup>th</sup> Labour Conference and only recommended “**Subsistence Based Minimum Wage**”. **AIRF took the lead and formed a Joint Action Committee with other Central Government Employees’ Federations and called for the General Strike by the Central Government Employees in July, 1960 against the unfavourable recommendations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> CPC and non acceptance of other demands.** As usual, NFIR betrayed the Railwaymen in spite of their agreement for the strike.

Though the strike lasted for five days, yet it shook the Government of India who had issued an ordinance and declared the strike illegal. The ordinance provided six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500 for those who joined the strike and one year’s imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1,000 for those who instigated the Railway workers for strike. In this strike 5 persons were killed at Dohad, 1,60,000 employees were placed under arrest, 50,000 employees were suspended and thousands of employees were removed/dismissed from service. Notwithstanding these hard measures to break the strike, the strike that took place proved to be a landmark in the history of free India.

This forced the Government of India to negotiate with the Trade Unions of the Central Government employees and to provide an effective forum for the settlement of their legitimate demands. This machinery was established in the year 1967 after protracted negotiations with the unions of the Central Government employees, including the Railwaymen. The machinery is called **Joint Consultative Machinery(JCM)** for the Central Government employees. It provided for Compulsory Arbitration on issues which could not be settled bilaterally. Many issues have since been resolved in the JCM – at National and Departmental levels as well as through Board of Arbitration.

Government did not agree for Arbitration on many major issues including those in respect of basic wages. Government rejected the demands of the Central Government employees including that for “**Need Based Minimum Wage**” and refused to refer the same to Board of Arbitration. **AIRF had to repeatedly agitate even for grant of DA to ward off erosion wages due to inflation.** Even the **Das Committee**, set up in 1964, gave a very unsatisfactory report on D.A., but still it was hailed by the NFIR as its achievement. **AIRF continued its agitation on the issue and finally Gajender Gadkar Commission on DA** was set up in 1966-67. But even its report was not implemented by the Government for long till **AIRF went on another strike in September 1968.** Setting up of **Third Pay Commission** was also held up – even though it should have been done in 1967(i.e. 10 years after setting of 2<sup>nd</sup> CPC) – in spite of heavy inflation and all round improvement of wages elsewhere in the Public and Private Sectors.

Consequently, another strike of the Central Government employees and the Railwaymen took place on **19th September, 1968** against the Government’s refusal to accept their genuine demands or to refer the same to board of Arbitration as provided for in the JCM Scheme. **AIRF was in the forefront in this strike**, but the NFIR backed out even after being a party to the Resolution for the strike in the Joint Action Committee.

In this strike 48,000 Central Government employees were served with notices of termination of service, 4,000 Railway employees were summarily discharged, 7,000 placed under suspension and 8,000 faced trial in different courts of law. 9 persons died in police firing in Pathankot, Bikaner and elsewhere. Most of them were Railwaymen. Leaders of the Central Government employees, including **General Secretary of AIRF, went on an indefinite fast in front of the Parliament in New Delhi against this massive victimization.** The Government of India was forced to withdraw the discharge notices and consequently all the discharged employees were reinstated in service. **Gajendera Gadkar Report on DA** was finally implemented from 01.10.1968 and the **Third Pay Commission** was belatedly setup in 1970 – nearly 13 years after the Second CPC and that too **after much struggle by the AIRF.** Its report was implemented from January 1973 under **much pressure by the Federation(AIRF).**

Report of the Third Pay Commission provided some relief, but many of the main demands were arbitrarily rejected by the Commission and by the Government – including that for the parity of wages with Public Undertakings and upgrading as per job evaluation etc. The Government also refused to negotiate on these and these and other vital issues. Consequently, **in May, 1974, the Railwaymen were again forced by the Government to go on strike lead by AIRF** and nearly 106 other Categorical Associations which joined the same as part of the NCCRS(National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen's Struggle).

NFIR and its affiliated unions and office bearers again betrayed and sided with the administration to sabotage the Strike, acted as informers and get rewarded through Additional Increments and recruitment of their wards. The Strike lasted for three weeks. During this strike 50,000 Railway workers were arrested, over 10,300 Railwaymen were dismissed from service, service of over 5,600 temporary employees were terminated and 4 employees lost their lives. This was a historic strike which attracted worldwide attention. This strike was also a contributory factor in the landslide defeat of the Congress Party, which was responsible for forcing the workers to go on strike.

All the victimized Railway workers were reinstated in service either by the court's orders or by the announcement made by the then Minister for Railways, **Pro. Madhu Dandvate** of the Janata Party Government in the year 1977.

**In the year 1978, AIRF took a strike ballot for an indefinite General Strike in the Railways on the government's refusal to concede the Railwaymen's demand for payment of bonus.** The strike was averted because of the settlement of the demands and Government agreeing to pay Productivity Linked Bonus(PLB) to Railwaymen. The PLB which started with 15 days ad-hoc payment has increased to 77 days wages(Rs.8860) for the year 2009-10 and this will continue to increase every years as the productivity improves. But the payment ceiling for PLB of Rs.3500 pm has not yet been increased in spite of repeated urgings and **AIRF will have now intensify the struggle to get it revised and linked to actual wages.**

In the meanwhile, some of the other demands were also accepted and **Workers Classification Tribunal(RWCT)** Tribunal was set up in 1979 – for upgrading as per job requirement. But even for the same, **AIRF had to agitate a lot and even boycotted the Tribunal at one stage and later gave a call for Tool Down Strike** – which was however averted and the report of the Joint Committee on issue was implemented – providing major relief and upgrading to Artisan Staff and Khalsis in all the Departments and Workshops.

This was followed by first time **Cadre Review in 1979 and Cadre Restructuring** of all Categories in 1984, 1993 and in 2003 substantially improving the avenues of promotions of all Group `C' and `D' staff of all the departments.

In the year 1997, on receipt of the report of the 5<sup>th</sup> CPC, **AIRF along with other unions of the Central Government employees organized a strike.** The response was massive. The strike was averted following negotiations between the JCM leaders and the Group of Ministers, as the result of which, an agreement was signed on 11.09.1997 which granted 20% additional wage hike over that recommended by the Fifth CPC along with an agreement for resolving the anomalies arising out of it.

**AIRF has the policy of having continuous dialogue between the Organized Labour and the Railway Administration at various levels** which greatly helped in maintaining prolonged industrial peace on the Railways, **but to resort to agitation whenever the demands are unjustly denied.** Strikes have always been the last weapon to secure the legitimate rights of the employees.

**Legitimate demands of the Railwaymen could be settled by AIRF through negotiations,** The Railway Administration also got an opportunity to use a good industrial climate for the efficient functioning of the Railway System in the service of Rail users. **AIRF is a free, democratic and independent organization.** Out of 1.5 million Railway workers, 1.2 million are members of the AIRF. It has affiliated

unions on all the 17 Zonal Railways(including MTP Railway, Kolkata) and 8 Production Units and RDSO Lucknow.

**Besides fighting for the rights and just demands of the Railway employees, through strikes, demonstrations, dharnas, AIRF and its affiliates have been doing a lot of social service through several non-bargaining activities** like health check-up and blood and eye donation camps, sports activities and prize distribution for the children of Railway employees, organizing drug and alcohol de-addiction, AIDS Awareness and family planning camps and providing relief to the victims of natural calamities etc., taking regular coaching classes for the children of Railway employees and also running computer classes and educational institutions including an Engineering College.

**AIRF is also concerned about safety on Indian Railways and has been organizing various seminars and meetings** - educating the cadre on Safety in Railway working, and in this direction, **AIRF had organized an “All India Maha Safety Samvad” on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2003 at Allahabad**, which was attended by more than 12,000 Railway workers, the leadership of AIRF and its affiliated unions, the Railway Minister, Minister of State for Railways, Chairman, Railway Board and other Members of the Railway Board. This received highest appreciation everywhere.

Notwithstanding all the work for productivity and safety being done by the AIRF, as cited above, **AIRF and its affiliated unions are involved in a continuous struggle and are facing Governments’ offensive on various issues.**

**AIRF is opposing outsourcing of activities to corporations or contractors.** Incidentally, workers’ unity is being disrupted by the Railways by granting recognition to non-representative unions. Benchmarks and targets are being pursued without creating the requisite working conditions and providing required manpower, tools, equipments and spareparts as per requirement all over the Indian Railways. Real wages of the employees are eroding due to heavy inflation. Compilation of Price Index is defective and out dated. 50% DA is not being merged – as in the past. Seventh Pay Commission is not being set up even though DA has crossed 80 % w.e.f. January 2013.

Downsizing of the working strength is being carried out indiscriminately, a Contributory Pension Scheme(New Pension Scheme) has been introduced - doing away with the beneficial old Pension Scheme and Labour Laws are being amended to the detriment of workers to placate foreign investors at the behest of the IMF and WTO. Since Indian Railways are the Nation’s greatest asset and second line of the defence of the country, **AIRF and its affiliated unions are determined to continue its constructive activities, and at the same time take all possible steps against Railways’ being privatized and tempering of their unity.** Government employees continue to face the British legacy and are still termed as Government Servants and Subordinates – even more than 65 years of Independence.(Can you name a single private company in India or elsewhere in the world where employees are called Servants). **It is high time we intensively fight against all these atrocities.**

**All India Railwaymen’s Federation strongly believes that, only satisfied workforce can ensure safe and efficient operations on the Railways, and as such it has to carry on the struggle to achieve that end at all cost – through sweat and blood.**