



CHAPTER-XII

Emerges BEFI with a Clarion call

Background :

Bank employees found a new meaning of life with the formation of AIBEA in 1945-46. AIBEA made its commitments abundantly clear in advancing the cause and interest of the employees, based on working class outlook and approach, fighting the exploitative devices of the bank lords. Naturally, employees tearing apart age old shackles of submission and surrender, organized themselves with courage and determination and waged movements one after another to register their onward march. This yielded rewarding results to the organization. Prestige of the organization enlarged and spread throughout the country.

But ominous signs started appearing after a glorious passage of 20 years. With the signing of the first Bi-partite Settlement in 1966 the cracks became visible. Prior to 1966 Tribunals set up by the Government/s generally sub-served the interest of the twin combination of bank lords and the Government/s, employees' reasonable and justified demands were neglected to suit the interest of the powerful combined force of the opposition, and the Awards were thrust upon the employees. So, those were the days of imposition when leaders with whatever legal aid available to them tried their best through facts, figures and arguments, diligence and perseverance to protect and advance the cause of the employees. Employees also reacted in unison against unjust imposition, whenever warranted and added to their laurels many an achievement which had not been witnessed before.

This, however, made dominant section of leadership gradually cultivate their more than life projection, wielding

unbridled authority and power, basking in personal glory and encouraging personality cult. They started to drift away from their principled commitment to the working class ideology and trade union democracy. Instead they preferred to indulge in class collaborationist and pro-management attitude and to avoid struggle as far as possible. This was very much evident in their acceptance of an economic package with only 8% increase in load (Source : Bank Workmen's Service Conditions by Monoranjan Bose and Rajen Nagar), as against demand of 20% wage increase in the 1st bipartite settlement, and that too, against acceptance of a package deal of mechanization for doing banks' simple routine work and also disciplinary measures virtually on the dotted lines of Tribunal Awards, entailing punishment even for normal trade union activities and also continuation of the provision of termination of service without assigning any reason, but with 3 months' notice or salary in lieu of notice, as contained in notorious clause 522(1) of Sastry Award. Bankers' mischievous demands to extend their foray on the employees were accepted through mutual discussions and signing of the settlements. So, it was no longer an imposition by third party, but was voluntary acceptance of surrender deal imposed on the employees not by any 3rd party, but by their leaders themselves. Conscientious voices were raised immediately to implore upon them to rethink and desist from putting their feet into the shoes of the bank lords, but ego, adamancy and one-upmanship prevented them from listening to fair voice of criticism and reconsidering their wrong stand.

In the subsequent 2nd and 3rd Bi-partite Settlements a partial wage freeze policy was indirectly accepted by agreeing to ceiling on dearness allowance, merger of D.A. with Pay with less than full neutralization and a quid-pro-quo i.e. give and take device in the 3rd and successive Bi-partite Settlements as a matter of policy without exploring the potentials of struggle,

thereby not only creating a stumbling block for the days to come but also attempting to instill a collaborationist attitude among the employees themselves - all these harmful instances of anti-struggle class collaborationist outlook were set. In the 2nd Settlement, increased load was 8% against a demand of 15%, while in the 3rd it was Rs. 30 crores. (Ibid)

Apart from the impaired economic benefits and defective service conditions inflicted on the employees with active co-operation, - in the political front also this section of the leadership indulged in glorification of the then ruling party of the country. The largest democracy of the world became awe-struck witness to the darkest chapter of crucifixion of democracy in our country because of imposition of 'Internal Emergency' in June 1975 for nineteen months, whereby all dissenting voice was throttled, all democratic rights were trampled down ruthlessly. All rights of the working class, peasantry and the entire democratic sections of the society to raise voice on reasonable demands, resort to agitations and strikes were completely banned. Democracy was usurped by semi-fascism with the slogan 'Indira is India' coined by Debkanta Barua, President of Indian National Congress (I).

In such an agonizing atmosphere AIBEA held its **Conference at Amritsar in 1976**. This was for the first time that even a peaceful 'Vegetarian' procession of the delegates and sympathizers preceding the Sessions according to long practice and tradition of the organisation was not allowed to be taken out but it did not at all touch the sentiments of the leaders. They swallowed the bitter pill gleefully. The General Secretary's Report placed in the Conference heartily welcomed clamping of the Emergency. It did not even stop there; it went a few steps further lamenting that clamping of the Emergency "is a belated decision, rather it should have been proclaimed earlier." Economic programme and political decision of the

ruling party was hailed with full throated support in spite of the fact that agitational programme of the bank-men and talks on 3rd Bi-partite Settlement long overdue were stalled taking advantage of the Emergency, payment of Bonus was also stopped. Not even a member of the ruling Congress party could have excelled our veteran General Secretary in the manner he defended the Emergency with his demagogy in reply to the criticism of the delegates in the Conference.

Two of the editors of this compilation had the privilege of attending the Conference as delegates and one of them (the Chief Editor) had the opportunity to express his views on the ominous situation in the country. He strongly criticized the evil design of the ruling party and toeing of the leadership with them as reflected in the General Secretary's Report placed. This observation so much enraged Com. Prabhat Kar, the then General Secretary that he took the opportunity to spit venom in his reply to the deliberations made in a very distasteful manner. He even went to the extent of threatening - "A boy (he was only 31 years then) of yesterday is teaching me history? He must remember that I can teach him geography too!" What a taste and choice of language! When reason fails, demagogy and abuse take its place. This is not only an example of that but also of just an iota of intolerance of the leadership against any sort of criticism and/or suggestions. The path of working class movement was sacrificed on the altar of political convenience to establish closer relations with the powers that were. This deviation of the leadership also further widened the gap in understanding within the organization which they never tried to overcome through democratic means of discussion, persuasion, criticism and self-criticism. On the contrary, taking advantage of their hold on the majority of the bankmen they gave utmost provocation to widen the gap to the point of no return by resorting to the crudest form of

undemocratic functioning and arbitrary actions to silence any dissenting voice. Worst type of Trade Union bureaucracy gripped the dominant section of leadership.

It may not be out of place to mention in this connection that Com. Naresh Paul, Vice-President of BPBEA, was detained without trial on one occasion by the Government for political reasons. Com. Prabhat Kar, while presiding over a meeting of the Working Committee of BPBEA did not allow raising a resolution against the arrest, as his political view was akin to that of the ruling party in the matter. So he exercised his prerogative as President of the meeting undemocratically to preclude any discussion even though the issue involved was detention without trial of one of the Vice-Presidents of BPBEA - a serious encroachment on civil liberties.

In the organizational sphere - Basic Trade Union norms and democratic functioning gradually seemed alien to the leaders. Even comrades of unquestionable allegiance to working class ethics and principles were being placated by the leadership as 'disruptors' and 'saboteurs' for their raising of queries to the functioning. Taking advantage of their influence on the management they got large numbers of members in different branches of banks transferred to distant branches for their critical voice and thereby it was sought to create stumbling block for their participation in day to day Trade Union activities and organizing the employees.

Sanctity of provisions of the Unions' Constitutions and Rules was maintained more by flouting than by adherence. Even elections for holding State Conferences were dependent on the assessment of numerical choice and support for the leadership among the members, and this led to withholding of Conferences for years together in States like West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam etc.

A section of employees and organizers in different banks like United Bank, Central Bank, UCO Bank, Syndicate Bank, Canara Bank, even in Reserve Bank, Grameen Bank etc faced vindictive actions of the leadership for raising voice of protest. They were termed as 'disruptionists', 'extremists', 'divisive forces' and what not! Only a few such instances in brief, though not exhaustive and conclusive, are being dealt with here

State Level Developments :

Odisha

Odisha (The then Orissa) Bank Employees were first organised at the state level in the year 1954. At that time not a single bank was having state level employees union including State Bank of India. Except Andhra Bank all other bank employees were unionised through their the then Calcutta (now Kolkata) Unions/Associations. Andhra Bank employees were members of their Hyderabad Union. However, the bank employees working in the State of Odisha assembled in a meeting at Cuttack and decided to form a State federation of AIBEA. To that direction they formed an adhoc committee for forming the State federation. Sushil Kumar Ghosh of State Bank of India was elected as the Convenor. That adhoc committee was functioning as the State body of AIBEA. This initiative was taken by State Bank of India Staff Association leaders from Calcutta. Immediately after the formation of that adhoc committee a delegation from Odisha attended the AIBEA conference for the first time. That was AIBEA's 6th conference held at Madras from 17th to 19th October 1954. In that conference Sushil Kumer Ghosh of SBI, Convenor of the adhoc committee, was elected as the Central Committee member from Odisha for the first time. Again delegates from the same adhoc committee of Odisha attended the 7th conference of AIBEA held at Bombay (now Mumbai) from 14th to 17th October 1955, Susil Kumar Ghosh was again elected as Central Committee member from Odisha.

Thereafter in the year 1956, State Bank employees withdrew themselves from the adhoc committee. Because of that the adhoc committee which was functioning could not hold its conference and became defunct. Since there was no State organisation of AIBEA in Odisha no representatives from the State attended 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th conferences of AIBEA, After 13th conference of AIBEA another effort was made to form a State body of AIBEA in Odisha. Finally in 1964 a State federation of different bank employees Unions/Associations except State Bank of India employees association was formed and named as "ALL ORISSA BANK EMPLOYEES FEDERATION (AOBEF)" affiliated to AIBEA. One Advocate of Odisha High Court C.V. Baman Murthy was made President and Asish Mukherjee of United Bank of India was elected as General Secretary. Later on after 7th Conference of AIBEA held in 1955 again the delegation from bank employees under the banner of AOBEF from Odisha attended 14th conference of AIBEA held at Delhi from 27th June to 1st July 1966. Ashish Mukherjee of United Bank of India was elected as Central Committee member, But thereafter due to lack of coordination among the leaders and the inexperience in running a State federation coupled with absence of any guidance of AIBEA leadership it became defunct, but AIBEA leaders never cared to bother. However some young comrades from the State out of their own urge to rebuild the organisation went to Pune conference of AIBEA in 1968 and made the leaders explain the situation. In the absence of regular credentials they were made observers in the conference and were also advised by the leaders to organise a conference of the State Federation to revitalize it, in which AIBEA leaders would be present. Tara Das was selected as Chairman of the Reception Committee by the AIBEA leaders to organise the said conference. Accordingly a conference was convened at Town Hall, Cuttack in the 1st week of December 1969

according to the convenience of AIBEA leaders with their full approval and support. This created great enthusiasm among the employees and with their whole hearted cooperation arrangements for holding the conference were complete in every respect. Both Pravat Kar, General Secretary of AIBEA who was to inaugurate it and Tara Das General Secretary of United Bank of India Employees Association who was Chairman of the Reception Committee arrived at Cuttack to attend conference. But apprehending that the State committee to be elected in the conference would not be dominated by their yes men, they decided to sabotage it. Pravat Kar refused to inaugurate the conference and advised the delegates not to hold it; instead he suggested formation of an organising committee for holding the conference on a later date. The overwhelming majority of delegates did not agree with the suggestion and pointed out that the conference had been duly convened with prior approval and consent of AIBEA leaders. Even the posters and delegate badges for it had been printed in Calcutta according to arrangement made by Tara Das himself. Hence what may be the reason for withholding it at this eleventh hour, they asked. The leaders could not reply and left the conference hall. Even the delegates from United Bank of India were hesitating to leave the conference hall. But Tara Das gave a mandate to the delegates from United Bank of India Employees Association to leave the place, They walked out of the conference for the fear of reprisal along with a few others. But the overwhelming majority of the delegates remained present and concluded the deliberation under the Chairmanship of the outgoing President C.V. Baman Murthy. A working committee of the federation was duly elected with Amal Chakravarthy of UCO Bank as president and Damodar Pagal of Bank of India as General Secretary. But AIBEA leaders refused to recognise it. Instead they held a separate meeting

with the handful of delegates who had walked out of the conference hall and formed an adhoc committee with this minority splinter group naming it as an Organising Committee of AIBEA in Orissa, knowing very well that it lacked the support of the overwhelming number of employees in the State. Thus the seeds of the disruption and disunity were sown in Odisha by none other than the top AIBEA leaders themselves. The irony is that everything was done in the name of organisation and unity.

AOBEF, however continued to function as the majority State organisation in Odisha having its headquarter in Bank of India, Cuttack Branch. They were observing all the programmes of AIBEA. But AIBEA leadership was encouraging the splinter group who left out the conference of AOBEF in December 1969 and was functioning as organising committee of AIBEA in Odisha. This so called organising committee of AIBEA even could not form their formal State body. In 1971 AIBEA was holding its 16th conference at Delhi from 16th to 19th April. AOBEF decided to attend this conference as there was no other formal State body of AIBEA and they were the majority organisation in Odisha, Delegates were duly elected in the working committee meeting of AOBEF for attending this conference. They went to Delhi to attend the conference. But they were not allowed to attend the conference by the AIBEA leaders. Even they were driven out and not allowed to stay in delegates' camp. Thereafter in a most undemocratic manner they allowed the delegation of so called 'organising committee' which till then (1971) could not even form a State body of AIBEA in the State of Odisha'. The convenor of that so called "Organising Committee" Nirmal Gupta was made CC member from Odisha. Thereafter finally in 1973 with much difficulty AIBEA leaders could float another State organisation naming 'ALL ODISHA BANK EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION' disowning their original state body which they themselves formed and recognised from the year 1954.

After that also though AIBEA was not recognising, All Odisha Bank Employees Federation was continuing to function, claiming themselves the real State body of AIBEA as they were the majority bank employees organisation in the State of Odisha. In the year 1978 when struggle started for 3rd bipartite settlement Tarakeswar Chakravarthy convened a meeting of all AIBEA unions operating in different banks of Odisha at Bhubaneswar. Till that time after lapse of more than five years AOBEA (AIBEA's recognised State body) could not hold their 2nd conference. In that meeting Tarakeswar Chakravarthy appealed to all the bank employees unions to join AOBEA and suggested that AOBEF should be merged with AOBEA for the sake of unity and also to carry forward the ongoing bipartite struggle unitedly. By that time Amal Chakravorty was transferred to Calcutta and Damodar Pagal took promotion. Tarakeswar Chakravorty assured that very soon the 2nd conference will be held and the leadership will be elected democratically from that conference, But the main issue was recognition of UCO Bank Employees Association the overwhelming majority union of UCO bank Employees in the State of Odisha. Because in AOBEA, AIBEA was recognising the minority union in UCO Bank named as UCO Bank Employees Union Odisha and its General Secretary was functioning as the General Secretary of AOBEA, Then Tarakeswar Chakravarty assured that both the unions in UCO Bank will be allowed to attend the conference. He also assured that Reserve Bank Employees Association, Bhubaneswar will be accepted as affiliated unit of AOBEA, Then as per the assurances of AIBEA leadership AOBEF leadership decided to join AOBEA in 1978. The 2nd conference of AOBEA was held at Berhampur. But AIBEA leadership once again showed their real character. Tarakeswar Chakravorty and Ajit Banerjee declared that UCO Bank Employees Association, the overwhelming majority organisation will not be allowed

delegation in Odisha conference since they were members of their Calcutta Association, their membership will be considered for BPBEA conference and not for Odisha conference, For Reserve Bank Employees Association they told that after this conference both class - III and Class - IV association/union will be given affiliation by AOBEA, After all these betrayal from AIBEA leadership the unions belonging to erstwhile AOBEF decided to attend the conference with a hope if there will be the election through secret ballot, as agreed by the AIBEA leadership, their panel will win the election. But when the election agenda came Tarakeswar Chakravorty in an unprecedented manner declared that let the house decide by raising the hands of the delegates whether their will be election through secret ballot or openly by raising the hands. So in a most undemocratic manner the conference was conducted and all the assurances of AIBEA leaders were not honoured, However unions belonging to erstwhile AOBEF attended the conference till the end and thereafter continued to function as affiliated unions of AOBEA.

In 1979 when workmen directorship issue came in Union Bank, as per AIBEA directive, AOBEA leadership advised All Odisha Union Bank Employees Association to pass a resolution in their meeting supporting the candidature of AIBEA sponsored candidate M.K. Mundul, Son of K.K. Mundul the then Vice-President of AIBEA, instead of Shanti Bardhan the then General Secretary of All India Union Bank Employees Federation and informed the same to AIBEA as well as the Union Bank Management accordingly. But All Odisha Union Bank Employees Association, the only union of Union Bank Employees in Odisha, did not accept the advice of AIBEA/AOBEA leadership. They passed the resolution in their state committee meeting in favour of Shanti Bardhan and informed the same to Union Bank Management accordingly. Because of

this, AOBEA leadership gave notice to AOUBEA to disaffiliate them from AOBEA. But AOUBEA leadership placed their arguments very strongly that it is upto Union Bank Employees to decide who will be the workman Director in Union Bank and AIBEA is to recommend his name only. But finally, AOBEA leadership disaffiliated AOUBEA from AOBEA/AIBEA,

Opposing this undemocratic decision of AOBEA seven bankwise unions came out of AOBEA and decided to revive the original and first federation of bank employees in the State of Odisha ie. "All Odisha Bank Employees Federation". Finally through a convention of nine bank employees unions rebirth of AOBEF took place in Odisha. Thereafter when BEFI was formed in 1982 AOBEF joined the foundation conference as a proud founder of BEFI.

These are just some instances of undemocratic functioning of AIBEA leaders.

N.E. Region

Simmering discontent as regards functioning and attitude of the AIBEA leadership was becoming gradually percolated amongst members of different bank unions in North Eastern Region of the country as far back in 1974. Undemocratic functioning of the leadership was aptly manifested in not holding conference for long 10 years. Gross improprieties vitiated the entire atmosphere right from constituting the Presidium to conduct Conference proceedings till renewal of the same bunch of leadership declared elected without going through the normal procedure of election, ignoring strong protests of majority of the delegates present. Eight bank wise unions including RBI, UCO, SBBJ, BOB etc had to stage walk out. Authoritarian attitude of the leadership was further evident in preventing UCBEA, though a constituent unit till then, from its participation in the 9th Conference of APBEA

in 1982. Similar situation, perhaps more vindictive aggression was faced by a large number of delegates, not liked by the leadership, in the all India conference of UBI employees in Cuttack where they were physically ostracized. Bank of Baroda comrades remained under surveillance of the leadership! Even then members of all these banks chose remaining within the organization and continue their internal fight with an expectation to bring back leadership on the right track. But it was not to be so. Leadership preferred to remain unconcerned with the saner voices.

After long wait and efforts going into futility well over 3.000 employees in the N.E.Region assembled in the hall of Institution of Engineers, Guwahati on 5 January, 1997 and had no alternative but form bank Employees Federation - NER. A glorious chapter of struggling unity ensued.

Punjab

Although the State organization under the banner of BEFI was founded only 20 years back on 20.11.1994 important functionaries in particular of different bank unions became targets of attacks by the managements at the instance of their favoured organization i.e. AIBEA's leaders since long back. A series of suspensions, charge sheets even false criminal cases were inflicted and the comrades had to suffer from that. To name only a few such comrades - Com. G.S. Tiwana (the then Union President in Punjab & Sind Bank), Com. Arun Ghai (then Office bearer of the Union in Canara Bank), Com. M.M. Behal (then General Secretary of the Union in State Bank of Patiala), Com. S.K. Sharma, then Union President, Com T.C. Kapilesh, then Union Asstt. General Secretary in Punjab National Bank, and also a few others. The cases, mostly false, frivolous, fabricated and vindictive in nature were fought by the organization both in and outside the court and finally the comrades came out victorious with their heads high.

Eastern Maharashtra

Experience of the comrades particularly in Reserve Bank,

Union Bank and United Bank was also not otherwise in relation to the attitude and functioning of the AIBEA leadership. Signing of derogatory industry level settlements one after another caused murmurings amongst the employees. Enraged leadership contrary to listening to the grievances chose to expel Reserve Bank's and Union Bank's Employees Unions and this led to the formation of Joint Council of Bank Employees Vidarbha in 1980. The JCBEV formally became affiliated to BEFI in 1982 and the name was changed to BEF, Eastern Maharashtra.

Kerala

Collaborationist and undemocratic functioning by the leadership widened the gap in understanding to such an extent that a sizeable membership from AIBEA joined together to float INBEC. Naturally, the division in the State came not from adherents of BEFI ideology initially. The anti-struggle attitude of the AIBEA leadership rose to such a level that a number of Industrial Disputes in Private Sector Banks (Kerala having the tradition of a large number of private banks based on religious community, and promoted by traders and landlords) led to long drawn agitation including strikes. And the struggles were crushed ruthlessly because of indifference and apathy of the leadership. After lifting of the internal emergency election of different unions were held and the results proved that the leadership was fast losing its grip. Infuriated at the turn of events a spate of expulsions took place. Process of reconsolidation by the employees in the light of the bitter experience from late 70's was also undertaken seriously by the affected employees and this led to holding of the Foundation Conference of the State Federation affiliated to BEFI on 25th-26th October 1985.

Tripura

The historical factors those accumulated in bank employees' trade union movement of our country for birth of a new organization based on working class outlook in true sense, were also concentrated in Tripura in late 70's of the last century.

The 16 unions of West Bengal, were disaffiliated from BPBEA in September, 1980, most of them had the functionalities in Tripura. A serious contradiction in the United Bank in West Bengal was also deepened in UBIEA (affiliated to AIBEA) at the head quarter at Calcutta which had a direct bearing as a major bank in Tripura also. Obviously, United Bank in Tripura became the nerve centre of new birth of a federated organization in Tripura. In 1978 the all India conference of UBIEA was held at Cuttack. The legitimate elected delegates of UBIEA, Agartala were forcefully debarred from their participation in that conference. This incident including some other issues which were undemocratically trampled vibrated the whole conference. In 1980, when UBIEU (United Bank of India Employees Union) was formed in Calcutta as a central organization, the overwhelming majority of employees of the branches of the Bank in Tripura joined UBIEU. A Co-ordination Committee of bank employees in Tripura was functioning initially within the fold of AIBEA. An established leader from Central Bank of India, Agartala was the Convener of the Coordination Committee. But he failed to rise to the occasion in keeping with the new developments that cropped up in almost all the units of the Committee leading to change of the Convenership in 1980 and virtually since then Tripura Bank Employees Co-ordination Committee became preamble of Tripura State Federation of BEFI.

At that time, Tripura Gramin Bank Employees Association (TGBEA) was formed which was an all-cadre association. Tripura State Co-operative Bank Employees Union (TSCBEU) was functioning with overwhelming majority. Tripura Land Development Bank Employees Association, Agartala Urban Bank Employees Association were the sole organizations in their respective banks. Taking all together Tripura Bank Employees Co-ordination Committee under the Convenership of Pronob Kanti Choudhury was renamed as Bank Employees

Federation, Tripura in the foundation conference held in 1982 covering 90% of bank employees in Tripura, except State Bank of India. Santi Ranjan Bhowmik from UCBEA (United Commercial Bank Employees Association) and Pronob Kanti Choudhury from UBIEU were unanimously elected as the President and General Secretary in the foundation conference from which emerged BEFT (Bank Employees Federation-Tripura), the state unit of BEFI.

In all the glorious struggles, remarkably against suspension of 6 comrades in United Bank, Agartala for their participation in trade union activities culminating to glorious victory, against Government-Bankers move to organise 'Loan Mela' and its ultimate failure, heroic strike in all India public sector especially in the reign of terror in Tripura etc. during pre and post foundation conference of BEFT could cementise the inner force of struggle of all banks in the state, and was able to create a strong base, and thereby becoming part and parcel of the democratic movement of that state. SBI employees also extended their unique co-operation in those days of struggle.

Himachal Pradesh

Rights and privileges of the employees in general being neglected, voice of protest being chocked in the hands of the AIBEA leadership, the employees were desperately trying to come out of the shackles. The Unions in H.P. State earlier were working as part of Northern Zone Bank Employees Federation consisting of States of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Himachal. So, from within the employees were trying to wage fight against the authoritarian leadership of AIBEA's State organisation. Ultimately separate State organization, separated from Northern Zone Federation, was formed by AIBEA in Himachal Pradesh, but the leadership was ineffective and indifferent to employees' issues. This made UCO Bank

employees wage their struggle under the banner of BEFI from 1982 onwards. Their efforts bore fruit when after a long process of efforts and campaign, the employees in Himachal formed a constituent State Unit of BEFI in its 1st Conference in 1997.

Bihar - Disgusted and disillusioned with the attitude and functioning of the leadership employees were raising their voices from 70's in the State. But here AIBEA leadership floated a parallel union in UCO Bank in 1978 because that suited them. Soon after Union Bank Employees Association in Bihar was disaffiliated. As a consequence of all these developments employees unions in Reserve Bank, Union Bank and UCO Bank together formed a State Federation in the name of Bank Employees Union, Bihar. The Foundation Conference in the State was held at Patna on 20th-21st December, 1980.

Bihar State Bank employees' Convention was held on 20th December 1980. The Convention after adopting a declaration placed by SheoDutt Prasad (RBEA) formed a Preparatory Committee with directive to hold a Conference next day i.e. 21st December 1980 with participants in the Convention as delegates in order to build up a militant organization of bank employees in the State of Bihar.

During the process all individual bank unions in the State of Bihar, by organizing the general bank employees democratically decided in favour of secession from BPBEA (Bihar Provincial Bank Employees Association), the State Unit of AIBEA.

CONVENTION

“Working class in general and bank employees in particular were the targets of vicious attacks of capitalist class and its servant, the Government. Denudation and stringage of the gains of the Indian Trade Union movement were their principal

objects and to achieve these objects, they constituted Sukhomoy Chakravorty Commission, Bhoothalingam panel, Pillai Committee and tried to bring Industrial Relation Bill. Attacks on Bonus right, on DA by tapering and CDS were attempted at times with partial success.

The experience of trade union movement teaches us that Capitalists succeed in their aims, to the extent they are able to divide the sections of working class movement and win them over to their side. During seventies of this century the Indian capitalists had demanded that trade unions too should sterilize themselves, as is done by men and women with Vasectomy and Tubectomy. They desired that wages froze. While CDS was one of such direct assaults on our incomes, discreet silence by AIBEA on 3rd Bipartite due in 1973 itself was considered favourable for the formulations of socialism of Indira Brand. Even mild protests on inadequate bonus were given up and this year no unit of AIBEA has considered it necessary to even issue a circular claiming even a fallacious victory. This class collaborationist and surrenderist line has reached its optimum height when AIBEA along with AITUC and INTUC had sung hysterical hymns in support of emergency and twenty point programme. The president of AIBEA signed joint circular with the management calling upon Bank employees to observe arrears clearance week by “Shrma Dan” to ensure success of twenty point programme.

The partial 3rd Bipartite agreement on wages is before you. Just compare the wages of 1st BP, with 3rd B.P. You will know the gains of the heroic struggle of Bank men, which has been shamelessly betrayed. With no discussion at any level, the leaders of AIBEA have surrendered the DA formula. They were ready to accept tapering of DA at a basic pay of Rs.700/- of course for fear of isolation from bank employees relented.

But tapering is there at 10001- basic and special allowances

stand frozen at 340 points. Both Sukhornoy Chakravorty and Bhoothalingam had wanted this and AIBEA has acceded to these demands. Now Bankers want to discipline the bank employees, they want some harsher provisions in the Penal sections of 2nd BP. They want higher responsibilities be imposed without increase in emoluments. They want to denude the local units of their power and capacity to resist oppression. All these demands are the remaining undecided part of the 3rd BP, now under arbitration.

Have the AIBEA and its units any perspective in their minds to defeat these move?

Nowhere it is visible. Rather certain affiliated units of AIBEA have already accepted some of the above conditions in their bankwise agreements, as in Canara Bank, Indian Bank etc. Leaving the struggle by units to their humiliating end, has long ago become the practice of AIBEA. They caused the humiliating end of the 53 day's strike of Andhra Bank Comrades in 1973. In Bank of Baroda (Bihar), Central Bank of India (Bihar) they ended the struggles forcing humiliating apologies upon Shri Ram, then Treasurer of their All India Federation. And in the end they took to the ignominious role of strike breaker in Grindlays Bank.

The leaders of AIBEA are conscious of the fact that Bank employees at large cannot be kept prisoners of ignorance for all times to come. So they have started stifling the democracy in the organization as back as in 1973.

Be it Assam, Bengal, Bihar or Orissa, nowhere did they have any regards for democratic norms or practices. These votaries of unity have unhesitatingly floated paper unions, where they failed to get their henchmen placed in the position of vantage.

COMRADES, with the experiences of two decades, we have come to the conclusion that-AIBEA has forfeited the trust reposed in it by the Bank employees all over the country in the task of defense of bank employees' honourable future and as such an organization committed to working class and democracy has become an urgent necessity. And therefore, we call upon the bank employees all over the State to disown and discard the anti-working class and undemocratic leadership of AIBEA and join hands with forces which believe in unity & struggle of Bank employees with working class outlook participating in the Bihar State Bank Employees' convention scheduled to be held at the Lady's Stephenson Hall, Museum Road, Patna on 22nd and 23rd November 1980.

With revolutionary greetings,

Yours comradely,

- 1 Reserve Bank Employees' Association, Patna
- 2 Bihar State Bank of Baroda Employees' Association
- 3 United Commercial Bank Employees' Association
- 4 Vijaya Bank Employees' Union (Bihar)
- 5 Union Bank Employees' Association, Bihar
- 6 United Bank of India Employees' Union
- 7 Central Bank of India Employees' Union (Bihar)
- 8 Punjab National Bank Sramik Union (Bihar)
- 9 Allahabad Bank Employees' Association (Bihar State)."

"As per the directive of the Convention and decision of the Preparatory Committee the Conference commenced at 11.30 a.m. on 21st December with A.V.S.N. Rao (PNB),

An open letter to the General Secretary. All India Bank Employees Association

710, Ballimaran, Delhi-6

Dear Comrade,

The 16th Conference of Bihar Provincial Bank Employees' Association was held at Bhagalpur from 24th to 26th April, 1980 after a lapse of some 4 years since the 15th Conference had been held. It was convened by a leadership which retained its existence by growing abuse of their position and flagrant violation of their constitutional obligations which you as the General Secretary of AIBEA should be aware of. Nevertheless you thought it fit to inaugurate the conference and also to deliver a speech which is meant to boost up the activities of those leaders who have been systematically resorting to high-handed, arbitrary and undemocratic practices to maintain their coterie domination over the organization for furtherance of their vested interests which they have developed over years together. To illustrate this point, we mention below some of their actions :

1. The Working Committee of BPBEA usurped the powers of the General Body by continuing its existence without holding the conference even after expiry of 27 months for the previous conference, although the constitution of BPBEA specifically provides that the conference cannot be delayed beyond 27 months from the previous conference.
2. During this period the leaders of BPBEA engineered in connivance with some leaders of AIBEA formation of a parallel committee of Bihar State Central Bank Employees' Union and in a highly arbitrary manner derecognized the democratically elected Committee of the said Association in its Chapra Conference held in May, 1978, thereby causing a split in the organization and throwing a large number of employees of Central Bank of India out of BPBEA.

3. More or less in a similar manner, the Employees' Association in United Commercial Bank was disrupted by the leaders of BPBEA, a parallel Union, formed and given affiliation, disaffiliating the existing Union which had been the affiliated unit of BPBEA since the inception of the latter.
4. Similarly, in Union Bank a Union consisting of a handful of a members was formed with blessings of leaders of BPBEA and giving affiliation by disaffiliating the existing union which represents all but 7 employees of the said Bank in Bihar.
5. In Reserve Bank of India also, the same action has been repeated, a parallel union formed and given affiliation disaffiliating the existing union.
6. In several districts, viz. Patna, Nalanda, Begusarai, Ranchi, Muzaffarpur and Giridih the District Organisation have been disaffiliated and parallel Unions formed.
7. All the above decisions have been taken without a proper discussion at the forum but in a most arbitrary and high-handed manner and the 16th Conference of BPBEA which has been held excluding the aforesaid organizations is neither democratic nor representative.
8. The members of Vijaya Bank working in Bihar were prevented from attending the 16th BPBEA Conference, because Com. Suderason has asked them for work under one of his henchmen in Bengal, who is associated with INBEC and there boys refused to oblige him.
9. In Canara Bank Com. Thakur who happens to be in the good books of Com. Kamla Singh was elected to the Central Committee of All India Canara Bank Employees Association against the express desire of entire of Bihar delegations and Com. Thakur is feinted upon the Canara Bank Comrades by Kamla Singh and Co.

10. Bankwise representation in the executive of BPBEA has not been determined in consultation with the Bankwise delegations, but foisted on the strength of fake majority obtained with fake delegations from R.B.I., Bihar Co-operative Bank and State Bank of India.

The leaders of BPBEA are trying to justify the aforesaid actions in the name of protecting the unity and solidarity of AIBEA, but they are virtually disrupting AIBEA and from the manner they are resorting to such arbitrary steps which cannot but lead to the unacceptable conclusion that the said leaders are no longer interested in the unity of the Bank Employees but are interested to maintain their position by stifling the voice of democratic opposition. This is a dangerous trend which, if not checked immediately, cannot but lead to division of the ranks.

As you are aware, some of the basic features of the 3rd Bipartite Settlement, hostile attitude displayed by the leaders of AIBEA in relation to wage settlement in Reserve Bank, unfriendly attitude amounting to betrayal of Grindlays Bank employees' 90 days long glorious strike struggle, have created serious controversy in the Bank employees' movement. Such controversies are natural in any democratic organization and critical voice against the decision which are harmful and against the employees interest is bound to arise. But, to stifle the position to the harmful line of action adopted by the leaders, if such arbitrary and sectarian methods, such as large-scale expulsion of Unions are resorted to as has been done by the present coterie of leadership in BPBEA then the unity of the organization is seriously threatened.

It is our expectation that to maintain the unity of the organization, you would dissuade the leadership of BPBEA from the pernicious disruptive line they have taken and see that the arbitrary decisions taken by them as listed above are scrapped.

We would therefore urge upon you to see that a truly representative democratically conducted BPBEA participated in by all these unions who are prevented from attending last conference because of the said arbitrary act of expulsions is immediately held failing which we shall be left with no alternative but to initiate steps to organise a truly representative democratic organization of the Bank employees in the State of Bihar.

With Greetings,

Comradely yours,

N. A. Khan

President : Union Bank Employees' Association, Bihar State

B. Prasad

Secretary : United Commercial Bank Empl. Association,

Bihar State Committee

S. D. Prasad

Secretary, Reserve Bank Employees' Association, Bihar.”

West Bengal

The most glaring example of undemocratic functioning was witnessed in West Bengal, birthplace of AIBEA. Like elsewhere here also debates within the organization centered round mainly on the following issues :

- 1) Undemocratic functioning.
- 2) Shunning of path of struggle on the question of employees' rights and privileges.
- 3) Voluntary acceptance of anti-employee provisions in bipartite settlements.
- 4) Alienation of bank employees from larger democratic movements.
- 5) Acceptance of mechanization as a package deal, ultimately leading to jobless growth and huge reduction in manpower.

6) Support to the Internal Emergency etc.

True to their design of functioning and attitudinal pattern the AIBEA leadership not only chose to remain unconcerned of the pertinent points raised regarding functioning and various settlements but they started hurling against those raising questions abusive, vitreous, even sarcastic expressions as 'revolutionaries', 'extremists' 'unruly elements' and such other insinuating remarks so as to divert attention from the real issue. In spite of the State Conference in West Bengal remaining due for years it was not being convened by the leadership on their arithmetical calculation that in most of the bigger unions elected leaderships did not support their anti-struggle attitude and support to the Emergency. They also faced another problem, as the outgoing General Secretary of BPBEA Com. Ajit Banerjee was defeated in his base union, i.e. Grindlays Bank Employees' Union consecutively for three years and in the event of BPBEA Conference being held, he would not be elected as a delegate by his base Union. But he was not ready to step down and trampling down all democratic norms he continued to cling to his post as the General Secretary of BPBEA shamelessly and desperately by withholding the overdue conference in the State for years together in spite of repeated requests. In this move he had the support of his mentors in AIBEA leadership including Com. Prabhat Kar who was the President of BPBEA at that time. The term of the elected committee of the State organization was over for years together and withholding the conference indefinitely created a stalemate. Majority of bank comrades of different bank unions affiliated to BPBEA were against such undemocratic grabbing of power by the General Secretary.

In the meantime, to silence any criticism and choke democratic discussion or dissenting voice, AIBEA leaders made it clear in its General Council meeting in Baroda in December

1969 that any differing opinion within AIBEA would not be tolerated. In protest against this highly undemocratic decision to stifle critical comments, four office-bearers and Presidents and General Secretaries of 16 large Unions affiliated to Bengal Provincial Bank Employees Association wrote an open letter to the General Secretary of AIBEA on 15th September 1980, pointing out their compromises with the bank managements against the employees' interest and disruptive and undemocratic activities in different States. A Convention of Bank employees was called to be held at Thyagaraj Hall, Calcutta, on 28th September, 1980, to evaluate the situation and also to demand holding of the long overdue Conference of BPBEA without delay.

In the novel judgment of BPBEA's General Secretary and his mentors, the open letter to the General Secretary of AIBEA and calling the Convention at Thyagaraj Hall were disruptive activities. So he acted with undue haste without waiting for the outcome of the Convention or without holding any Working Committee meeting of BPBEA. Himself rejected by the members of his own base Union consecutively thrice, he usurped the power of the Working Committee and arbitrarily wrote on 24th September 1980 a common letter to 4 Office Bearers (out of existing 10) viz., Naresh Paul (Vice President), Naresh Das and Jayanta Ray (both Assistant General Secretaries) and S. Ziauddin Ahmed (Assistant Treasurer) and also to all the 16 Unions who were signatories to the open letter that they had respectively ceased to be office-bearers or units of the BPBEA. To hoodwink and confuse the employees at large, he mischievously and falsely termed it not expulsion, but voluntary cessation of membership. Neither did he explain wherefrom he derived this extra-constitutional authority nor did he realize that by this action he automatically and immediately truncated BPBEA into a minority organization in West Bengal, because overwhelming majority of bank

employees in the State were members of the expelled unions. It became clear that it was a desperate but futile attempt on their part to silence differing views within the organization and use expulsion as a means to isolate comrades holding differing views from the rank and file members.

Obviously the employees concerned were left with no other alternative than to organize them into a separate organization. A resolution to that effect was adopted in the Convention with tumultuous applause. A Preparatory Committee for holding a Conference for the purpose was formed with Com. Naresh Paul as Convener. In this background the Foundation Conference was held on January 16th - 18th, 1981 at Baker Hall (Presidency College), Calcutta and Bank Employees Federation, West Bengal came into being amidst enthusiastic response of the comrades.

In this context, it would not be out of place to quote the common letter dated 24.9.1980 written by Ajit Banerjee, General Secretary of BPBEA, to four office-bearers and 16 unions as stated above and also the reply dated 25.9.1980 by Bank of Baroda Employees Association, West Bengal.

BPBEA's letter dated 24.9.1980 :

QUOTE : "It appears from printed leaflets recently distributed amongst the Bank employees and the poster displayed that you, along with 3 other office-bearers and Presidents and General Secretaries of our 16 units have sponsored a so-called Convention of Bank employees as a step to organize and form a parallel organization with some oft-repeated and wild allegation against the AIBEA and BPBEA leadership. You and your other co-sponsors have been raising such allegations and slogans for the last 15 years on every platform and forum of the organizations and decisions have been taken democratically from time to time on such matters

within the forums of the organizations. It is clear that you have raised the same slogans again just to carry out your pre-planned design to disrupt this organization and the AIBEA.

"You have thus chosen to disown your responsibilities as an office bearer of this Association and/or do not have any more allegiance to this Association. In other words you have voluntarily ceased to be an Office Bearer and/or unit of this Association.

"In the circumstances we have no alternative but to make it known to the bank employees that you have decided on your own to voluntarily sever your connections with BPBEA and AIBEA." - UNQUOTE.

Reply dated 25.9.1980 of Bank of Baroda Employees Association, W.B. :

QUOTE : "We are not surprised to receive your letter dt. 24th Sept. '80 disaffiliating us from BPBEA. We, however, give below our reaction to your said letter for your information.

- 1) You have no locus-standi to address us as General Secretary of BPBEA since you have constitutionally ceased to be such after 31st March 1978 as per clause "14" of the constitution of BPBEA.
- 2) You are absolutely correct that we have been leveling certain charges against the leadership of AIBEA since 1966 though we hold that our charges (of yourselves being anti-struggle, class-collaborationists, surrenderists and betrayers) are all based on facts, albeit, unsavoury.
- 3) We have all along been voicing our allegations and criticism strictly within organisational forums while you have preferred to use the organisational platform to disrupt and dismantle the organisation itself as is evident from your letter under reference.

- 4) There being no constitutionally valid leadership of BPBEA for over 2½ years past, we, with others, took initiative to organise a convention for a thread-bare discussion of the state of affairs and to chalk out a detailed scheme to get rid of a State-Leadership constitutionally invalid and organisationally moribund. You have for your own convenience deliberately confused leadership with organisation.
- 5) We cannot match your wild imagination that the proposed convention is a step to form a parallel organisation. It is perhaps with a view to justify the parallel organisations formed in UCO Bank, Union Bank, RBI, to name a few, by your cronies under your veiled patronage that you have resorted to such flings. Our decision to sponsor the convention was moreover taken at our General Council, the highest forum available under our constitution. It is, however, unfortunate for you that our method of taking a decision does not suit your style of Trade Union functioning.
- 6) In any event, you have no authority to disaffiliate us. As per clause 5 (c) of the constitution of BPBEA only the Working Committee is empowered to suspend/cancel affiliation of any unit and the decision of the Working Committee, as such, also requires ratification of the General Council “within two months from date. We, however, thank you for corroborating our allegation of yourselves being undemocratic, autocratic and authoritarian by your letter under reference. You have, in your unique style of functioning, not cared to consult the Working Committee or the General Council.
- 7) In fine, we shall request you to rethink whether we have ceased to be a unit of BPBEA or you have ceased to be its General Secretary.” - UNQUOTE.

To conclude this part of this chapter, let us quote **some portion of the report presented by Naresh Paul, Convenor of the Preparatory Committee of the Conference** which briefly set forth the circumstances leading to formation of BEF, West Bengal, and its tasks ahead.

QUOTE : “Trade unions, whether of bank employees or of others, are organizations of working class. This class outlook and consistent practices flowing therefrom are essential prerequisites to wage successful battles against opposite class forces. The first step towards that end is to build up impregnable unity. Any crack in this solidarity helps the class enemies. Formation of a union does not by itself create that solidarity nor do the members get the sense of involvement unless they are drawn in to have their say in policy making forums as well as in conducting the union affairs. Democratic functioning of the union is, therefore, imperative. Respect for each other’s views, howsoever differing, and endeavours for decisions through collective wisdom enhances trade union consciousness, strengthens unity and makes the union capable of waging class battles. These are some of the basic tenets guiding trade union movement which cannot advance simply by a mere formal acceptance of the guidelines. Assiduous implementation of the same is a must for any union. Otherwise, trends of bureaucracy sets in, leaders become the body and soul of the entire organisation. Unless a culture is developed in which members keep constant vigil, healthy criticism is honoured and corrective measures taken, distance grows between the leaders and the members and the unions turn into private reserves of the leaders. Individual or coterie rules supreme paving way for anti-working class tendencies and ultimately leads to lines of class collaboration.

“For the last two decades or so, bank employees’ organisation and movement have brought before us various

experiences to draw proper lessons. Ever since industry-wise negotiations in 1965-66 AIBEA leaders formed a coterie of their own, kept the employees always in the darkness about goings-on without involving them in any manner. Conscious drift from the basic tenets were initiated. Natural sequence was gagging of dissenting voice by all means and resort to all undemocratic methods so that the leaders can reign uninterrupted. Union after union where they or their cohorts were at the helm of affairs were made literally defunct; state federations were reduced to mere instruments of executing coterie decisions having no say in policy making on organizational matters as well as on others of material interest to bank employees. 'Internal disrupter', 'hidden saboteur' are attributes hurled whenever there is any comment or criticism not to the liking of the coterie. Whether in unions under their control or in the Bengal Provincial Bank Employees Association, conferences would be held or not depended on whether their yes-men will have majority. Elementary democratic demand of secret ballot is not conceded. Where majority is not assured even by raising of hands, threats would go round and executed in connivance with the management to transfer dissenting elements to remote areas, to have charge-sheets issued in brow-beating to submission a discordant voice and such other acts of commission befitting a sold-out team. Their attempt to keep bank employees away from working class struggles along with others on common issues was glaring by their absence from anti-wage freeze Convention of Trade Unions at New Delhi in 1975 and non-participation (except in isolated places) in the countrywide general strike by the working class on 14th September 1979 decided upon in presence and concurrence of AIBEA leaders in Bangalore Convention that preceded.

"Bengal Provincial Bank Employees Association's Working Committee meetings were held barely on three occasions during

a span of three years and more. Overdue Conference has not been convened as yet, the Working Committee decision notwithstanding a year ago. Even then, we bore all this with fortitude for preserving the unity and in expectation that they would perhaps mend themselves to return to the correct path. That was not to be. They pursued their policies of dividing the edge of united movement and organisation and on the eve of our Convention of 28th September 1980, which was arranged for evaluation of developments, removed us from B.P.B.E.A. with scant regard for obligations under the organisation's Constitution. Move for formation of a separate organisation is, therefore, not by our choice but an eventuality forced on us.

"A great responsibility now devolves on us. Guidelines are already discussed above. Deviation of them would be perilous and unpardonable. Bank employees have to be freed from the influence of class collaboration. Capitulators should be isolated and restrained from doing further damage. Implementation of democratic norms and principles in union functioning is a must and has to be meticulously followed in practice.

"Our immediate task is to forge a real and purposeful unity of all bank employees in the State, to build united struggles to protect and extend their interests by working in close co-operation with and as integral part of the working class. Let our deliberation in the Conference be clear and straight, policies and approach determined. Let the new organization emerging from this conference serve as the beacon light for consolidation and carrying forward the tasks bestowed." - UNQUOTE.

Anti-employees activities and harassment at the Bank Level:

Bank of India

Employees in Bank of India in its Eastern Zone comprising

West Bengal, Orissa, Assam and the rest of North Eastern parts of the country unleashed series of agitational programme under leadership of Bank of India Employees Union in defence of hard earned and legitimate rights of workers against the attitude of and large-scale onslaughts by the management of the bank, right from 1968-69 till mid '80's of the century last. Here also the employees had to face twin opposition by the management and the all India leadership of AIBEA in the bank. But a unique show of courage and strength was displayed by the employees. To elucidate only a few of the vital issues fought during the period spanning over nearly two decades :

On a torrential rainy day when regular transport system, both buses and trains, were highly dislocated employees facing all odds, even travelling long distances on foot came to the bank to see that they had been marked late. Employees immediately met the chief of the Branch to impress upon the difficulties they faced and requested him to cancel late markings. The management not only refused but on the contrary, being infuriated by the deputation, they issued show cause memo to 52 employees including the leaders of the Union. But In the face of organized protests and mood of the employees the management had to backtrack.

Clamping of Internal Emergency gave a shot in the management's arms; they came out this time without any semblance of administrative decorum. Important leaders and organizers in large number were issued transfer orders to distant branches, more than fifty kilometers in some cases, all on a sudden, even senior employees counting their days of retirement were also not spared. The transfers were palpably vindictive and it was manifestly clear that those were aimed at harassing the employees. Ultimately the management had to bring them back to the branches as per demand of the Union.

The management then hit upon another nefarious device,

unheard of in the Bank till then. They ordered proportionate deduction for each and every minute of late attendance by the employees without any consideration of the circumstances taking advantage of the 'Emergency'. Since all avenues for launching organizational programmes were banned the Union took legal recourse at the Calcutta High Court. The legal luminaries like Somnath Chatterjee (ex Speaker of Lok Sabha), N. N. Gooptu and others gave yeomen's service to numerous T.U. organizations, including Bank of India Employees Union in those days virtually charging nothing. Here again the management failed. Verdict went against the Bank and the Court ordered Bank to refund all deducted wages to the employees concerned. This has gone in the annals of history as a remarkable victory of the employees and an instance of total indifference of AIBEA leaders towards the employees under attack.

Management also extended their arms on the leaders and important organizers of Assam and Orissa. A spate of Charge - sheets, Suspension orders were issued to taste the nerve of the Union there. The young and determined employees fought valiantly under the banner of BIEU, faced all onslaughts. Employees took to 'Work to rule' and 'withdrawal of co-operation' to the bank to combat the situation. Management faced a deadlock condition in running the bank. The Chairman of the Bank had to invite five leaders of the Union to Bombay Head Office bearing all expenses by air and back including lodging for two days of negotiations that took place there between the top management and the five leaders. This was also an unprecedented event in the history of bank employees movement where both the local management of the Eastern Region (the then nomenclature) and the all India leadership of the Union -Federation of Bank of India Staff Unions with head quarters of Bombay under guidance of AIBEA leadership

were completely kept outside the negotiation process. Settlement finally was reached to the satisfaction of the Union. And normalcy was also restored in the Region. No doubt, a resounding victory of the employees' Union in Calcutta despite complete non-cooperation of the apex-level leaders.

Another principled movement was waged by the Union and clinched which had its unprecedented and far reaching significance. In those days during summer the practice in the Region for all banks was to deploy a large number of casual hands picked up from anywhere for sprinkling water on Khas Khas (A sort of curtains hung on windows and gates) in order to keep internal temperature of the Branches cool. They were paid paltry sums. Union made the management sit in negotiation and sign an agreement to the effect that Seasonal recruitment for the purpose for three months from April to June every year would be made from local employment exchanges and candidates so recruited would be paid wages equivalent to regular Subordinate Staff. This was a remarkable achievement of the Union solely on its own efforts.

Demands were raised by the Union to make fresh recruitment of Sub-staff commensurate with opening of new branches and employ a good number of hands working in Canteens (run in the branches under the private stake holders) as regular subordinate staff. Insistence and persuasions on the issues for a considerable period finally made the management agree to accept and implement the issues.

Differences within the organization reached its climax in 1980's when Bank of India Employees Union also became one of the victims of BPBEA General Secretary Ajit Banerjee's most arbitrary action of disaffiliation of a good number of unions and removal of four office bearers including one of the founding leaders of AIBEA and the then Vice-President of BPBEA Naresh Paul and Jayanta Ray, Joint. Secretary, in his

individual capacity without reference to the Working Committee in flagrant violation of not only democratic norms but also the Constitution and Rules of BPBEA. A small minority formed a new Union at the instance of AIBEA leaders. What a nice example of democratic functioning!

Canara Bank

The management of the bank here also started their old game of harassing and issuance of charge sheets to the members particularly to those who, either having resigned from the AIBEA union remained non-unionised and those remaining within raised critical voice because of their high handedness, were not having trade union protection. In order that such members might come out of such vindictive actions from the twin force represented by the management and the big leaders an urge grew for forming a Union of their liking where they could open their mind freely without fear of vindictive reprisals at hands of the Union leaders and combat onslaughts effectively. As a result a Convention of a large number of employees from different parts of the country was held on 10th November 1968 in Guntakal, and there was born "CANARA BANK STAFF UNION". K.J.Dixit, H.D.Shenoy and G M V Nayak were elected as President, General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary amongst others. The union was registered on 30 Nov, 1968 with central office in Bombay.

The newly elected leaders while visiting branches in order to reach broader sections of employees and express their mind as to formation of the CBSU had to face confrontations, even stiff opposition, threat of physical resistance from 'militant members of the Union' led by AIBEA functionaries.

But then the Staff Union had to resort to the path of agitations with all determination over various issues affecting interests and rights of the employees and confront the management in order to safeguard and protect them from onslaughts. And as usual AIBEA Canara Bank Employees

Union (CBEU), under leadership of AIBEA was settling the demands in a manner more favourable to the management. This fight against the forces had to be faced and continued by the Staff Union single handed for over a period of long thirteen years until the Union chose its affiliation with the BEFI soon after its formation.

Syndicate Bank

Though registered in 1952 organized activities of the union under the banner of AIBEA in The Canara Industrial and Banking Syndicate Ltd., as the bank was then known by that name, were witnessed from 1960's onwards. The employees and activists of the bank had to undergo series of aggression by the management. In 1964 eleven activists in Hyderabad/ Secunderabad were suspended without any provocation. Although the suspensions were lifted after a strike of 8 to 10 days as a result of settlement but the union had to barter recognition in exchange of code of discipline by employees. In 1965 the union had to go on agitation including strikes when there was a stalemate on some burning issues of employees. During the course of the strike 25 employees were suspended in Mumbai and many more in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Belgaum, Ernakulum etc. In Madras 18 employees were suspended including MSN Rao, the then Jt. Secretary of the Employees Union. The total number of suspensions escalated to 149 including over 10 women employees. But the Union leadership under advice from AIBEA leaders Prabhat Kar and H.L Parvana called off the historic 42 days old strike on the understanding that the suspensions would be lifted simultaneously with calling off the strike. But the management did not comply with their part of the understanding. Series of futile negotiations took place between the AIBEA leadership and the management. After long 20 months an understanding was reached for reinstatement of all the employees, but with

punishment of stoppage of increments varying from one to five. The CIBS became Syndicate Bank Ltd. in 1966. With the nationalization of the bank in 1969 the leadership of AIBEA showed evidently their close proximity with the management of the bank and this caused wide spread resentment amongst the employees. The resentment of the employees grew bitter when illegal dismissal of an employee was accepted by the leadership only to please the management. This incident opened the door of organized protest movement within the union. There was a show down at the Pune Conference of the Employees Union in the year 1974 against the leadership. Although the leadership won with a narrow margin of 54% against 46% of votes, struggle for democratization of SBEU and endeavour to bring the leadership back on the right track continued. But the leadership of AIBEA-affiliated Union embarked on a spree of expulsions of members including MSN Rao on the eve of the election in 1976. Elected State Committees in different States were also superseded and expelled from the organization so that they could not send delegates to the conference. The entire process was so undemocratic and arbitrary that it appeared as if some sort of Emergency had been imposed in the Union by the leaders to stifle the voice of any kind opposition just on the eve of the Conference. Left with no choice and with an urge to protect members from vengeance of the leadership expelled comrades held a meeting on 25th April 1976, which was a Sunday at Bangalore to decide on their future course of action. The meeting was attended by around 175 leading comrades of representative character from all over South India. It was unanimously decided to form a new union in the name of Syndicate Bank Staff Union and the Union got registration on 1st May 1976. This opened up a glorious chapter in the life of the union though two pronged attack by the management and the AIBEA union continued against the members. The Staff Union fought courageously and successfully all the attacks of

the management and were capable of withdrawal of the charge-sheets and many dismissed employees were reinstated. One very important achievement of the union was reinstatement of Shakunthala S Nayak, dismissed in 1972 (instance cited above and whose case was surrendered by the AIBEA union/ after long 15 years in 1987 with full honour and all back wages.

The Staff Union unleashed a very significant movement in 1983, perhaps first of its kind in the banking industry, against fraudulent involvement of the then Chairman and Managing Director of the bank R.Raghupathy against whom an FIR was filed by the CBI, then a wing of Government of India, before a competent court in Mysore (Karnataka) alleging that he had accumulated wealth beyond his known sources of income. The Union demanded his resignation which was almost unheard during those days. In order to muster support and strengthen the demand Press meetings were organized in different centres like Madras, Bangalore, Delhi, Ernakulam etc. The programme received coverages in both the print and electronic media. P. Ramamurthy, then a Member of the Rajya Sabha, echoed the demand of the Union. Leaders like Samar Mukherjee and Somnath Chatterjee took the demand to the then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee also. The Government without paying heed to the collective voice of the Union assigned him the post of a Director in EXIM Bank first and then the Chairmanship of IBA. 'A stage was reached where everybody thought that the demand is defeated and the Union will be destroyed' as because both the management and the recognized union joined hands to defeat the demand. Unfazed by the turn of events and adversaries the Staff Union continued vociferously with the demand raised on a principled slogan "nationalised banks are accountable to the people of the country". Finally on September 5, 1983 the Government announced that the CMD of Syndicate Bank has been sacked.

The incident quite naturally enhanced the prestige of the Union for the role played by it with dogged perseverance on a very principled issue until it is won despite Union Finance Ministry's dogged resistance.

Union Bank

In Union Bank Shanti Bardhan took initiative to form an All India Federation of different State, Region and Branch level Unions. Because of his sincere effort only the Foundation Conference of All India Union Bank Employees Federation took place at Delhi from 19th to 21st December 1959. This Foundation Conference was addressed by Prabhat Kar and H L Parwana, the General Secretary and the Secretary of AIBEA. In that Conference, though Bardhan presided over the session, Doughly from Ahmedabad and O P Kalra of Delhi became the President and General Secretary. Shanti Bardhan was made 1st Vice President. Kalra was made General Secretary as was suggested by Parwana. In presence of AIBEA leaders the draft constitution of AIUBEF was adopted. In fact they guided to finalize the constitution. One of the clauses of the constitution was, if in a State there are two unions or at any point of time there will be more than 1 union, the Federation will recognize the largest union.

During 1960 a serious difference cropped up between Kalra and Bardhan. 'The Management had stipulated minimum work load on the employees. Kalra and Bardhan took diametrically opposite position on the issue. While the General Secretary was in favour of accepting some stipulations with regard to the work load - if necessary, after some changes in the Management's suggestion, Bardhan was not prepared to accept any such stipulations. However in view of possible adverse impact of the controversy on the organization, Bardhan was asked by Parwana to be in Delhi for discussion with Kalra in his presence, In Delhi Parwana told both Kalra and Bardhan

for close relationship between Delhi and Calcutta Units and camaraderie between two of them were essential for development of the organization in the Bank. Bardhan then accepted Parwana's advice.

The post foundation conference i.e the 1st conference of the Federation took place in the 1st half of 1961 in Bombay. The inaugural session was arranged at the office of the chamber of commerce near Churchgate Railway Station and the dias was occupied by the top executives of the Bank. Even most of the office bearers of the Federation were made to sit in the auditorium. The welcome address was all praise for the top executive of the Bank. Bardhan thought that the content of the welcome address as also the venue and the seating arrangements were not befitting the inaugural session of a Trade Union Conference. He therefore left the place in protest but, the AIBEA leaders though approved Bardhan's action, suggested him to attend the delegate session of the Conference. But Kalra and his followers failed to appreciate Bardhan's protest action. That apart, Bardhan's rigid opposition to the Management's proposal to fix the quantum of work on the employees was not liked by some of them. But Bardhan's stand was, however, accepted by most of the delegates. But at the instigation of AIBEA leaders all the positions on the new committee were contested. However, the new committee was formed with Wadke as the President and Kalra the General Secretary. Bardhan decided not to seek any position in the committee and did not contest. Thereafter the second conference was held in September 1963 in Bombay. In that conference again because of AIBEA leadership unfortunately the contest for the post of General Secretary took place. Bardhan was compelled to contest Kalra for the post of General Secretary.

But Kalra lost the election. Wadke was re-elected as the President and Bardhan was elected as the General Secretary of the Federation.

The 3rd Conference of the Federation was held in Madras in December 1964. For the inaugural session of the Conference Com. Bardhan invited Prabhat Kar as the chief guest. Unfortunately the leaders of the host unit invited the General Manager of the Bank to attend the conference in the same status. Bardhan was so depressed as to think of resigning from the post of General Secretary on the eve of the conference. Kar however impressed upon Bardhan, the need for his continuation in the leadership and volunteered to preside over the inaugural session. In this Conference Wadke and Bardhan were reelected as the President and General Secretary respectively. This episode was subsequently used against Bardhan at a conference of BPBEA by its then General Secretary. But when Bardhan stood up to seek permission of the chair to clarify the matter, Kar himself informed the house that it is not necessary as the entire incident was very unfortunate.

The 4th Conference of the Federation was held in 1965 at Calcutta, where Kalra again contested for the post of General Secretary and lost. Again Wadke and Bardhan were reelected as President and General Secretary.

In the year 1972, Bardhan became the 1st Workmen Director in the Board of Directors in Union Bank of India. He remained Workmen Director in Union Bank of India for long 12 years till 1984, But it was not liked by the AIBEA leadership. In the year 1979, AIBEA leaders proposed the name of M K Mundul, son of K K Mundul, the then Vice President of AIBEA, as Workman Director. But majority of the units of the Federations opposed AIBEA's recommendation and decided the continuation of Bardhan as Workmen Director. Because of

this several State units of All India Union Bank Employees Federation were expelled from AIBEA in most autocratic and undemocratic manner.

Till about the middle of 1976, all Units of All India Union Bank Employees Federation (AIUBEF) were affiliated to AIBEA through its respective State Units. In spite of AIUBEF's allegiance to AIBEA, the leaders of the latter tried conspiratorially to get the leadership of the former replaced by those who shared their (AIBEA leaders') political views. Having failed in their efforts through democratic means, they even stooped down to sabotaging AIUBEF's movements against the management. Such sabotage was conspicuous at the time of AIUBEF's 39-day long agitation for realization of its 26-point charter of demands. Not only AIBEA's State unit refused to express solidarity with struggling employees, AIBEA leaders also gave hint to the management that they did not support the struggle. The attitude to the leaders of AIBEA towards the leaders of AIUBEF, their acts of sabotaging movements of Union Bank employees and undemocratic functioning created an anti-AIBEA atmosphere in some of the Units of AIUBEF. The leaders of AIUBEF had to carry on ceaseless campaign in favor of AIBEA with a view for changing that atmosphere.

In the absence of any reciprocation from AIBEA leaders, when INBEC was formed a few of the units of AIUBEF found an outlet for their till-then restrained disappointment with AIBEA leaders. They joined the new organization in mid 1976. The Central Executive Body of AIUBEF, in terms of the constitutional directive which was duly approved in the Foundation Conference in presence of the then General Secretary of AIBEA Com. Prahat Kar and Secretary Com. Parwana, unanimously resolved to affiliate the majority Unions of Union Bank employees, irrespective of their national level affiliations. The resolution was ratified unanimously by the

Central Committee of AIUBEF. On both the CEB and the CC of AIUBEF, comrades from Union Bank Employees affiliated to AIBEA's state Units were in overwhelming majority. They all supported this resolution. Afterwards at the instigation of AIBEA leadership a few AIBEA - Unions subsequently expressed their difference of opinion in this regard. The Central Committee took a decision to place the matter at the 8th Conference of AIUBEF held in Calcutta on 24-28 April 1979. At that time the majority of the Units of AIUBEF were affiliated to AIBEA's State Units and their delegates would have constituted the major section of the participants in the Conference.

Union Bank of India Employees Union (Kerala) – UBIEU, affiliated to AIBEA was the one and only union in the state. During the period of emergency, the then leadership of UBIEU(K) disaffiliated from AIBEA and joined INBEC (affiliated to INTUC) in an undemocratic manner. The protest and voices of dissent were suppressed with the help of the ruling party. Once the emergency was lifted and the people of India voted out the forces of Emergency, the corrective forces in the Union tried for re-affiliation to AIBEA. But the leadership undemocratically disallowed them from moving a resolution and later they were expelled from the Union. This paved the way for the formation of Union Bank of India Employees Federation (Kerala)-UBIEF(K) in the year 1977 under the leadership of M.S. Sreedharan, who was a victim of the black emergency. Naturally UBIEF(K) sought affiliation with AIBEA and fought against the dictatorship leadership of UBIEU(K), which by then became an affiliate of NCBE.

The irony begins when after 4 years, the very same UBIEF(K) was expelled from AIBEA in a totally undemocratic manner for the reason that UBIEF(K) stuck on to a historic decision taken by secret ballot in its second Annual General body meeting.

The story thus follows. In Union Bank, All India Union Bank Employees Federation (AIUBEF) was the only recognized and representative Union at all India level, which was very powerful and had a peculiar constitution that allows the majority organisation in a state, irrespective of its industry wise affiliation, to have affiliate with AIUBEF.

AIUBEF wanted to hold majority of staff members to its fold which really increased its bargaining capacity. The management wanted to weaken AIUBEF and at their instance AIBEA floated an all India body viz. All India Union Bank Employees Association-AIUBEA- comprising the AIBEA-affiliated units in various States. The AIBEA leadership in Kerala instructed UBIEF(K) to join AIUBEA. But UBIEF(K) leadership which floated a new organisation in Kerala splitting UBIEU(K) against the opportunistic and undemocratic attitude of that union, did not favour split in AIUBEF which upheld highest values of trade union democracy and fought for the legitimate demands to the employees. So the resolution whether to join or not AIUBEA was placed before the General body meeting and that meeting in its historic decision through secret ballot voted against joining AIUBEA. Naturally, the State AIBEA leadership expelled UBIEF(K) from it and UBIEF(K) had to fight independently without any State/all India affiliation. It is a matter of pride that by upholding this principled stand and by relentless fights for the demands of the employees, UBIEF(K) achieved the status of majority in the year 1988 and even now it is the recognized majority organisation of Union Bank Employees in the state.

The path treaded by UBIEF(K) and the many struggles it fought, have many common factors and features which led to the formation of Bank Employees Federation of India in the year 1982. The imprints of a forerunner of BEFI is very much visible in the history of UBIEF(K).

Surprisingly, AIBEA leadership thought it fit not to wait and see outcome of the exercise of democratic rights of the delegates of the conference. Possibly apprehending that the decision of the Conference may go against their view, they decided to split AIUBEF and with that end in view, one of the Vice-Presidents of AIBEA issued a circular a few days prior to the conference, calling upon AIBEA unions in Union Bank to boycott the conference and to assemble in Bombay for formation of a rival organization. Only a few Unions listened and responded to the call. The rival organisation under the style of All India Union Bank Employees Association, with M K Mundul, Mumbai as its General Secretary and J S Kamdar, Delhi, as its President, who shared the same political outlook with AIBEA leaders, was formed at a meeting of those who boycotted the conference of AIUBEF held in Bombay sometime in June 1979 under the direct guidance and control of AIBEA leadership through a number of its top leaders including its President. The same tactics which they adopted to split Orissa State Unit of AIBEA was followed here also to split an All India Bank wise Federation. These developments conclusively show how intolerant AIBEA leaders had become of any different views within the organization and did not even hesitate to split the organization in their lust for power, instead of resolving the differences democratically through the method of discussion and persuasion.

After creating rival All India organization, AIBEA stooped down to pressurizing those AIBEA-affiliated Unions which defied their call for boycott of AIUBEF's conference, for change of loyalty, AIUBEF's Ahmedabad unit, which had a membership of more than 800, was expelled from AIBEA's State Unit, Maha Gujarat Bank Employees Association, and a minority union of about 35 was floated and granted recognition in its place. Thus trade union democracy was given a burial to maintain hegemony of AIBEA leaders by any means.

UCO Bank

United Commercial Bank Employees Association (UCBEA) with headquarters in Calcutta was the foremost and pioneer trade union in UCO Bank (formerly The United Commercial Bank Ltd. before nationalization). It was set up in August 1946 with an All India constitution and engaged itself in the task of forming unions in different parts of the country. In this process its organizational network was extended throughout the States of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the then Assam comprising the entire North Eastern Region (i.e. the States of Assam as at present and the newly created States of Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh), Tripura and Goa, besides some centres like Pune, Kolhapur, Nagpur in Maharashtra. Subsequently when Unions were set up in various other States, UCBEA did not try to extend its operational areas to those States. On the contrary it took initiative to form an All India Co-ordination Committee of all the Unions for pursuing all India Bankwise issues affecting UCO Bank employees. The Co-ordination Committee functioned for some years with President of UCBEA as Convener. In its place a Federation – All India United Commercial Bank Employees Federation (AIUCBEF) was formed with Com. W.G. Deshpande (Bombay) as President and Com. S.R. Bal (Calcutta) as General Secretary in a Convention held in Delhi from 28.2.63 to 3.3.63.

There was no problem in Ucobank till 1969. The employees were united and jubilant at the formation of the All India United Commercial Bank Employees Federation in 1963 and its achievements soon thereafter. A powerful work-to-rule movement in 1964 (possibly the first of its kind in the banking industry) at the call of the Federation totally paralyzing the bank's functions throughout the country resulted in stoppage of direct recruitment of officers for the time being and subsequently in December 1968 signing of the 1st Promotion Policy Agreement, thus bringing to an end 'pick and choose'

promotion policy in the Bank and restricting direct recruitment of officers to 20%. Besides this, another notable achievement was settlement of pending bonus disputes for nine years 1956 to 1964. All attempts of the management to disrupt the struggling unity of the employees by getting a parallel INTUC floated yielded no result.

But problems arose in early 1969 on the issue of bonus for the year 1968. Bonus at the rate of 11.2% of annual emoluments (comprising pay and DA) was paid for the year 1966. Next year, i.e. for the year 1967 Bonus was paid at a lower rate @ 10.3% of annual emoluments. The Federation accepted this considering the fact that Jubilee Bonus was also paid to the employees in the same year. For the year 1968 the Federation, however, demanded restoration of the rate to 11.2%, as paid for the year 1966. This was a logical demand but In the negotiation held in Bombay, the management first offered 9.74% and then raised it to 10% for settlement which Federation's all office-bearers rejected unanimously. Mr.R.B.Shah, General Manager of the Bank, suggested the matter to be referred to Com.Prabhat Kar for arbitration. This proposal coming from the management surprised the Federation officebearers and they did not accept it.

A programme of demonstrations/deputations etc. was decided. The employees responded splendidly, but while the movement had gathered momentum and was to be intensified some office-bearers wanted reconsideration of the decision. Accordingly a meeting of the officebearers was called in Calcutta. It transpired that the reason for their sudden change of mind is advice of AIBEA's topmost leaders who had already arrived at, surreptitiously behind the back of the units, a deal for all banks with IBA to the effect that the previous year's rate linked to total emoluments would be converted to the rate linked to the annual pay of the said year. Bonus for the year

1968 would be maintained at the rate linked to pay thus arrived at, by converting it to the rate linked to emoluments comprising pay and DA for the year 1968 to conform it to the provisions of Bonus Act. This meant that the quantum of bonus would be limited to a percentage of pay and employees would thus be deprived of the benefit of increase in DA during the year – a benefit guaranteed in Payment of Bonus Act. The Bank's original offer of 9.74% of annual emoluments (Pay + DA) as bonus was based on this formula and it was raised to 10% for the purpose of rounding up. It was even less than 10.3% paid as bonus in the previous year. However, the reason for the surprising proposal of the management to refer the dispute to Com. Prabhat Kar for arbitration now became clear.

Being pressed by Mr. R.B.Shah, the then General Manager of the Bank, to honour the understanding, AIBEA leaders tried to influence the Federation office-bearers by means of backdoor brain washing to sabotage the movement by getting it called off midway, though it had every potential of a resounding victory. The majority of the office-bearers, forgetting that their commitment is to the employees, not to the AIBEA leaders, came to the meeting determined to call off the agitation at the instance of AIBEA leaders, but the General Secretary and the Treasurer refused to yield to their undue stand to compromise employees' interest to oblige the management. After a marathon meeting lasting upto midnight, a decision was taken to call off the agitation by majority votes. The members of United Commercial Bank Employees Association (UCBEA), the largest unit of Federation with a spread-over of membership in the entire Eastern & North-Eastern Region, reacted very sharply at this gross betrayal of the employees' interest by premature withdrawal of the blooming movement and supporters of the decision of withdrawal were defeated in the next elections of the Association.

Not satisfied with such naked display of pro-management and anti-employee activities, the said leaders, instigated by and with the help of AIBEA leaders became busy with disrupting the UCBEA which had been their eyesore. Their first step was to remove the headquarters of the Federation from Calcutta to Madras so as to elect a General Secretary from Madras instead of Calcutta. The next attempt was to disrupt UCBEA's Orissa State unit with the help of AIBEA leaders who, having failed to have their way in Cuttack Conference of AOBEF, started intrigues and manouvres to disrupt Bank-wise Unions which did not toe their line. UCBEA being the largest union in Orissa became particular target of their attacks. Raising parochial slogans, they succeeded in disrupting it in 1972 by forming a new Union in the State. But their success was short-lived, as the Orissa unit being disillusioned with the functioning of the Federation leaders not only came back again to its parent Association UCBEA but is continuing since then as one of its strongest units with overwhelming majority of members in the State.

In the meantime Kancheepuram conference of AIUCBEF was held. As a mark of protest against the disruptive activities of the Federation leaders, UCBEA decided to remain away from the Conference. The Federation leaders, however, with a view to creating a rift in UCBEA, allowed some unauthorised individual members to attend the conference without any locus standi whatsoever. Despite such undemocratic functioning and provocative action, UCBEA neither left the Federation nor took any disciplinary step against the erring members who attended the conference against the decision of the Association, but decided to continue its struggle within the organisation democratically. According to Federation constitution, it was entitled to three members in the Working Committee of the Federation. Accordingly on receipt of notice of a meeting of the Working Committee at Delhi, three members representing

the Association went there to attend it. But as soon as the meeting commenced the President arbitrarily declared UCBEA stood disaffiliated. Obviously this was a pre-planned decision of the coterie that dominated the then leadership of the Federation and it was peremptorily implemented, flagrantly violating provisions of Constitution and Rules of the Federation to avoid any discussion in the Working Committee. Possibly they thought that this way they would be able to isolate the Association from the rank-and-file members. But their calculation failed miserably, although they formed separate Unions in Bihar and West Bengal, splitting UCBEA.

Despite having an All India constitution, UCBEA did not open any unit in the States where State-wise unions were formed and gradually handed over its units opened earlier in Goa and other centres like Pune, Kolhapur, etc. to the Union operating in Maharashtra. With the arbitrary expulsion of the Association as stated above and considering the disruptive activities of the Federation leaders in Orissa in connivance with AIBEA leaders and subsequently in Bihar and West Bengal, the Association decided to extend its activities throughout India. Accordingly a unit was formed in Delhi, where a few hundred employees were working on temporary basis for more than 240 days in a year for quite a long period. Although they became entitled to be absorbed as permanent employees, the then leadership of Federation's Delhi Unit did not pay any heed to settle their cases. UCBEA took up their cases and after diligent pursuance succeeded in getting them absorbed in permanent employment. As a result in a short time Association's Delhi State Committee soon attained overwhelming majority in the State.

Similarly, in UP also some employees from Lucknow met the Association leaders in Calcutta, expressed their desire to form a unit there in view of the inaction of the local Union

leadership to defend the case of a charge-sheeted employee. A unit of the Association was formed in the State and the charge-sheeted employee was defended successfully. Although UP Bank Employees Union, affiliated to AIBEA, was a unitary organization and did not allow any bank-wise formation, they could not stop the formation of UCBEA in the State. In course of time it also attained majority in Ucobank in the State including in Uttarakhand. In this way units and State Committees of UCBEA came into being in Jammu & Kashmir (where it attained majority at the very beginning), Maharashtra, Gujrat, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, M.P. including Vidharbha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Karnataka, apart from its absolute position in the Eastern and North-Eastern Regions.

With this organizational network and struggles conducted from time to time it succeeded in settlement of many employees' issues which otherwise would have remained unresolved.

United Bank :

A volatile situation emerged in the bank in Calcutta when leadership of United Bank of India Employees Association (UBIEA), affiliated to AIBEA, refused to take up the cases of two comrades e.g. Aniruddha Munshi and Manojit Chakraborty, dismissed on political ground by the bank management. The leadership of the Association tended to place themselves as if on the seat of the management and behaved with the dismissed employees as employer. In such a situation, in an anxiety to save comrades who fell prey to the management-leadership combine, employees of the Bank met in a convention at Sealdah Branch of the bank in Kolkata on 13.05.1978 and decided to go on mass campaign movement for reinstatement of the two comrades. The memorandum signed by 4553 employees was handed over to Tara Das, the then General Secretary of UBIEA

on 14.06.78 with a request to submit the same to the Chairman of the bank in accompaniment with the Office bearers of Sealdah Branch Committee. But he refused to oblige the petitioners making his position abundantly clear both to the management as well as the members. Defying the anti-employee attitude of the leaders, exhibited in the matter, the employees rose in unison to lead series of deputations to the management and conducted other forms of agitational programme of varying degrees embracing large number of employees, cutting across organizational affiliation. The leadership became isolated. Mood of the employees shook the nerve of the management, which was so long adamant as not to budge an inch, but finally had to succumb to the pressure of the movement and decide on 26.09.1979 to reinstate both the victimized comrades in the bank with full back wages. That the management did not take the development in good spirit became vindicated on the day itself when a Charter of Demand on some policy matters was submitted by the employees. The management instead went to Calcutta High Court and instituted case against the leaders opposed to the pro-management leaders of UBIEA on false charges of alleged violation of Section 144 Cr. P.C. in Head office. However, in the face of persistent pressures of employees the then General Secretary, UBIEA submitted a demand of 24 items to the management out of which only a policy on promotion and promise to increase number of Special Assistants without any basis was agreed on condition that reconciliation of inter branch transactions would be processed by outside agency through computer. Members became highly agitated at this turn of events and they successfully resisted outsourcing of job even defying notice of pay cuts, charge sheets etc.

Then again differences widened on the question of holding all India conference and on some vital issues relating to the conference. The leadership decided first to hold the conference

either in Bihar or Orissa, and finally fixed venue at Barbati Stadium in Cuttack (Orissa) on 9th to 12th January, 1980. Whereas smelling something foul sizeable section of members demanded that it should be held in Calcutta. Leadership showed no signs of reconsidering the demand. However, as many as 27 resolutions, duly proposed and seconded by members were submitted well in advance for consideration by the Central Committee. Amitava Nandy, the then Secretary, Sealdah Branch Committee with clear 7 days notice to the General Secretary urged upon him to allow him to verify membership register and Delegates register in terms of clause 19 of the Constitution. But the reply of the General Secretary was - membership register could not be maintained at Central Committee office and that Delegates list would be notified prior to the conference. But the delegates list was not notified even in the conference. Actual number of delegates attending the conference remained veiled in mystery. In the Central Committee meeting held on 4.01.80 the number was stated as 1183, in the conference it was said to be 1261 (THOUGH NO LIST WAS SHOWN), but accommodation in the gallery meant for delegates was full to its capacity of 1600 on 12th, concluding day of the conference. Assuming that the number of Delegates was 1261 of which a percentage must have been absent, how could the gallery be full to the brim with persons all wearing Delegates badges unless outsiders with a motive were hired and deployed? Demand for physical verification of the Delegates was turned down. However, majority of the Delegates then under leadership of Chitta Banerjee and others raised serious objection to the flagrant violation of rules and norms of the constitution by the Presidium and demanded counting of votes after verification of actual number of Delegates. Hooligans assembled in the house in disguise now were let loose to pounce upon Chitta Banerjee, Amitava Nandy, A.P.Sinha, Bimal Banerjee and others. A riotous situation was manoeuvred. In

order to avoid further scuffle and assaults majority of the Delegates had to leave the venue and assembled at the Cuttack Club. They refused to further remain onlookers to the butchery of trade union ethics and principles and formed a Co-ordination Forum.

The Co-ordination Forum formed in Cuttack met in Calcutta on 16-17 February, 1980. Hectic activities followed. The Forum in its meeting on 21-22 June, 1980 took the historic decision to form United Bank of India Employees Union and the Union was registered on 31 July, 1980 to effectively fight out the onslaughts of the management, combat authoritarian forces, consolidate members and ensure democratic functioning and fight for protection of members' hard earned rights.

Grindlays Bank :

The betrayal of the employees' heroic struggle in Grindlays Bank for 92 days in 1979 by AIBEA leaders was one of the darkest chapters in its history. The employees of the Bank had gone on a heroic strike for 92 days in 1979 at the call of All India Grindlays Bank Employees Federation (AIGBEF) to secure the jobs of employees against automation and various job-killing devices of the management with tacit approval of the coterie that dominated AIBEA leadership, although the struggle elicited support of the Central Trade Unions like CITU, AITUC, INTUC, HMS and BMS all of whom issued statements in support of the strike. Among them CITU & AITUC issued their statement jointly. When all devices of the management failed to weaken the morale of the employees and break the strike, it is none other than a top-ranking leader of AIBEA Rajinder Sayal of Delhi who took upon himself the role of strike breaker by joining duties in Delhi and forcing other employees to act as black legs. Nevertheless the strike continued in other centres until the dispute was referred to a Tribunal by the Government. The Tribunal Award partially upheld the

Union's contention and passed remedial orders to some extent. Had AIBEA leaders lent their support to the struggle and organized solidarity actions in its favour, instead of lending their tacit support to the management, the outcome might have been otherwise. Rather than appreciating this heroic battle, AIBEA General Secretary, in his report placed in Allahabad Conference, took recourse to untruth and abuses against the leaders of AIGBEF. He wrote in his report: "Although the negotiations were resumed at the instance at AIBEA, the same was further deadlocked by the leadership of the Federation...." He further added: "The leadership of the Federation repeatedly failed to heed to the advice of AIBEA to properly handle the disputes to enable it to reach an honourable settlement." But he had no word of condemnation for Rajinder Sayal acting as a black leg to break the strike in Delhi. According to AIGBEF leaders, the allegation of Prabhat Kar was baseless, he could not point out a single instance or fact to substantiate the same and he resorted to a slanderous campaign against the Federation leaders to hide their own hypocrisy and misdeeds.

Formation of BEFI :

In the context of the above developments, which are illustrative, not exhaustive with many more still remaining unmentioned, it became imperative to form a new organization of bank employees to maintain the heritage of the bank employees' glorious struggle which had been abandoned by the collaborationist leadership of AIBEA. Naresh Paul, Ashis Sen and other leaders deliberated carefully about the pros and cons of the situation and the future course of action. The hasty arbitrary expulsion of the leaders and the Unions from BPBEA in West Bengal by the outgoing General Secretary without holding three overdue Conferences clearly indicated their fear and apprehension that if the Conference were held the leadership in West Bengal would pass on to those who held

critical views about the functioning and approach of AIBEA leaders. In that event they, as per constitution of AIBEA, would be entitled to representation in the Central Committee of AIBEA which they dreaded the most. The coterie they have formed in AIBEA Central Committee was afraid of any dissenting voice regarding functioning of the organization. In course of a conversation with Santi Bal was told by O.P.Gupta who was a member of the AIBEA Central Committee from U.P. that he earned the displeasure of the leadership for raising some query about some expenses in a meeting of the CC. Subsequently he had to leave AIBEA, join NCBE and became its President. Similar was the fate of Syndicate Bank Staff Union and Canara Bank Staff Union who were also forced to join NCBE in the absence of any other alternative. Arbitrary expulsion of Naresh Paul and Ashis Sen who were among the pioneers in the formation of AIBEA in 1945-46 before leaders like Prabhat Kar joined it was a clear manifestation of the fact that AIBEA leadership wanted to keep them away from the common members of AIBEA so that they could not be influenced by their views within the organization. So to remain in the movement and to pursue the path of class struggle which resulted in many glorious achievements of bank employees in the past - a path which AIBEA had consciously forsaken, there was no alternative but form a new organization.

Accordingly, the Foundation Conference of Bank Employees Federation of India was held in Calcutta on 13th to 16th October, 1982 amidst great enthusiasm. It was attended by delegates and observers from 9 State-level organizations and 4 All India Bankwise Unions. The inaugural session was held on 13th October at Subodh Mallick Square, in a mammoth gathering, preceded by colourful processions from BBD Bagh and various other zones. Inauguration of the Conference was by veteran Trade Union leader B.T. Ranadive, President of CITU.

Delegates session was inaugurated on 14th October 1982 by Jyoti Basu, Vice-President, CITU, and Chief Minister of West Bengal.

In the Report placed before the Conference a detailed and critical analysis of the situation in the country as well as abroad was made. It dealt with attitude of the government in power, banking scenario and BEFI's approach, the compulsions that necessitated founding a new organization, its approach to other organizations, tasks ahead etc. To quote a few such glimpses from the Report may be of interest to the readers :

On misuse of bank finance BEFI raised its alarm - "...how bank finance is misused by industrialists is evidenced by more than Rs. 1.700 crores lying outstanding as loans to sick industries. Money taken for an industry is diverted to other fields. The particular establishment is made to fall sick. Closure is declared and workers lost jobs. In course, the loans are treated by the bankers as bad, ultimately written off and not shown in the balance sheets. The accumulated bad debts, according to an estimate, may well be in the region of Rs. 2.000 to Rs. 2.500 crores. Is it not a calculated fraud on public funds?" It may be of further interest that by July 1982 deposits in the banking industries rose to Rs. 46.000 crores and advance of Rs. 31.000 crores. "Bureau of Public Enterprises has dished out that any wage revision must not raise the overall load to more than 10%.....there is again the Boothalingam Committees' recommendation of value per point dearness allowance i.e. Rs. 1.30 for every point rise in consumer price index number which means Rs. 5.20 for each block of 4 points instead of 1.58% of pay."

On AIBEA's functioning and attitude the report commented - "they gagged democracy. Their attitude towards other sections of the working people is manifested when they

welcomed and extended whole hearted support to Emergency when the ruling classes imposed it to suppress the working class and throttle democracy. They abstained from the anti wage freeze convention in Delhi in August 1974 and in spite of being a party to the unanimous resolution for nationwide strike on 14th September 1979 adopted in Bangalore Convention, they withdrew bank employees from participating in it except in a few States where their dubious policy did not work.” “..... drifted to the quagmire of class collaboration authorized widespread mechanization, conceded wide scope to management to victimize employees on slightest plea of resistance, concurred wage freeze policy by accepting lowered down rate of dearness allowance and a ceiling.....”

On organization - “Our primary tasks will be to develop BEFI on the correct lines of a class conscious Trade Union organization. A trade Union is not merely an agency for some how to get some economic concession realized for its members. It is an organization of the working class. No doubt economic demands are to be fought for and won but it has also a role to play in the battles against the anti working class, anti people policies of the ruling classes. The Trade Union movement of bank employees and that of other office employees cannot be different.the strength of a Union is not determined by number of its members alone, Trade Union consciousness is the beginning. Members are to be raised to the level of consciousness of being a component of the working class. Each movement and every struggle of the working class bring experiences and lessons. We have to take note of them and disseminate among the members.....” said BEFI in its aforesaid report.

The struggle between two lines of thinking - one represented by AIBEA and other by BEFI became amply evident in the Conference when necessary guidelines on Charter of Demands

for the ensuing 4th Bi-partite talks, although residual items of the 3rd Bipartite Settlement were yet to be concluded, were formulated in the Conference itself with the knowledge and approval of the members present. And the Charter demanding 25% increase in Pay & D.A. to compensate the erosion of wages over the years besides other allied demands as per authorization by the Conference was formulated by the Central Committee and submitted to the IBA on 15th November 1982 i.e. within one month of the Conference being concluded, whereas AIBEA & NCBE jointly submitted their charter on 3rd January 1983, i.e. 4 months after the expiry of 3rd Bipartite Settlement on 31.8.1982. The Charters so submitted clearly manifested the outlook of pro-employer attitude of the AIBEA and pro-working class outlook of BEFI. In an anxiety to avoid confrontation with the bankers AIBEA termed their Charter as ‘realistic and realizable’. On careful analysis of the demands formulated, it may be said that out of 10 demands formulated and listed by AIBEA, there was no quantification of 5 most vital items relating to Basic Pay and D.A., House Rent Allowance, City Compensatory Allowance and retirement benefits like Provident Fund and Gratuity. The Charter also remained quite silent on the demands of bonus, policy of inter-branch transfers, promotion policy of subordinate staff cadre and further new benefits. AIBEA so long maintained the tactics of raising vague and unquantified demands so as to leave enough scope of manoeuvre at the time of negotiation, keeping the general members in dark, and ultimately arrive at a settlement which suited the policy of the Government Bankers combined. BEFI made in its Charter every item quantified and abundantly clear not only to its members but all employees in the Industry well in advance.

True to the guideline as envisaged in the first Conference BEFI has been persistently and consistently following the path to mobilize employees on to struggle and raise their

consciousness which may be clear from only a notable instance - on its initiative a mammoth demonstrative programme of the bank employees was instantly organized against management's ill conceived design to freeze dearness allowance of employees of the UCO bank, before the Bank's Head Office in Kolkata. On only 3/4 hours notice by our organization alone, thousands of employees gathered at B.B.D. Bag to express their indignation on recommendations by CII to close UCO, UBI and Indian Bank on the plea of sickness. Then again it was BEFI who first started protest movements against selling of shares by different banks, at that time no other organization in the banking industry realized the danger of the move of privatizing Public Sector Banks. Later on, when other organizations also could see the implications they joined against the move of privatization.

AIBEA from the very beginning was totally against BEFI's participation in the Bipartite Talks. They took various stances to refuse participation and created pressures on the bankers to do so. But in the case of other organizations AIBEA was very much generous for their entry in the talks. It may be mentioned in this connection that in the 3rd Bipartite Settlement the signatory Unions jumped to four from only one signatory in the 2nd and two signatories in the 1st Settlements. Out of the four signatory in the 3rd, two were big organizations, i.e. AIBEA and NCBE and two were small viz., NOBW and INBEC. In the 4th Bipartite there were three - AIBEA, NCBE and INBEC. In the 5th along with two big organizations one new organisation INBEF (in place of INBEC) were signatories. From all these it was quite evident that the new organizations, whether it was NOBW or INBEC or INBEF, faced no opposition for being partners and signatories to the settlements, rather they were received with welcome gesture both by AIBEA and the bankers. So it was not only an exception but reflection of inimical attitude specially of AIBEA leaders that BEFI

enjoying support of more than one and a half lakh of employees has to face opposition of all sorts. AIBEA's principal opposition was BEFI since its birth, and they conspired to block its entry in the industry level negotiations though they were certainly not oblivious of the fact that in other industries like Coal, Steel, Insurance, Port & Dock, BHEL etc. all the Trade Unions functioning in the respective industries received invitation from the respective managements for participation in industry level bipartite and signed wage settlements together.

During 5th Bipartite Settlement also when BEFI placed its reasonable and just rights for participation in negotiation on its Charter of Demands on June 5, 1987, both AIBEA leaders and IBA remained opposed to its entry. In such a situation BEFI gave a call for 1 day strike in the banking industry on September 2, 1987. On receipt of the strike notice the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) had to intervene as per law of the land and a tripartite meeting was called on August 31, 1987 for conciliation. IBA attended it and at its request next Tripartite Meeting was fixed on September 15. In view of this, conciliation proceedings were deferred and BEFI also deferred the Strike on request by the CLC(C). But surprisingly, IBA abstained from the meeting on the next date. In consequence the CLC(C) submitted his failure report. Simultaneously, however, talks were going on between IBA and the negotiating 3 Unions AIBEA, NCBE & INBEF. In such a turn of events strike call was revived by BEFI. It took place on 27th September 1987, evoking widespread response from the bank employees in the country and paralyzing banking functions in many places. During the period AIBEA leaders hurled invectives against BEFI as "splinter minority group" and threatened the bankers for withdrawal of co-operation in the matter of mechanization, if BEFI were called for negotiation (Ref. AIBEA's letters dated. August 29. 1987 and September 2, 1987 to Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) and IBA).

They conveniently forgot that INBEF is also a splinter minority group which originally broke away from AIBEA to form AIBEF (joint signatory to 1st Bipartite Settlement in 1966) at the instance of Abid Ali Jaffarbhai. The name of AIBEF was first changed to INBEC and then again to INBEF with its affiliation to INTUC remaining unchanged.

In the face of such unjustified opposition, BEFI had to approach Calcutta High Court on March 14, 1987 to seek justice through legal channel. The main point of its Petition was its participation in bipartite negotiation on the question of wage revision and service conditions of the bank employees, and deferment of 5th Bipartite Negotiations till disposal of the case. In the meantime on another Petition filed by INBEC, an injunction was granted by the High Court against continuation of bipartite talks. This incident is narrated in details as because BEFI was castigated as supporter of adjudication by the AIBEA leaders and thereby sought to create widespread confusion and misunderstanding amongst bank employees in the country. Attitude of IBA was also evidently clear through letters which were submitted by its Chairman to CLC(C) reading as “..... two majority unions... generally may not come in conflict and they adopt balanced approach and are not insensitive to the issues having no direct bearing for the employees.” IBA further wrote - “..... the signatory unions would not agree to anything which yields an advantage to their rival” meaning BEFI and presumably hinting at computer agreement. IBA also informed CLC(C) in its letter on September 1, 1987 - “There is no question of their negotiation with BEFI to avoid misunderstanding between them and majority unions with whom IBA have bilateral relation.” It clearly shows that opposition of IBA is due to pressure tactics of the leaders of the negotiating unions, particularly AIBEA leaders. They might possibly be afraid that BEFI's participation in joint talks would

expose their pro-management approach. True to their onepmanship they totally ignored the fact that a joint front of the Unions at the negotiating table strengthens the bargaining power of the employees, leaving little scope for the management to manipulate, to their advantage, divided opinions among the organizations. Though accepting even a small Union like INBEF in the talks, they were averse to accommodate BEFI, because their vision was blinded by trade union rivalry rather than genuine concern for bank employees' interest.

Undeterred by all these obstacles BEFI remained steadfast and committed to upholding the principles for which the organization was born. Tenets of democratic functioning, upholding employees' rights and privileges based on concrete conditions and working class principles, forging unity of employees and united movement etc. guided BEFI all through. BEFI has always acted since its formation as a catalytic agent for bringing all employees and organizations in the industry under United Forum of Bank Unions and also in bringing bank employees in all the joint platforms existing prior to formation of UFBU viz., Joint Action Committee, Joint Struggle Committee, Anti Privatization Movement Committee etc. BEFI has been playing a pioneering role in bringing bank employees movement from the industry level to wider movements which will be evident from joining with other organizations in the banking industry in the anti privatization strike in the Insurance industry, anti labour reform strike, all India strikes convened by the National platform of Central Trade Unions etc. Involvement of bank employees in such movements has no doubt brought them in contact with different sections of struggling masses and has widened the mindset of the bank employees. These were very positive ingredients that could be planted by BEFI since its inception and which BEFI vowed to embrace in the days ahead.

Significant Struggles : True to the objectives and guidelines upheld in the Foundation Conference struggles were waged by the members under leadership of BEFI for protection of trade union rights, security of jobs, recruitment, fair policy in relation to the service conditions etc. with a clear mindset to forge unity and united struggle with all bank employees and officers unions in the country and also with other trade unions and mass organisations representing broader sections of the working people. But the fundamental prerequisite of waging broader united movement based on working class ideology is to educate, develop and consolidate its own members first. But it was an upheaval task with many odds; BEFI's sincere call for unity and united struggle was very much ridiculed by AIBEA leaders and others at the initial stage because of lack of understanding of the situation in proper perspectives.

Major Struggles -

First Independent Struggle in the Industry at BEFI's call - Well within one year of its foundation BEFI gave a countrywide call for one day strike in the industry on September 6, 1983 against indiscriminate Computerisation in the industry, unconcerned of the fate of thousands of educated unemployed youths vis-a-vis endangering service security of the existing employees. Although there is no denying the fact that its organizational strength was limited the issue evoked wide response from employees in general resulting from which the call met with an overwhelming success. It is also the first ever organized strike action by bank employees against computerization in the industry. It may be further mentioned in this connection that as if to ridicule BEFI's efforts and demarcate them away from anti-computerisation movement, only two days thereafter - on Sept. 8 an agreement on computerization was signed in the banking industry between AIBEA, NCBE & INBEC and the IBA, widening its operation in the name of restricting it.

The movement spearheaded by BEFI as per demand of the situation prevailing in the country evoked wide response beyond the industry also **resulting in formation of anti-automation bodies of different trade unions and mass organizations**, BEFI Units included, in States like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Tripura, West Bengal etc.

Hongkong Bank-The stiffest battle against mechanization and computerization of manual work had been fought in West Bengal. The 142 days round-the-clock squatting from May to October 1985 before Hongkong Bank premises in Calcutta to prevent installation of computer, participated by nearly 15,000 bank employees and supported & joined by hundreds from fraternal organizations indeed added a glorious chapter in trade union movement. Coinciding with this agitation as also pursuant to the decision of the General Council meeting of BEFI at Vijayawada on 4-5 April 1985, the bank employees throughout the country observed All India Strike on 25th September 1985 on the issue of automation in banks, mass transfer policy of bankers and vindictive attacks on functionaries of BEFI units. The sweep and tempo of the strike exceeded even the earlier one in 1983 and quite a large number of bank employees cutting across their organizational affiliations took part actively.

The prolonged agitation in Hongkong Bank also brought into sharp focus before the trade unions the dangers and implications of automation. Here also the role of the leaders of most of AIBEA affiliated recognized unions in foreign banks was of abject surrender - in fact they accepted computers as a fait accompli without any resistance and consented to unbridled power of the transnational bank managements to bring in whatever machines they thought fit by an agreement as a package deal for some monetary gains as far back as December 1982.

Calcutta Clearing House -The move for Calcutta Clearing House computerization was also bitterly fought by the employees under BEF (WB) leadership. They frustrated RBI management's four consecutive attempts to procure data entry terminal operators for the machines installed in a newly acquired premise – far away from the bank and office complex of Calcutta in fear of prolonged disturbance by continual vigil and big mobilizations. In a surreptitious way the management could get some operators by holding test at Bombay and when they were posted in the new premises, picketing commenced from 1st September 1986 at the call of BEF (WB). Despite that and notwithstanding repeated urgings to the bankers not to disturb clearance of cheques in view of the impending festive season in the State when workers usually get bonus payment and business activity reaches its peak, the RBI management closed manual clearing from 13th September 1986. But the computerized clearing could not take place onwards because of opposition by bank employees. That computerized clearing does not result in quicker clearance of instruments, as is borne out by experiences elsewhere and as such it was unwarranted being detrimental to employees' interest fell on deaf ears. To the utter unconcern of the bankers, RBI and Central Govt. cheques began accumulating. Meanwhile on 19th September 1986, at BEF's call, bank employees went for a day's token strike throughout the State in protest. As usual, requests to State units of AIBEA, NCBE, INBEC, NOBW etc for supporting actions went in vain. The strike was a tremendous success. On 23rd September the Executive Committee of BEF reviewed the situation – meanwhile more than a million cheques worth 1100 crores of rupees piled up, bonus and salary payments of lakhs of workers in the State were withheld by employers on the plea of non-clearance of cheques. This was followed by persistent vilification campaign of big newspapers aimed at creating animosity amongst the people by cleverly

concealing that this was a movement in the interest of unemployed youth and people. In this background the Executive Committee decided that the movement in the form of picketing would be withdrawn from 25th September 1986. Also came an appeal from the State Chief Minister to have a second look to the situation in view of the hardships of the people. The Committee further decided that the anti-automation movement and action would continue in diverse ways; for, computerization of clearing house was only a part of the bankers' total attacks.

Not being content with the computerized clearing in Calcutta, the RBI had given direction to each member bank for making necessary arrangements for MICR cheque clearing system. It meant installation of Encoder machines in each bank and carrying the encoded cheques to clearing house by courier service for being sorted through High Speed Sorter machines installed in the clearing house by RBI at fabulous cost. Apart from basic opposition to mechanization/computerization, West Bengal unit of BEFI felt very much concerned as several hundred employees and officers were likely to be rendered surplus because of introduction of the system and another 2000 members of subordinate staff would have been redundant by introduction of private courier service. Instructions were issued to different bank wise units to oppose such move and forestall the offensive. They carried out this directive with a magnificent display of militancy.

Despite all sorts of efforts by the bankers and RBI the scheme and time table for starting the encoded cheque clearing could not materialize. The new system was originally scheduled to be put into operation in October 1988. But it could not start. Thereafter, dates were fixed on as many as four occasions in November 1988, December 1988, January 1989 and March 1989, but to no avail. The tempo and enthusiasm of the resistance movement conducted by the different bankwise units

stalled the respective managements' attempts to make infrastructure! arrangements required for encoded cheque clearing operation. The RBI was forced once again to postpone their plan to start such operation from 27 April 1989 when as many as 17 member banks handling 70% of local clearing instruments expressed their inability to send encoded cheques on the scheduled date due to opposition of BEF (WB) affiliated unions. Under the mounting pressure of the movement, the local Chapter of IBA and the Reserve Bank authorities had no alternative but to call BEF (WB) for discussions which were held on 6th and 8th May 1989. After threadbare discussion, they had to come out with the following understanding as communicated in a letter to BEF (WB) :

“The Local Chapter of Indian Banks Association met the Bank Employees Federation, W.B. in the presence of the Manager, Reserve Bank of India, Calcutta on 8 May 1989. It was in respect of the situation arising out of introduction of new system of cheque clearing in the Calcutta Bankers' Clearing House and the member banks.

“BEF (WB) reiterated their principled opposition to indiscriminate computerization.

“The participant banks assured that because of introduction of new system of processing of clearing instruments there will be no retrenchment/reduction of staff in any bank in Calcutta Clearing Zone.

“It is also assured that there will be no reduction in the strength of staff in any cadre in the said area of work subject to exigencies to be discussed at Bank's level. There is also no proposal to hand over any part of clearing work to outside agency. It is decided that the member banks may write accordingly to their respective union/s immediately.”

The notable feature of this movement was that this was the

first time the bankers had to discuss an issue with one of the State units of BEFI. Moreover the outcome of such discussion gave the guarantee of non-reduction of staff in the specific area of clearing operations. The respective bank managements had to confirm this decision by writing to the bank-wise unions and only thereafter the movement was called off. No other organization came forward for a joint movement despite requests by BEF (WB). On the other hand they castigated the glorious movement. But the myth of so-called majority union in different banks as claimed by other organization/s was exploded, as in very many banks, our units, though being minority ones, put up a gallant resistance, stalling the managements' moves.

Why we waged this movement :

Principled opposition to indiscriminate use of computerization by BEFI was mainly on the ground of job shrinkage and elimination which would aggravate huge educated unemployment problem on one hand and endanger job security of the employees on the other. Naturally, when large-scale introduction of machines is contemplated, recruitment ceases, for machines devour human jobs. When redundancy is on the anvil, no management would go for fresh recruitment. In banks recruitment had already come down to a trickle - from 30,000 a year sometimes back to a few hundred at most. It was also reliably learnt that the lead offices of nationalized banks had instructed their zonal/regional offices to withdraw forthwith if they had made any indent from BSRBs for 1987. Waiting panels in several offices including RBI were being annulled. BEFI decided in the meeting of the Central Committee at Bombay in February 1986 to fight this menace and highlight to the people at large the goings-on in banks in regard to the very vital question of recruitment. Accordingly, a Central Dharna was organized in New Delhi on 4 April 1986, which was largely attended by representatives of bank

employees from various parts of the country. On the same day at the call of All India Reserve Bank Employees Association, its units in 21 offices of RBI also squatted on the demand of recruitment. These programmes got wide publicity in the press. This was followed by further Dharnas in State Capitals and different city-centres in the country which attracted wider public attention. In the face of such a stark reality relentless fight for the unemployed youth was considered by BEFI as one of its responsibilities.

A few examples of the grim reality will be further elucidated by the following : due to automation/computerization, clerical staff reduced from 10500 in 1970 to 5000 in 1977 in the New York branches of Citi Bank.

Number of ledger keepers went up in SBI at 12, N.S. Road Branch (non-mechanized branch) to 28 in 1982 from 18 in 1978, whereas in Delhi main branch (mechanized branch) having much larger volume of work, the number of ledger keepers remained constant at 28 between 1971 and 1982.

In Grindlays Bank, out of 112 clerks, 71 clerks and out of 30 peons 10 peons were displaced from 5 branches at Bombay where ledger accounting machines were installed in 1975.

In Brabourne Road branch in Dena Bank, 6 workmen out of 12 became surplus in advances department due to introduction of one Blue Star Ledger Accounting Machine in 1984.

The State Bank of India ranking 82nd position among 100 top world banks according to the value of assets as in 1982 deployed 183000 employees in its 6300 branches, whereas one French Bank ranking 8th with 13650 branches in the world could manage the business by employing 70900 employees due to intensive automation and computerization.

It may also be noted here that between June 1969 and June

1981 there had been huge expansion of bank business in India. The growth has been noticed to the extent of 8.7 times, and 4.3 times in respect of total deposits, advances and number of scheduled commercial bank branches respectively and in contrast, the staff strength increased only 2.2 times which in actual terms stood at 620651 in December 1980 from 275026 in December 1970 (**Source : RBI Bulletin**).

This figure and index convincingly refute the hollow justification of computerization in banks on ground of unmanageability to handle manually the increased volume of bank's works and thus wild propaganda and unfounded allegation that the bank staff are becoming inefficient and incapable to discharge their tasks stand fully exposed.

Policy recommendation of the ILO in this regard is illuminating, which says that ".....they (computers) should not be used for routine internal data processing just because present management is incompetent to handle a sufficiently large staff...." (Automation in developing country, ILO publication, 1972 page 241).

Many more such instances were before the leaders of all the bank organizations. But BEFI was the only organization in the industry that, knowing full well that technological advances could and should never be halted, tried to delay the process of bankers aggressive move for indiscriminate, wild and massive computerization in the interest of the job security of the employees and recruitment of more and more staff particularly in the context of huge unemployed educated youths in the society.

Bank of Baroda – In August, 1987 Bank of Baroda management chalked out a scheme to transfer 850 plus clerical staff, out of a total strength of 1100+ from one branch to another, in the city of Calcutta. The scheme was to be

implemented in phases within December 1987. All the 3 Unions – affiliated to BEFI, AIBEA & NCBE, representing all the workmen-staff of Bank of Baroda, in the State of West Bengal jointly opposed the scheme. The unions submitted both verbal and written representations to the management on 21st August 1987 opposing the scheme and demanding immediate negotiation to avert a showdown. Since the management was reticent, the unions, on 25th August 1987, raised an industrial dispute before the Assistant Labour Commissioner (Central) demanding his intervention in the matter. On 25th August itself, the ALC(C) issued notice convening conciliation meeting on 18th September 1987. Under section 33(1) of the Industrial Disputes Act, the management was to maintain status quo during pendency of the conciliation proceedings. The ALC(C) also, in his notice, reminded the management of its said obligation under the law. But the management of Bank of Baroda, a nationalized institution as it is, in contemptuous violation of the mandatory provision of the law, issued transfer orders on 20 employees on 7th September 1987, as 1st instalment of the proposed 850+ transfers. The management did not allow the concerned employees even an hour to enable them to consult their respective unions in the matter of acceptance of the transfer orders; nor did the management consider the representations submitted by the affected employees. The orders were hung up on the notice-board and the names of the concerned employees were scored off the respective Attendance Registers. The unnecessary haste on the part of the management to get the concerned employees transferred exhibited the mala-fides and caprice behind the impugned orders. Aggrieved, the employees went on continuous strike action with effect from 7th September 1987 which subsequently spread to all the 73 branches/offices of the Bank in the State of West Bengal. The employees, irrespective of organizational allegiance, opposed the scheme.

The urge for united struggle of the employees found expression in the three State level bodies in West Bengal affiliated to BEFI, AIBEA and NCBE giving a call for statewide strike in the banking industry on October 23, 1987 in support of the fighting Bank of Baroda employees. The BOB employees all over the Eastern and North Eastern Regions also observed two days strike in support of the struggle. After 54 days of heroic joint struggle the striking employees saw victory through an unprecedented phenomenon of the bank management seeking intervention of the then State Chief Minister – Jyoti Basu for solution of the dispute and agreeing in to abide by his decision in a policy matter having all India bearing. The main point of the settlement was that for transfer there must be a norm acceptable to employees as against the management's whims. The norm must not be the management's unilateral decision but a product of discussion firstly with the concerned striking unions, secondly with the All India unions having consultative status and lastly an agreement with the recognized all India body.

Thus ended a successful glorious 54 days strike action in Bank of Baroda proving once again the efficacy of united action.

The above movements had, no doubt, created an wide impact in the minds of the employees of all shades that an organization has come which is a different one, it is not going to compromise with the interest of the employees of the industry and people of the country at large and that it is sincere to its commitments based on working class ideology.