



CHAPTER VI

Birth of AIBEA in 1946

Banking industry entered the era of direct negotiated settlement popularly known as Age of Bipartism in 1966. It was really a historic chapter unfurled, and the first ever industry level settlement on all India plane in the country was introduced in our industry. However, the first negotiated Settlement in any Bank in the country undivided, on uniform basic pay, local area allowances etc. between the All India Reserve Bank Employees Association and the RBI management was arrived at and implemented in 1946, the year AIBEA came into existence. The first Bipartite Settlement in the Banking Industry was signed on Oct 19. 1966 after just full 20 years of the trials and tribulations of the Organisation faced. But before we focus on the latter parts let us rewind our memories to two decades back since 1946.

Now it is a well known fact that AIBEA was founded on April 20, 1946 in the then Calcutta. But behind every formal beginning there lie preparations to build up the base by so many dedicated souls, mostly unsung and unheard, without whose courageous and untiring effort the ceremonial march forward remains inconceivable. Bank men, reeling under oppression and exploitation over the years were desperately looking for avenues to speak out. So here and there, in a few banks in some pockets Unions started raising their heads. Even in a few banks like Imperial Bank, Bank of India, National Bank etc. employees plunged into Strike actions for days together for resolving their demands, quite disregarding the consequences. Enriched and encouraged by the outcome and experiences an urge for coming closer ignited the minds of a large number of employees.. Of course a few comrades enarmed with high spirit and ideology came forward in mobilizing their

colleagues outside office premises and beyond duty hours and on occasions like Sundays and holidays, in places like some ones' houses or tea-stalls or parks or some lonely corners away from the eyes spying. Some such pioneers were Com. Naresh Paul, Com. Ashis Sen, Com. Sudhin (fondly known as Mantuda) Biswas and some others in Kolkata.

The Convention :

Came November 03, 1945. The significance of the day shall ever be remembered while tracing back the trade union history of the Bank employees movement in our country, nay the sub-continent, beyond the present boundaries, during the British regime. A Convention of bank employees joining from different banks in Kolkata was held at the Mahabodhi Society Hall in the heart of the city, opposite Calcutta University. Much to the surprise of the organizers the hall was not only jam-packed, the audience spilled over outside the hall and adjoining streets also. The hall is still there perhaps basking in the glory of the day. The meeting was presided over by Sri Syed Naushad Ali, former Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Some senior bank officials e.g., Sri D.N.Lahiri, Manager of the East Bengal Commercial Bank Ltd, Sri J.N.Sen, General Manager of the Calcutta Commercial Bank Ltd, Sri S.N.Sen, Agent and Sri P.K.Mitter, Senior Officer – both of the Bank of India Ltd. etc. joined the Convention. Also came in the venue Com. Ajit Krishna Sen, the pioneer in organizing the employees in the then Imperial Bank and Com.Ashis Sen's father. Notable trade union leaders of the days like Srimati Moitreyee Bose and others also attended the Convention. (The present author of the article had the privilege of coming in contact with Sri S.N.Sen and Sri P.K.Mitter and working with them in the Bank they also served. However they were pretty seniors and highly placed and respected officials when I entered the bank. They are no more in this earth but I fondly cherish their memories. Being high officials of the bank they did their best to build up workmen's organization.)

Speeches touching upon the national and international scenario like Second World War, Price rise, Exploitative and tyrannical rule of the foreigners occupying our mother land, Movement for independence, Humiliations and sufferings of the bank employees and misrule of the bankers, Improvement in service conditions, Growing monopoly business of foreign banks etc. created an electrifying effect amongst those who assembled that day. Employees were enthused. In such an atmosphere it was obvious that everyone present in the Convention felt the imperative need to form an Organisation covering employees of different banks and give it a permanent shape.

Deliberations centered round **two key issues** :

If the Organisation so intended would confine itself within the periphery of the undivided Bengal or it would have an all India character. The debate was easily resolved to the satisfaction of all that the same would have an all India body.

But there arose another debate. It was a more serious one – as regards the name of the Organisation, – if it should be called a Union or an Association. A high pitched battle of arguments and counter arguments continued for quite a long time. Here I like to quote from “A Trade Union Odyssey” published by AIBEA for information – “There were serious differences in the matter of calling the organization as Union or Association. Com. Naresh Paul, founder office bearer of AIBEA effectively argued that the word Union will create misunderstanding later when bank-wise unions in the country would like to join, whereas the word Association will give a large dimension and Federal character to our organization. Hence, he pleaded that the name should be All India Bank Employees Association and not All India Bank Employees Union.” Finally, it is now needless to mention that the argument of Naresh Paul was accepted by all. Naresh Pal’s far sight was established beyond doubt.

The decision to hold the Foundation Conference soon when announced in the Convention was hailed and accepted through tumultuous applause of the audience. A Provisional Committee with K.C. Neogi - M.L.A., Central Assembly, as Chairman, A.D. Ghosh as General Secretary and K.C. Mukherjee as Treasurer along with a hundred others from different banks was formed to make necessary preparations for holding the Foundation Conference of the Organisation. It may also be mentioned that A.D. Ghosh held the position only for a brief period, and R.C. Chakraborty performed as the officiating General Secretary till holding of the Conference. A.D. Ghosh was a staff of the Imperial Bank of India.

Pioneers like Naresh Pal, J.N. Sen, G.K. Deydhari, D.M. Lahiri, Sunil Choudhury and others laboured hard for days together to reach bank employees, organize them and make all out preparations for holding the conference. Hectic activities started. The news of giving a permanent shape to an Organisation of the bank men in the country created a feeling of hopes and aspirations amongst large number of bank employees. A dream was about to come true. From age old bondage and tyranny, deprivation and exploitation a new sun in the horizon appeared rising tearing apart clouds and darkness. The days seemed rolling fast. The red letter day in the history of middle class movement in the country came finally. A new chapter opened up.

Foundation Conference of AIBEA :

The conference was held at the University Institute Hall, Calcutta on 20th and 21st April, 1946 amidst mounting enthusiasm. The hall was full to the brim; it was attended by around 650 delegates and 1000 members of the Reception Committee. The conference was inaugurated by Dr. Pramatha Nath Banerjee, eminent economist at 8:30 a.m. on 20 April. Speeches were delivered by D.N. Mukherjee as the Chairman,

Reception Committee and others. Mukherjee in his speech emphasized - "A bank employee has to spend longer hours in his work when compared with other services. As he has to deal with the public and has to execute the work allotted not only with a full sense but also to complete the same before he leaves his desk, his post should be sufficiently remunerative to create a sense of security and responsibility and it should compensate for longer hours of working...". Dr. Banerjee in his inaugural speech traced the growth of Indian Banking from the days of Jagat Seth right up to incorporation of the Reserve Bank of India in 1934. He in his speech said "...Turning to the present position of the Indian Assistant of the banking concerned in this country he expressed genuine concern for the present scale of salary and absence of any stability in jobs even with the bigger concern. Compulsory provident fund, he recommended should be introduced in all banking concerned". Dr. D.N. Sen in his presidential address said a few words, inter-alia, "About the technique of strike, which he considered the last weapon to be used by the association." The Secretary's Report placed on 21st April at the Delegate Session incorporated - "It is a matter of deep regret that excepting a few reputed banks none of the banks have anything like a fixed scale of salary and provident fund etc to offer to those who are rendering honest and sincere services. In most of the banks appointment is made to suit the convenience in such a way that it becomes prejudicial to the interest of the employees and very frequently attempts are made to strike a bargain at each stage of recruitment. As regards stability of service, in most of the cases, it may be termed precarious especially in smaller banks. Dismissals are very frequent, whimsical and on flimsy grounds. In short the plight of the employees in small banks beggars descriptions.....It appears that the bank employees have houses to live in but they have no business with household duties other than a midnight meal, midnight

sleep and a hasty meal in the morning. There is a proverb in Bengali that children of bank employees seldom meet their father when awake as the latter leaves home for office when the children are still asleep and return from duty when they had already retired to bed.The negligible extent to which the provisions of the Establishment Act is made applicable to banks and banking institutions is made ineffectual by laying down the rule that no court should entertain any case unless prior approval and sanction had been given for filing of the case by the provincial government in that behalf. The result is the bank employees are left without any protection as no inspection of work in banks is undertaken by the Department created for the purpose..."

On 21st April Secretary's Report was placed. The Report highlighted the prevailing national situation, banking scenario, conditions of employees and expectations, movemental aspects for realization of reasonable demands and objectives as a true fighting trade union.

A good number of important Resolutions were adopted in the conference; One of which was - "that the All India Bank Employees' Association be affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress". (Reselution under Serial No. 10 - 'The History of All India Bank Employees' Association')

The first Committee

President :

Mr. K.C. Neogi, M.L.A. (Central)

Vice President :

Dr. D.N. Sen, M.A., Ph.D

Dr. Suresh Ch. Banerjee, M.L.A.

Mr. G. D. Desai (Exchange Bank of India and Africa)

Mr. J.N. Sen, B.A., F.R.E.S. (Lond) (Calcutta Commercial Bank)

Mr. D.M. Lahiri, M.A. B.L. (East Bengal Commercial Bank)

General Secretary :

Mr. R.C. Chakraborti (Bank of India)

Asstt. Secretaries :

Mr. Sunil Choudhury (National City Bank of New York)

Mr. G.S. Rao (Bank of Baroda)

Mr. Sudhin Biswas (Allahabad Bank)

Mr. B. Bhattacharjee (Pioneer Bank)

Treasurer :

Mr. N.C. Moitra (Hindusthan Mercantile Bank)

Asstt. Treasurer:

Mr. Naresh Chandra Paul (Central Bank of India)

Members :

Mr. Kshiti Mohan Mukherjee (Comilla Union Bank)

Mr. Indu Bhusan Das Gupta (Calcutta Commercial Bank)

Mr. Manash Ranjan Roy (Hooghly Bank)

Mr. Bibhuti Bhusan Basu (Imperial Bank of India)

Mr. Debabrata Ghosh (Imperial Bank of India)

Mr. Binoy Lal Ghose (Pioneer Bank)

Mr. Prithwish Roy Choudhury (Lloyds Bank)

Mr. K.C. Mukerjee (Hindusthan Commercial Bank)

Mr. R. Dutt Roy (Tripura Modern Bank)

Mr. S. Banerjee (Bank of India)

Mr. G.H. Dhar (Comilla Union Bank)

Mr. Narayan Sarkar (United Commercial Bank)

Mr. K.P. Bagchi (Murshidabad)

Mr. Nagendra Kr. Choudhury (Comilla)

Mr. Hrishikesh Bhattacharjee (Chittagong)

Mr. Kanai Lal Roy (Burdwan)

Mr. Chittarajan Banerjee (Khulna)

Mr. Sibdas Bhattacharjee (Rajshahi)

Mr. B.P. Kar (Dinajpur)

Mr. Binoy Roy (Mymensingh)

Mr. Nirmalendu Bhattacharjee (Siliguri)

Mr. Hiten Roy (Dacca)

The Central Committee was authorized to co-opt 12 more members from the provinces outside Bengal.

From the list of the above Committee a careful reader will observe that 'Mr.' has been preceded to the names of each of the members. In those days 'comrade' could not be used lest managements of the banks and the government unleashed unwarranted attacks and punitive measures against the employees as well as the organization. Hence 'Mr.'

Founder General Secretary of AIBEA Ramesh Chandra Chakraborty has remained mostly in oblivion presumably because he did not remain associated with workmen's movement for long (he was in the committee of the second conference of AIBEA also) and chose to be an officer soon and retired also as an officer of the bank i.e. Bank of India. But that does not in any way belittle his contribution in the days when only a handful of young men could show their guts to come forward and lead the movement from the front. R.C. Chakraborty has received very little acknowledgment and references, except some passing references, even in the historic documents – books, commemorative issues, circulars, leaflets etc. of the organization/s and he seems to have remained as an unsung hero, though the first General Secretary. However, his role, his coming forward to undertake the responsibility of an organization in the formative days cannot be ignored.

Chakraborty wrote this editor a letter on 24.11.1995, when he was organizing the Golden Jubilee Celebration of his organization – Bank of India Employees Union, Kolkata in reply to his invitation requesting him to attend the same. Reproduced hereunder the letter in full in order that some impression our readers may have about the man –

Quote : “My dear Com. Jayanta,

It was a matter of great pleasure for me to receive your letter of 3rd August to attend your inaugural Function of Golden Jubilee year on 19th August, 1995.

I would have been the happiest man to join your celebration but your letter reached a day earlier. I would have been too glad to greet your members and happy to see my old comrades of 1945-46.

You are the first to invite me to attend such a function of Bank Employees in Calcutta, to see how my family has grown up. Though I failed to join due to postal lapses, I thank you all from the core of my heart for your warm invitation. I assure you, I shall meet your comrades first; if you call a meeting during my next visit in Calcutta, sometime in January, 1996,

Our bank employees movement was a part of our great national movement and its birth was pure in 1946. So it survived all obstacles and has served the bank employees so well all these years and established its name all over the country and outside world.

I wish this Golden Jubilee Year of Bank Employees, be the unity year for Bank Employees and this should be started .by Bank of India leaders. Though all bank employees movements such as AIBEA, AIBOA, AICOBOO etc. were originated with me and I happened to be the AIBEA Founder General Secretary, I shall fail in my duty, if I do not let you know the great spirit behind it.

It is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who introduced me to Sir Chunilal V. Mehta, Chairman, Bank of India, for training, as I promised him to stop exploitation by the foreign banks. His birth centenary is going to be celebrated soon. May I urge you all to take a vow for real socialism and complete unity to remove poverty and unemployment from the country on that occasion.

It is his blessing and inspiration, that makes me to work even at this 84 years of my age. As the President of AIBRF with Sri B.P.Bajpai as General Secretary All India Bank Retirees Federation, I have undertaken the struggle for old-age benefits such as Medical Aid, Pension etc. for all Retirees irrespective of ranks without any cut off date. I believe, your organization will support our stand and co-operate us in all respects.

Though blessed by Netaji, I send his letter of introduction to the bank dated May 23, 1938, with all humility for your information and record. Only with the assistance of a few and brains like Late P.K.M., SRDG helped me for the foundation of such a mighty movement. Of course, I had to sacrifice and suffer a lot. I have no regret; I want no name, fame or honour. I have the greatest satisfaction of having done my duty sincerely and selflessly as a result my Almighty blessed me enough. Present day leaders know little of the origin of the movement. You will know the brilliant chapter of the Movement, if I can complete the same, urged by many. Com. Naresh was associated with me. I asked him to write a chapter of his part but he is silent. Please do ask him on my behalf to write something.

Though late to acknowledge your invitation, I feel, I have written enough in reply to bore you.

Convey my message to all your comrades.

Unite, Unite, Unity and Unity that was shown by Netaji in his I.N.A.

And

Work, Work and Work, a great ‘mantra’ given by Swamiji for us to survive and prosper.

Thanks again for your kind letter.

Yours as ever, affectionately, Ramesh Chandra Chakraborty”

Unquote.

(Text of the letter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose reproduced below)

Quote : “Phone 30580

S.C. Bose,

Bombay.

May 23, 1938

26, Marine Drive, Bombay.

Dear Sir Chunilal,

I have much pleasure in introducing to you Mr. Ramesh Chandra Chakraborty, B.A., who is desirous of going in for a training in banking. He wants to qualify as an Associate of Institute of Bankers, London. I understand that it is open to him to undertake the necessary course of studies either in London or in this country provided he can get himself attached as a probationer to some bank. I shall be thankful if you could help him in getting himself attached as an unpaid probationer to a bank in London or to the Bank of India in Bombay. Perhaps it may be possible for you to help him in joining a London bank with which either you or the Bank of India may have connections.

I earnestly hope that it will be possible for you to help him in either way.

Thanking you,

I am, Yours sincerely,

S/d

Sir Chunilal V. Mehta, K.C.S.I. Chairman, Bank of India Ltd., Bombay.” Unquote.

Now, coming back to the letter by R.C. Chakraborty. In his letter he has mentioned two names P.K.M. and S.R.D.G. Both of them were Calcutta based officers, loved and respected by employees at large. When this editor joined the Bank in 1965 ‘PKM’ was the Sub Manager and ‘SRDG’ was the Accountant of Calcutta Main Branch of the Bank. PKM was the abbreviated

form of Prafulla Kumar Mitter (Mitra) and SRDG stood for Satya Ranjan Dutta Gupta. These two officers along with another highly qualified man, the then Agent of Burra Bazar Branch of the Bank – S.N. Sen gave their advice and active support from behind in the formation of AIBEA and of the Union in the bank – ‘Bank of India Employees Union (Calcutta Branches)’ in Calcutta. This editor knew all these persons personally, came in contact with them because of his employment in the Bank. All of them were perfect gentlemen also and always sympathetic to the cause of the workmen. P.K.M. and S.R.D.G. became General Managers and S.N. Sen, Area Manager in the Eastern Zone of the Bank.

However, during his subsequent visit to Calcutta Com. R C Chakraborty came to Bank of India Employees’ Union Office, had talks with Bank of India Employees’ comrades, and on his advice this editor took him to Nareshda (Com. Naresh Paul). They had some friendly exchange also but this editor is not aware if Nareshda contributed any article to him, or if Com Chakraborty had made any progress at all towards compiling the history of AIBEA’s movement.

During the last part of his days he remained quite active, moved different corners of the country to bring retired employees of the banks under one umbrella and advance their cause. He took the leading role in founding ‘All India Bank Retirees Federation’ in ‘90’s of the last century, and the organization to day holds the largest number of retirees of commercial banks in the industry.

Another important thing may be noticed from the list of the first committee that all the names included were from Bengal (undivided). So it was basically a provincial body although the name of the organization carried all India flavour. Even after one year of foundation it will be seen from the list of the unions affiliated, a few unions were from outside Bengal. The organization gradually grew and embraced workmen of states beyond Bengal and finally it assumed its true all India stature with the passage of time.

Names of the Units affiliated with AIBEA till Mid Year of 1947:

- Tripura Modern Bank Employees Union
- Calcutta National Bank Employees Association
- Employees Union Eastern Trades Bank Ltd.
- Bank of India Ltd Employees Union (Calcutta branches)
- Calcutta Industrial Bank Employees Association.
- Dinajpur Bank Employees Union
- Allahabad Bank Indian Staff Association.
- Aryan Bank Employees' Association.
- The Bank of Baroda Ltd Calcutta Staff Association.
- East Bengal Commercial Bank Employees' Association.
- United Industrial Bank Employees' Association.
- Hindusthan Commercial Bank Employees' Association.
- The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China Local Staff Union.
- National Bank of India Ltd. (Calcutta branch) Union.
- Bank Employees' Association, Chittagong.
- Pioneer Bank Employees' Union.
- Central Bank of India Employees' Association.
- Satkhira Bank Employees' Association.
- Hind Bank Ltd Employees' Union.
- The Hooghly Bank Employees' Unfon.
- Prabartak Bank Ltd. Employees' Association.
- The Bank of Behar Ltd. Employee's Union.
- Comilla Union Bank Employees' Association.
- Mahaluxmi Bank Employees Union.
- Comilla Banking Corporation Employees' Association.
- Das Bank Employees' Union.
- Murshidabad District Bank Employees' Association.
- The Bank of Jaipur Employees' Association.
- The Chandpur Bank Employees' Association.
- Calcutta Commercial Bank Employees' Union

- National Security Bank Employees Association.
- Noakhali Union Bank Employees Association.
- Associated Bank of India Ltd Employees' Association.
- Bank Employees' Association of Tripura State.
- Pioneer Commercial Bank Employees Association.
- Ballygunge Bank Employees Association.
- Nath Bank Employees' Association.
- The Siliguri Bank Employee's Association
- Bank Employees' Association (P.O. Brahmanbaria, Tripura District)
- The Bank Employees' Union, Warrangal, N.S. Railway.
- Bank Employees' Association, Dinajpur
- Employees Welfare Association (The Sylhet Industrial Bank Ltd.)
- Indian Bank Workers' Union, Khulna
- Silchar Bank Employees Association.
- Rajshahi District Bank Employees' Association.
- Rajbari Bank Employees' Association.
- Giridih Bank Employees' Association.
- Comilla Bank Employees' Association.
- Bank of Assam Employees' Association.
- Bengal Provincial Co-operative Bank Employees' Association.
- Girish Bank Employees Union.
- Bengal Central Bank Employees' Association.
- Bhagalpur Bank Employees' Association.
- Narayanganj Bank Employees Association.
- Habiganj Bank Employees Association
- Hindusthan Mercantile Bank Employees Union.
- United Commercial Bank Employees' Association.
- Bharat Bank Employees' Association.
- The Bank Employees' Association of Gaya.
- UP Provincial Bank Employees Union
- Imperial Bank of India Staff Association (Bengal Circle).