

D.D. Shastri, TUCC-FB

(Interviewed by Anil, Krishna and Bobby on Feb. 10th 2,001 at his residence in New Delhi)

Sri. D.D. Shastri currently President of the trade union TUCC-FB is into and one of the last living leaders of the Forward Bloc and is in his mid-80s. His full name is Dev Dutt Shastri and according to the birth certificate his date of birth is 21st December 1918. However according to Shri. Shastri the actual date of birth is in 1917. He was born in the town of Bilore in Kanpur district. As far as his family was concerned it was a totally politicalised family. His father was a hard core Congressman and had been punished for his political activities in 1911 itself. His uncle was also involved in the freedom struggle and was in touch with revolutionaries like Chandrashekhar Azad and others. So from his childhood he was in the midst of politics. His father's activities meant that his house became a center of all the top poets and politicians of the day, be it Pt. Nehru, Ram Manohar Lohia, or other tall leaders of the UP politics. Sometime or other they had all visited his house. Swami Shajahnand Sarswati was also an influence in his life. His father was initially working with the Railways but due a fight with a British officer was thrown out. Then he became a self-taught Ayurvedic doctor and joined the Congress and was part of its 1918 movement after the coming of Gandhi.

From Bilour he moved to Kanpur to study Sanskrit in a Sanskrit Patshala after which he moved to Benares for further studies in Sanskrit. There for the first time he got involved in student politics where he organised the Sanskrit students and built an organisation. Till then nobody had organised the Sanskrit students. His initial study of Sanskrit was in Harishchandra Sanskrit Patshalla in Benaras. But for his political activity of organising the Sanskrit students for their rights he was thrown out. These student activities were done in and around the year 1935. In those days according to Shastriji there were no colleges for Sanskrit. Thus in those days it was called a Patshala. In those days there was no university for Sanskrit too like today one has the Sampoorandji University. In those days it was called the Government's Queen's College of Sanskrit. For one year after he was thrown out he could do nothing and it is at this juncture that he came under the influence of one leader of the Forward Bloc named Shri. Ram Gathi Verma who was also a revolutionary. Shri. Shastri could not finish his studies in Sanskrit. So he did his M.Sc in Chemistry. He joined BHU where he developed a friendship with one comrade Yogesh Chandra Chatterjee through him he managed to get more Marxist literature. Through Yogesh he

came into contact with another revolutionary named Chitranath Sanyal who used to bring out a paper called 'Danik Agragami'. The paper ran as long as Sanyal was alive and was the editor and it highlighted the police atrocities on revolutionaries and the various mass actions of revolutionaries.

According to Shastriji in those days all the revolutionary workers had to be multipurpose workers in the sense that they had to work on various fronts. The only aim of all political parties in those days was to fight the British. Congress was the biggest force fighting the British and

thus all forces right or left had to join the Congress struggle and calls given by Gandhi. In 1939 D.D. Shastri was a delegate to the Tripuri Congress of the Communist party. He of course never joined the Congress Socialist Party(CSP).

As regards his joining Forward Bloc he joined it at the end of 1939 in December. Shri. Shastri was involved very much in the process of the founding of the party. From then on he has continued in the Forward Bloc. Comrade Ruikar who was one of the tall leaders of AITUC and represented AITUC in ILO in those days also joined Forward Bloc. As far as comrade Shastri's attending AITUC conference he attended the Kanpur congress when V.V.Giri was the President of the AITUC.

As far as trade union work is concerned, Com. Shastri started his TU work in the textile mills of Kanpur. He was involved in textile mill workers strike in those days. Then when Forward Bloc was made illegal and he had to underground. He had to take refuge along with other activists in the jungles of MP in 1943-44. There he met Aruna Asaf Ali, JP and Ram Manohar Lohia. It was a dangerous time for according to Shastriji one had to do party work and also see to it that one does not get caught. During that period Shastriji was involved in Gandhiji's call of 'no rent campaign'. In the process of trying to enforce it he got arrested by the British police officials and was canded. According to him after 7 canes he went unconcious. It was during this underground period which lasted for over 4 years that he along with his comrades walked all the way from the MP jungles to Rangoon in Burma to join the INA. On reaching there he saw the INA preparations. The police during the British times was far more brutal than it is today. By 1946 the warrant against him was cancelled and resumed his trade union work by organising the sweepers of Itawa and creating a union in the town. Organising the sweepers was really difficult because their participation was inconsistent. However despite these troubles com. Shastri managed to organise the sweepers of Itawa for a 7 day long strike for their issues. Seven days in that time was a long time as far as any struggle is concerned. Apart from this Com. Shastri was involved with the textile mill workers of Kanpur and organised a strike which is one of the longest in the history of textile strikes i.e. 63 days. Shastriji did TU work in Itawa for over 7 years from 'unees sau sataiees to unees sau chauan'. He also participated in the 1952 general elections. Itawa was basically a small town and had small scale industries and small level textile mills. Com. Z.A. Ahmed was also involved in the TU activities in Itawa.

Futher as regards his TU activities Shri. Shastri also led a movement in Itawa in 1949 along with socialists and other communists on the issue of 'forced procurement of foodgrains' from the pesantry and kisan cultivators for creating buffer stocks of foodgrains as ther was no PDS system then. Apart from this he organised the over109 days long andolan of the Mahila Karamchari Sangh(or Sanstha) which was the biggest organisation in UP in those days. During the struggle there was a 52 day hunger strike which in those days affected the Parliament and the Home Minister of UP Rustom Sethi too had to come and take heed. The andolan took place when Charan Singh government terminated the services of these women employees arbitrarily. The CPI MP Uday Pratap Singh too joined the hunger strikers. This strike achieved its goals when

they manage to reinstate all the 4,000 women employees who were dismissed except 2. However Shastri lamented that though the communists led the strike aided by the Congress, it was ultimately used to the benefit of the Congress to come to power in UP.

Another important union that Shastriji established along with one Ram Bharose Bhaduria was the UP Police and PAC Union in UP in the 1970s. He led a strike against the Sampooranand Govt. of UP when the Govt. dismissed 27 policemen from service and put cases of not obeying government orders against 35. The cases went to the High Court. This police and PAC union had over 3,000 members. The reason for the strike and dismissals was the decision by the UP police and PAC in 1970s not to go as the government ordered to Lucknow University for crushing a student movement against the VC. The police officials were of the view that it was a matter between the students and VC and the police will not interve. This angered the govt. and it dismissed several policemen which started the strike and it was very much led and guided by Shastriji.

Shastriji was also one of the founders of the Forward Bloc's trade union i.e. the 'TUCC'in Calcutta in 1971. Shastriji was of the view that the UTUC union was formed with the view to bring at least all like minded left and socialistic inclined TUs under one umbrella so that the working class becomes more united. However AITUC did not join in and later RSP, Lenin Sareni, and TUCC came out of UTUC. But this does not mean that there are no linkages left with UTUC once TUCC was formed rather many of the FB MPs MLAs have many unions for which they work which are still affiliated to UTUC and not TUCC but Shastriji's policy is not to form TUCC affiliated unions by snatching others left parties TUs.

Com. D.D.Shastri is a man of great humanity, love, affection and integrity. His Gandhian simplicity and wonderful smile are remarkable qualities of his personality which inspires one to believe struggles and progress of the working class struggles is possible.