

## TRS MANI (Tamilnadu)

### Biographical Note

Born on 10 February 1937, he lost his parents early, at the age of 8 years. Brought up by relatives on mother's side. He passed his SSLC in 1953. He used to run a library regularly in Chennai, where he came across New Age and other periodicals and books on labour movement. It was these literature that influenced and shaped his future life, particularly the political life. It convinced him of a change in society. The 1955 assembly elections of Andhra Pradesh also greatly influenced his political judgement, which showed the communists might form a government. Besides, he was greatly attracted to Nehru, whom he adored like a bhakt. He used to attend all his meetings and listen to all his speeches. Once he attended his public meeting on the Marina Beach even while he had high fever. His own ideas were influenced by the socialism of Nehru.

While his family was an orthodox one, he himself became a worker for the ordinary poor and an atheist. He worked as a steno from 1955 to 1978. He used to do his job half-a-day and devote rest of the day to trade union and other activities.

His first TU activity was among the sweepers and scavengers belonging to the Adi-Andhras and the Harijans living in various areas of Madras (Chennai). These were very militant people, and they would all go on strike or any other action together on the slightest provocation and pretext. According to TRS Mani, the scavengers had a very good 'weapon' in the nightsoil: the city population could not afford to allow it to accumulate. In those days, it had to be collected and carried in buckets. Mani led and participated in several interesting strikes of the scavengers.

Attending central party school in 1974 and then visit to Berlin in 1974-75 further changed his life.

On returning from Berlin, Gopu of state AITUC asked him to take up the charge of the state TUC office, where he is working since. He is the president of the Kalpakkam Coop Store and looks after their Union. Mani is active among the textile, construction and other workers and keeps touring the state in connection with the work.

TRS is one of those few TU leaders who keeps regular contacts with the NGO sector and thinks their role is very useful and informative. He has become particularly interested in the problems of the child labour. He has organised several seminars and meetings on this subject.

TRS Mani thinks that the trade union movement including that led by the AITUC should come out of the mentality of 'Moscow days'.

He is at present a secretary of Tamilnadu AITUC.

XXXXXXXXXX

## TRS MANI (Tamilndu)

### Transcriptive note

(The interview was held in the office of Tamilnadu AITUC on 22 March 2005 at 4 pm. Mani had been very helpful in the work of oral history, and therefore knew what precisely was expected of him. He was appreciative of the worth of the work, and readily and systematically answered the questions. —Krishna Jha, Anil Rajimwale.)

I lost both my parents quite early, at the age of 8 years. So, I was brought up by my maternal uncle and mother's sister. After passing my SSLC, it was a library that infused me with ideas of social change and sympathy for the working people. The books and periodicals in the library in Chennai, particularly the New Age, helped me shape up my ideas. Besides, Nehru's was a great influence. His socialism I found very near to life. I listened to every speech of his. Once, even when I was running high temperature, I went with my friend to the Marina Beach to hear Nehru's speech, lying on the beach.

I come from an orthodox Brahmin family, and am the only one to have strayed out differently. My family would object my meeting 'those' people i.e. revolutionaries and the trade unionists and the communists. But they did not put up any serious hurdle. I took up a job as steno after completing my SSLC, during 1955-78. It was a part-time work, with part of the day devoted to social work. My boss there once contested Panchayat elections, and I worked against him. He took it sportingly. He won the election.

I kept my studies of the literature regular, so that my entry into the workingclass movement was not accidental or due to the wishes of some leaders, but due to my own convictions. I remember to have joined a procession against the Americans, in which an effigy of President Nixon was burnt.

My first trade union activity was among the sweepers and scavengers. I had several contacts among the harijans and backwards. In fact I have never understood this caste business; I never remember who is what caste.

So there were a number of Adi-Andhras, Harijans among my contacts in Madras. They were very good people, very militant, with lot of solidarity and friendship and cooperation. They would go on strike at the slightest pretext, even if it was their own wrongdoing. Once, during a strike the ladies were sitting around in militant mood. I was keeping a watch over them for any mischief. One of the ladies suddenly disappeared, taking advantage of my inattention. It was later discovered that she had poured a bucket of nightsoil over one of the blacklegs, which was in fact reported by the police.

There were many such incidents.

Marxist education in the 1970s in the longterm schools and other studies helped me a lot to work among the people. P. Karuppan, a leader in the Chennai Corporation, and who was one of the leaders of the 1946 strike, helped me a lot in organising the municipal and sanitary workers. I became a fulltime worker in the trade union

movement in the mid-70s. It was during the state level AITUC conf that A.M. Gopu asked me to join the state office. Thus I entered the state-level activities, and am there since.

I have working among a wide variety of workers all over the state. I have organised the construction workers in several centres; they recently have had a state-wide struggle and dharnas and arrests. I regularly go to the Kalpakkam where an Employees' Coop Store has been organised, of which I am the president.

Lately, I have taken lot of interest, and I think that they are filling lot of space of the TUs and the parties. They are doing lot of good work for the people including the workers, and we have a lot to learn from them. They are well-organised and they provide lot of informatiopn. I attend their seminars and meetings very regularly. Unfortunately, this is more at the personal level, and the AITUC and other organisations should take more interest. I was active during the WSF.

I have come to be more interested in teh problems of the child labour. I have got the AITUC organise a number of meetings and seminars on teh question.

I think that the Aituc and the TU movement in general has to change drastically and adopt new ideas and methods. They are still living in the old world which has gone for ever. Now new situation and new sections have come into being.

xxxxxxx