

Y D. Sharma, Delhi

(Interviewed on February 3, 12 and 13, 2001 in Delhi)

Com Y.D. Sharma, one of the founder members of the Communist Party and AITUC in Delhi state, was born on 1 March, 1918 in village Jakhauli in Sonapat district in Haryana.

Even at the age of 82, Com Sharma is active at the central level of the AITUC and leads All India Petroleum Workers' Federation, Brown Boverly Union, Hydro Electric Federation, and also All India Brooke Bond Federation and several other unions in the multinational companies. He is in the leadership of ITDC workers' union also.

A brilliant student of economics, YD Sharma was attracted towards the movement while going through the history of trade union movement in England and its economic history. He started with the student movement and was one of the founder members of the All India Students Federation in Delhi and was one of the secretaries in 1938 in Madras convention.

He was given the party membership in 1939. The labour movement in Delhi started with the agitation of the shop assistants and Com Bal Singh, secretary of the Congress party in Delhi and a communist, asked Com Sharma to organise these workers who had no working hours and hardly any wages and worked in the Katras of Chandni Chowk. In the years of 1939, '40 and '41, other unions also came up like Kapda Shramajivi Sangh and Carters' unions. All these unions were centred around textile industry. The demands were taken up to the Hindustan Mercantile Association in Delhi who were themselves freedom fighters and negotiations were concluded favourably. There was no shop act in Delhi. Punjab had its own Shop Owners Act which was extended over to Delhi after agitation.

During second world war, there was a boom in industry that inspired the trade unions also. During this period, first office of AITUC in Delhi was opened in Katra Shahenshahi. AITUC struggled for war bonus.

In this period, Kapda Majdoor Sabha was also organised under Red Trade Union and Com Sharma was asked to give intellectual input. Among the leading workers in this movement were Shiv Narayan Vatsa, Baba Ramchander, Bibi Chando and others. In fact Chando Bibi was the first trade union leader in Delhi and was with AITUC.

Com Sharma was mainly active in Chandni Chowk. He organised workers in Delhi Electric Supply Ltd, tramways, Rajghat Power House and many others.

With Gwalior and Northern India Transport Company, city buses were introduced and transport workers were also organised by him.

By this time second world war was taking its toll. Soldiers were coming to Delhi also and barracks were constructed for them. With them came the Communist Party members also from various European countries and exchanged their experiences with the party here.

In this phase, rickshaw pullers and hospital nurses were also organised.

With the influx of soldiers, eating places mushroomed and Gaylords, Wengers', Quality etc. came up. Com Sharma was the first president of Hotel Workers' union also. Government organised a wage board for them and Com Sharma was a member of the same. There was Shop Owners Association where the demands were usually taken up. The owner of Narulas', the owner of Ambassador hotel Ramprasad and few others used to take interest in such activities.

Delhi was a growing city since first world war. In course of second world war, the construction work went up and CPWD flourished. Com Janardan Sharma was elected general secretary of the CPWD Union, and a request was made to affiliate them with AITUC.

Various government workers unions also joined in after initial hesitation. Municipal workers union also joined in under the leadership of Shadiram who later joined CITU and organised Lal Jhanda Union. Com Khare is still active.

In Delhi the state unit of AITUC was formed in 1943 in Nagpur convention. By this time Com Sharma was party secretary of the state unit. Once the AITUC committee was formed, railways, post and telegraph workers and defence unions also joined in. Demands for dearness allowance and pay commissions were also raised. First pay commission was formed in 1946 and N M Joshi was its member as general secretary of the AITUC. Delhi unit was helped by State Legislative Assembly also.

One of the great struggles was RIN mutiny. In support of the naval workers, police forces in Delhi also went on strike along with textile and other unions supported by AITUC. Com Sharma and many others were arrested.

Later post and telegraph alongwith telephone workers got organised and Postmen and class IV employees union with class III workers was formed and Com Sharma was elected its president of the northern zone of Delhi and Punjab. All India president was VG Dalwi.

The strike call for the union was given in 1946. Many leaders emerged in this period. Com Sharma was arrested alongwith Ramachandra Sharma, Shakeel Ahmed, Janardana Sharma and NN Manna. Later he was interned in Delhi with a gag order for 18 months. It was only in 1952 that the cases were withdrawn.

AITUC unions also took active part in Anti-Republic Day demonstrations. Other political issues were also taken up like after transfer of power, minorities question was raised.

Till independence AITUC was the only organisation for workers in the country except National Federation of Labour led by MN Roy. In December 1947, leadership of the Congress including Sardar Patel took initiatives to form INTUC. In Delhi, AITUC was stronger but all over the country, INTUC had a better hold because of the government support. They started splitting the trade union units also. Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) was strong among railway workers and in ALL India Railwaymen's Federation, AITUC had only two units. The socialists dominated the union under the leadership of Jai Prakash Narayan and George Fernandes who later formed Hind Kisan Mazdoor Sabha.

In post independence years, a period of repression started against the trade union leaders and the CPI. No fraction for trade unions was organised in the party and whenever a call was given, trade unions also followed, like celebrating 7th November or organising meetings of the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU).

In 1949-50, college and university teachers and staff were organised and Com Sharma was president for ten years. In this period bank employees were also organised as there were no fixed working hours for them.

The white collar employees in various corporations also wanted to be organised on various demands after 1952 elections. It was a time when workers realised that their demands could be legal as the Constitution ensured their rights. Labour Laws came into existence and Industrial Dispute Act was also passed. India became a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) also.

Despite advancing age, Com Sharma continues to remain one of the top leaders of the working class not only in Delhi but also at the national level.