



CHAPTER VII

Struggles Brewing in Different Banks and States

Around the same time when bank employees in Bengal were busy in the foundation of AIBEA and various struggles that came in the wake of that, Unions were also coming up with struggles brewing in other parts of the country, independently of the developments in Bengal. This is possibly due to the fact that bank employees were subject to similar exploitation throughout the country and were also imbued with the new outlook of resistance that pervaded every nook and corner of the motherland in the explosive situation after the Second World War which had weakened the British imperialism considerably. Let us have a look at the developments in other parts of the country before we revert to the situation in Bengal and subsequent developments on AIBEA front.

Developments in Bombay : In Bombay, the financial capital of India, the situation in banks was not in any way different from Calcutta. Acute exploitation was the fate of the employees in all banks. Many Branch Managers used to ask the employees to work till 11-30 p.m. They said that this would allow them sufficient time to reach Victoria Terminus (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus) of Central Rly., as the last suburban train leaves V.T. at 12 o'clock night. Such was the crudity of the treatment meted to employees in every bank. As an example of how cruel and inhuman can be the Managerial behaviour, we quote from 'A Trade Union Odyssey' published by AIBEA: "In Bank of India, a sub-staff member had severe asthmatic complications, but no leave was allowed. When he took leave for 3 days out of compulsion and returned for duty, he was summarily dismissed. He actually died in the platform in front

of the bank." The employees who had silently tolerated such inhuman treatment all these years now reacted in the vortex of turbulent situation prevailing in the country.

Bank of India employees of Bombay took the lead. They formed a Union on Mar 16, 1946 with Abid Ali Jaffar Bhoj as President and M. G. Shirali, a member of the Communist Party, as the General Secretary and went on a 13-day-strike from 23rd July to 4th August. 1946 at the call of their union. On the question of pay revision the management made a paltry offer which was rejected by the employees. The Labour Commissioner of Bombay intervened in vain. In a General Body meeting on 25.06.1946, the employees unanimously decided to go on strike from 23rd July till their demand was satisfactorily resolved. All coercive measures at the arsenal of the Government and the management, including declaring the strike illegal under the Defense of India Rules, threats of summary dismissals etc. were applied but nothing could break the morale of the employees. Management read the hard reality and expressed their desire for a negotiated settlement of the issues. In the negotiation the management and the Union reached an understanding on pay revision. This is the first ever a negotiated bipartite settlement between the management and the local union in a commercial bank, apart from the first all-India-level bipartite settlement between the Reserve Bank and AIRBEA in the banking sector around the same time. The settlement was also gazetted by the Bombay Government as a consent award given by Divatia Tribunal on 15.9.1946.

The employees of other banks were much enthused by this development and went ahead to form unions in their respective banks. These unions joined together and formed Bombay Bank Employees Federation with Sri Abid Ali Jaffar Bhoj as President and Com. G.N.Trikanand as General Secretary.

Charters of Demands were submitted in 30 banks, according to reminiscences of Com. K.K. Mundul, veteran AIBEA leader and one of its former Vice-Presidents. In the absence of any response, the employees, led by the Federation, went on strike which went on for 11 days defying all attempts to break it by threats and intimidation including threat of arrests under D.I. Rules. After the Central Labour Minister Shri Guljarilal Nanda had intervened, Bombay Government referred all the disputes in different banks to an Industrial Tribunal under the Chairmanship of Justice Divatia. In its Award. Divatia Tribunal made a distinction between big banks and small banks but provided for wage increase and defined service rules for the employees of both big and small banks. Altogether over 3300 clerical staff and 1200 low-paid staff of 12 big banks were benefited by the Award. The employees were, of course, resentful of the classification of banks between big and small banks so as to deny the employees of small banks 'equal pay for equal work.'

Details of these Awards as also other State-level Awards which came as a result of struggles in different places and banks during the formative years of AIBEA are given separately in Chapter VIIA (Era of State-level Tribunals and Awards 1946-49).

Inspired by the success of the employees in Bombay several thousand bank employees in Ahmedabad (at that time part of Bombay Presidency, now in Gujarat) staged mass demonstration demanding implementation of Divatia Award in their case also. The Government conceded the demand and Justice Divatia passed necessary orders to give effect to the same Award in Ahmedabad too.

National Bank of India (later known as Grindlays Bank): Employees in Bombay under valiant leadership of Com. J.N.N.

Cursetji went on an all India Strike on demand of improvement of service conditions, reduced working hours, leave facilities etc. for 6 days. However, management crushed the strike and dismissed Cursetji from service. Similar was the fate of Com. R.C. Cooper who formed a union in Central Bank of India. His services were also terminated. But such vindictive action could not daunt the employees. On the contrary it made them more determined to carry on the struggle.

Developments in Uttar Pradesh: Exploitation of all sorts was the order of the days for the bank employees in U.P. Raising of voice or making a request for consideration met with transfers to distant branches or even dismissals from service. Normal working hours started at 9 in the morning and continued till 10 at night on all the week days and also Saturdays. Subordinate staff were treated like domestic servants of the Agents and officers. In several banks such as Bharat Bank Ltd., Bank of Bikaner Ltd., Central Bank of India Ltd., Hindusthan Commercial Bank Ltd and Punjab National Bank Ltd., rampant victimization was the order of the day. Employees were virtually treated as slaves of the authorities. Even the Government blatantly sided with the bank managements by passing a unique, unheard of order directing Employment Exchange to send candidates for jobs to banks to be used as black legs to break strikes. A highly repressive Government policy in all conceivable forms was the order of the day to arrest growth of trade union movement. This resulted in simmering resentment among workers and also people in general which found expression in a Hartal on 23rd February 1946 at Kanpur, Allahabad and Lucknow in support of the naval mutiny in Bombay and civilian employees of Air Force in a few centres. In such a situation Allahabad Bank Employees Union was formed with Dr. Bishambar Nath Pandey as President. Dr.Pandey was a respected Congress leader (who

later became Governor of Orissa) was also founder President of U.P. Bank Employees' Union. He advocated that unitary type of organization with districtwise units comprising employees of all banks in the district should be suitable for U.P. as the number of branches were small and scattered with small number of employees in a branch. In the given situation the argument carried sense and through the efforts of Com. Balram Singh, Com. K.M. Agarwal and Com. Radhamohon Tandon district unions of unitary type came into existence in Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra, Benares, Bareilly, Mirzapur, etc. This created ground for formation of U.P. Bank Employees Union which emerged as the provincial body in its first conference held in Allahabad. They sent five delegates to AIBEA Foundation Conference in April 1946.

The formation of UPBEU immediately electrified the employees. A pen-down strike was observed at Allahabad on 15.7.1946 against indiscriminate transfers of local leaders in 2/3 banks, forcing the management to relent and cancel the transfer orders.

A charter of demands was adopted in the conference of U.P. Bank Employees Union on 11.8.1946 and was served upon all banks. In the absence of any response the Union leaders approached Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the then Home Minister of U.P., for his intervention. He arranged a tripartite meeting on 16.8.1946 with no results. Dr. Pandey wrote to Pandit Jawharlal Nehru for his personal intervention, yet no results. On the contrary, an Ordinance was issued banning the strike. However, in the face of indomitable determination and spirit of the employees, the Government referred the disputes to B.B. Singh, I.C.S. Forty banks were made party. The Award came into force from 15.3.1947. But the bankers adopted a policy of creating all sorts of disputes in interpreting the Award

so as to avoid or delay its implementation. The Government appointed a Conciliation Board with Shri Bindya Bashini Prasad, Judge of Allahabad High Court, as Chairman with 2 representatives from the Banks and 2 from the Union. But before the Conciliation Board came out with its interpretations, an important development of great national significance took place which changed the course of the situation altogether in the banking industry.

In view of the difficulties faced to implement State-level Awards in banks having more than one Branch because of the anomalous position created by varying provisions of Tribunal Awards applicable to the same bank in different States, the Central Government, at the Bankers' request, assumed powers of jurisdiction for settlement of industrial disputes in the banking industry for all banks operating in more than one State and appointed a 3-member National Tribunal with Justice K.C. Sen as Chairman to adjudicate the bankmen's disputes at the national level. Consequently B.B. Singh Award and the proceedings of the Conciliation Board became infructuous and all disputes in U.P. were automatically transferred to the National Tribunal which is known as Sen Tribunal.

Bengal & Bihar after formation of AIBEA : Immediately after foundation of the AIBEA employees' unions in different banks started opening up in large numbers. Voices were raised centering round improvement in service conditions and against gross injustice and deprivations by the bank managements. Political struggles coupled with militant trade union movements lashed the country. An atmosphere was created for the British to leave the land. Bank employees also woke up from long slumber to stand face to face with the managements and clinch their issues. Freedom of the country became a matter of months, not years. Post & Telegraph employees stirred the entire nation

by their 46-day All-India strike. On the other side Calcutta Tram Company employees also organized valiant strikes. Obviously the demands of all the strike programmes centred round improvement in wages, service conditions and end of exploitation and discrimination.

Bank employees in Calcutta joined All-Bengal hartal and a day's solidarity strike on 29th July 1946 along with all other sections of working people in support of the struggling P&T workers. The success of the programme was so massive and reflected total unity of the people that it made the British Government worried. It also made Muslim League leader Jinnah apprehensive and he announced Direct Action Day on 16th August, 1946, for realization of separate homeland for the Muslims. The consequence was disastrous, as Hindu-Muslim unity was severely affected by unprecedented riots and bloodbath between the two communities of such a magnitude as had never been witnessed before in British India.

Strike in Imperial Bank of India : A glorious strike for 46 days from 1st August to 15th September, 1946 was launched by the Imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association, Bengal Circle. The seed of the strike was sown just 3 months back on 1st May when employees of the bank assembled to observe May Day programme at 3, Hastings Street (presently Kiron Shankar Roy Road), Calcutta where among other things crude exploitation of Indian employees were highlighted by all the speakers and the employees present reacted sharply. They were very much vociferous against the foreign management at their policies of gross abuse of power and deprivation and discrimination. This led them to plunge into action within 3 months. From August 1 till midnight of September 15, the strike in Bengal circle from Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) in North and North East India to Peshawar

(now in Pakistan) in North West in the subcontinent covering 300 branches and pay offices involving 6100 employees under the banner of the Imperial Bank of India Staff Association (Bengal Circle) led by Dr. Nalinaksha Sanyal, President and Debabrata Ghosh, General Secretary. Debabrata Ghosh along with Bibhuti Bhusan Basu were also elected in the first Committee of AIBEA. There was no All India Federation of employees of the Imperial Bank at that time. However, before going into direct action programme Dr. Sanyal drew management's attention in writing to the effect that if the employees' demands were not conceded to by June end, the employees would have no option but to plunge into strike programme for an indefinite period. The management in reply said that they would indicate their reaction by 15th July. The Union waited till end of July but no response came from them. The European management did not relent nor did they show any indication of considering their demand. A strike ballot was held. The employees expressed their whole hearted readiness to go into the strike. The demands raised by the employees were —

- 40% rise in Pay. [In 1931 the management unilaterally effected a cut of 10% on Pay on the plea of recession and a further cut of 5% towards Pension Fund). Prior to launching of the strike action the employees also made repeated appeals to the bank management to stop deduction of 15% (10+5) effected as far back as 15 years.].
- Rescinding of 5% cut towards Pension Fund.
- Leave Rule as available to Government Employees.
- Medical treatment at Bank's cost.
- Promotion Policy.
- Gratuity to those deprived of Pension.

- Specific Working Hours.
- Dearness Allowance commensurate to Cost of Living.
- Proper enquiry before entering adverse comments in the service record etc.

The strike was total in places like Cuttack, Patna, Bhagalpur, Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi, Shillong, Narayanganj (now in Bangladesh) etc. apart from Calcutta where the Head quarter of the Bank was located. In Patna, solidarity action by observing 10 minutes strike on the very next day i.e. 2nd August, 1946 was demonstrated by employees of small banks.

Administration and the management joined hands to break the strike from the very first day. Police were set against the striking employees. Union leadership also apprehended beforehand that a combined force would be active to deny employees' demands and keep the bank open. So they contacted the Students Federation and requested for their help and co-operation. Students' community came in support of the striking employees braving all odds under leadership of Gita Mukherjee and others. The students lined up in the forefront of the picketers and guarded them at the Bank's gates facing police atrocities. They stood steadfast in commitment by the side of the strikers. There were four branches of the bank in Calcutta at that time. Foreign officers tried to break the strike and enter the branches with the help of the police, but they failed repeatedly as the Students resisted them with all their might and determination. Students' community in Lucknow and Bhagalpur also fell in line with their counterparts in Calcutta. AITUC gave all out support to the strike.

In Calcutta the pitch of heinous and brutal attempts was heightened to terrorize the employees and break the movement. On three consecutive days — 14th, 15th & 16th August, 1946

employees who assembled before the main gate of the bank were baton charged by the police at the instigation of the management. Jyoti Basu, by then Legislative Assembly Member and a popular mass leader, condemned police atrocities on the striking employees and supported the strike in his speech on 14th August in front of the Bengal Assembly Gate in a gathering of the students' community, striking employees and public.

On 15th August, 1946 the European management escorted by the police pushed aside the picketing employees, even trampled over their bodies and entered the bank premises leaving thereby many employees severely injured. This barbaric incident was reported in the Amrita Bazar Patrika on 16th August, 1946 —

“Picketers Injured: Baton Charge Action by the Police before Imperial Bank —

There was baton charge on the picketers at the gate of the Imperial Bank of India on Strand Road on Thursday during the strike by the Indian staff of the bank. A number of persons including 11 ladies were seriously injured. The baton charge followed resistance given by picketers to several European officers, who attempted to get inside. The Labour Minister of Bengal, Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed, visited the scene of the incident and assured that the Government will take up the matter.”

Mr. H.S. Suhrawardy, the then Bengal Premier, in spite of his assurance before a 2000 strong gathering of bank employees including striking Imperial Bank employees that necessary enquiries into the matter would be made and that conciliation also would be proceeded, nothing materialised and the strike continued. Even Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Indian National Congress President, intervened and advised the

striking employees to withdraw their programme and resume work. The employees did not relent to any pressure without any positive assurance and action on their demands. Meanwhile employees in Bombay Circle of the bank also made preparations for joining the strike and 73% of them voted in favour of the strike. Their counterparts in Madras were in a fix.

However, the management could no more withstand the escalating pressure of the striking employees and the public. The customers also became restless and agitated against the management since they were being deprived of any service from the bank for over a month-and-a-half and their economic activities almost came to a standstill and were grossly jeopardized. Naturally, the management finally relented. They assured the Staff Association that they would react in a positive manner on their demands for interim relief and also assured them in favour of constitution of conciliation machineries.

R. Gupta, I.C.S. was appointed as adjudicator by Bengal Government in the disputes raised by the employees of Imperial Bank of India in their 46-day strike in 1946. Incidentally it may be taken as a piece of interesting information that R. Gupta happened to be the elder brother of Indrajit Gupta, a leader of the Communist movement and also former Home Minister of the country in the United Front Government.

A glaring example of crude exploitation and discrimination which had forced the employees to resort to indefinite strike action is given below which conclusively proves the justifiedness of the employees' demand and strike action to realize it.

Monthly pay bill of 6100 employees — Rs. 2,70,000/- i.e. average Rs. 44/- per head (excluding D.A.). But that of only 42 white officers (they were called 'Lords' sarcastically) — Rs. 85,000 i.e. average Rs. 2260/- per head (excluding D.A.). So the ratio was 1 : 51 (plus).

Struggle of Central Bank Employees -1947 – 48 : Under charismatic leadership of Com. Naresh Paul Central Bank employees in Calcutta formed their trade union to meet challenges of the management. The employees served a charter of demands and made repeated efforts for reasonable settlement of the same. With no results forthcoming, the dispute was referred for adjudication by the Government to S.K. Sen Tribunal on 4th November 1947. There were two references, one relating to Calcutta branches and the other covering rest of the bank's branches in West Bengal.

The general manager of the Bank H.C. Captain was ill-famed for his motoreity. He created a reign of terror in the Bank. He personally appeared before S. Sen Tribunal on behalf of his bank and opposed dogmatically employees' demands and arguments. A very interesting narrative has been given in AIBEA's publication '**Odyssey of Bank Employees Movement**' in connection with the proceedings of Tribunals and in exposition of the character of Mr. Captain by A.S.R. Chari, advocate for AIBEA in the Tribunals:

"Mr. H.C. Captain argued that the interest of the shareholders who supplied the capital for Central Bank of India is more important than giving some wage increase for the employees. Shri A.S.R. Chari in the open court suggested to the judge that Mr. Captain will be given a gunny bag and he can put the capital supplied by his share-holders, namely, Rs. 100 crores or Rs. 10 crores in the bag, tie it and keep it unopened for 6 months. When he opens it after this period, he will find that the amount is the same and that the capital within the gunny bag has not produced any profit or dividends. Shri Chari said that only if labour is also involved and mixed up with the capital, the capital will swell. Mr. Captain is, therefore, at liberty to keep the paid up capital of the Central

Bank of India in a gunny bag or to put into proper use with the contribution of labour so that the share-holders will get good dividends. By this simple analogy, he exposed the hollowness of the arguments of Mr. H.C. Captain that the interest of the share-holders should be supreme and paramount.”

The Tribunal gave its Award on 15.12.1947 and it became operative from 01.01.1948. However, the notorious management of the Bank did not implement 9 of the 14 recommendations of Sri. Sen and this led to severe unrest amongst over 1000 employees of all the 14 branches of the Bank in West Bengal including Calcutta. In view of the adamant attitude of the management the Union served a 14 days' strike notice on the 21st July. The Management still unrelenting, the employees started strike action on and from 5th August. Bank employees in the state of West Bengal participated in sympathetic strike action on 17th August in support of the struggling Central Bank employees. The strike action on and from 5th August 1948 highlighted their two most important demands — (1) correct implementation in full of the award of the Tribunal. (2) Increase in Dearness Allowance. The incident was reported in the Hindustan Standard as under :

“BANK EMPLOYEES STAGE ONE-DAY STRIKE By
a Staff Reporter

In sympathy with the Central Bank of India employees on strikes, employees of other banks in Calcutta and Howrah went on a one-day strike on Tuesday. All the Indian and foreign banks with their branches, numbering 350 and employees nearly 20,000 men, were affected.

In the afternoon a meeting of bank employees was held at the foot of Ochterlony monument (renamed as Shahid Minar after Independence) in the Maidan urging fulfillment of Central Bank Employees demands. Ten arrests were made on a charge of making obstruction in public thoroughfares.

The strike was called off on 24th August when the management offered to settle all their disputes amicably. The Reserve Bank Employees Association also participated in the sympathetic strike although it was not a constituent unit of BPBEA.

Naresh Paul reminisced — “Let me now come to my own organization in Central Bank of India. In Bombay, Abid Ali Jaffer Bhoy became our leader. He advocated that as banking is an all India industry, unions also should have an all India body. In those days, the most cruel treatment and imperial Durbar was witnessed in Central Bank only. One day, one employee was in charge of distribution of clearing cheques committed a small mistake. He was immediately suspended, physically beaten and was prevented from entering the bank. I saw no one coming to his rescue. Everyone was afraid of the management. On another occasion, in Shyambazar branch, the head Jamadar asked the sub-staff working under him to escort his family members for a sight-seeing tour of Calcutta. The sub-staff member could not do so. He was summarily dismissed. The entire staff rebelled. We disconnected the telephone. Come what may, this time we wanted to hit back. The Labour Commissioner visited the bank. He asked me as to what happened. I told him, “I have not called you. You may go and ask those who called you.” An officer who was the nephew of the Chairman of the bank, Shri H.P. Modi, visited the branch. He asked the Telephone Clerk to inform the Police. I directed the clerk not to inform the police. Heat was generated. That Officer pushed me down. I pushed him back. He slapped me, I returned in the same coin. Eventually, police came in. Myself along with Comrade Pashupati Banerjee were taken into custody. I was convicted with one month imprisonment or Rs. 100/- fine. There was no jail term. I returned from Police custody and entered the branch. The entire sub-staff in

full uniform saluted me, standing erect. That was the way they showed their respect and love towards me. Even today, at this age, that incident and the demonstration of their love haunts my memory. Of course I lost my job.”

He did not seek any other job and became a full time dedicated leader entirely in the service of the bank employees’ and the country’s democratic movement. With working class ideology as the guiding principles he left no stones unturned to build up AIBEA and take part in its activities till he was forced out of the organization in the most arbitrary and undemocratic way, keeping no alternative for him but take lead to form a new organization BEFI. He was undoubtedly one of the tallest leaders of bank employees movement.

He also recalled the days of foundation of the AIBEA with his extreme modesty — “We all felt that the General Secretary should be elected from the biggest bank namely, Imperial Bank of India.....but unfortunately employees in Imperial Bank of India were not prepared to take up the post of the General Secretary.....When I was asked to take up that responsibility, I replied that my own union is weak and how one from such a union can be a leader of another organization.” And Ramesh Chakraborty was the choice.

Naresh Paul recalled the proceedings of the Tribunal in his own simple words—

“...we were before the Tribunal asking for our demand for House Rent Allowance. The Managing Director of Central Bank of India, Mr. H.C. Captain, drawing at that time a salary of Rs. 20,000/- and above, asked as to why salary should be given and what is the purpose of that if HRA is included in the same. I asked whether Mr. Captain or the Tribunal is aware that due to partition of the country, millions had come from

Dacca to India. In Calcutta in a room of the size 10’x10’ around 5 families are living and how in such an atmosphere, a young girl of around 16 years can have even a little privacy or decency. I asked Justice K.C. Sen (?) during his visit to Calcutta whether he can visualize a situation like the above and at the same time reminded him of our arguments for a few Rupees of HRA.”

Naresh Paul episode : Tarakeshwar Chakraborty in his memoir on Naresh Paul wrote: “After a few months in Jail Com. Naresh Paul was released. His first concern was to reconstruct the union. But it was not that easy and simple. In those days in 1950 and early 1951, Comrade Naresh used to, almost every alternate day, come to my maternal uncle’s house at Hazra Road, where I used to stay. Quite often we used to sit in Hazra Park or at Hazra Crossing, in Sanguvalley Restaurant where we would have two cups of tea. He would go on persuading me to become full-fledged General Secretary taking full responsibilities of building up the union. I was reluctant but he was a person not to give up his line. Once I asked him as to why he was after me to become the General Secretary when there are many others, his party members, available for the job. His reply in simple Dacca accent was “Everybody is not suitable for every job.” He told me that “Even though you are not a Communist and you had opposed me on occasions, I want you to become the General Secretary because you are the most competent man for the purpose,” This was the wonderful truth in his life. He never suffered from bigotry or dogmatism. In plain and simple words, he told me that “If I believe in a union, then I have to take up the responsibility.” Ultimately, he won and I got the defeat. I agreed to become the General Secretary. It was he who brought me to the trade union field and I have considered myself always as one of his disciples. He was my Guru in the true sense of the term.”

Developments in Lloyds Bank : Lloyds Bank Employees also, at the call of BPBEA, took part in the strike on 17 August 1948 in support of Central Bank strike. The management of the bank became furious at the participation by their employees in the strike which the bank termed as 'illegal', and in order to teach them a fitting lesson declared lockout of the bank. "The strike and the lock out for 26 days in the Lloyds Bank resulted in the dismissals of 51 employees of whom 11 including Prabhat Kar, present General Secretary of AIBEA, were convicted" - K.K. Mundul (Reminiscences of)..

"Prior to 1947-48 Prabhat Kar believed that the English management of the bank will not be brutal and barbaric in its treatment of the employees. But soon he realized that this was not so....The bank planned a calculated attack on its employees..."[A Trade Union Odyssey—AIBEA Publication]. As a sequence to this dastardly attack employees of the bank jumped onto strike action for 19 days. Management of the bank replied in dismissals of 558 employees through a Press notification. Most of the dismissed employees got panicky. The government intervention became instrumental in signing of a 'surrender bond' and swearing that they will not participate in any strike in future. But 40 employees including Prabhat Kar were not taken in. After long ten years' legal battle at various levels the Supreme Court on May 12, 1958 ordered for reinstatement of all the dismissed employees. However, Prabhat Kar found no reason to join the Bank any more as by that time he was well established as a very successful leader of AIBEA (became its General Secretary 'in 1953 at Lucknow Conference through contest, by a margin of 8 votes'—Sushil Ghose) and also a Member of Parliament. Another dismissed member of the bank C.R.Sengupta also did not join as because

by then he became an employee of the Reserve Bank of India and finally he retired from the United Bank of India as its Chairman.

Bank employees in Bihar : Conditions of the bank employees in the state was a replica of what their counterparts were facing during the formative days of the unions in U.P, Bengal, Delhi, Bombay etc. A major difference here, perhaps, was that the employees had to report for their duties at 9.30 in the morning but were not allowed to leave the banks before 12 midnight. Employees here also were subjected to pay-cuts, denial of leave even on own marriage grounds and on important festival days, thrown out of employment on flimsy pretexts etc. Virtually a barbaric reign was thrust upon the employees. Discontent amongst the employees was naturally simmering. A good number of employees wanted to attend the foundation conference of AIBEA, but majority of them could not do so, as their leave was denied. Only two employees - R. Sharma of Central Bank of India and Sukumar Kanshani of Bengal Central Bank — could make it. Their report on the conference encouraged everyone. As a result leaders like B.P. Bajpai (Bank of Behar), R. Sharma (Central Bank), T.N. Mehrotra (Hindusthan Commercial Bank) etc. toured branches and gave leadership in organizing the employees. They were successful in giving a shape to Bihar Provincial Bank Employees Association in 1946, and lead the employees to join sympathetic strike action for the struggling Imperial Bank employees.

In 1947 : Bharat Bank Employees' struggles remain inseparable with the name of H.L.Parvana, one of the tallest leaders of AIBEA. Parvana, a matriculate, joined the Punjab National Bank at Lahore as a Daftry in 1939. He was sacked from the service for organizing the employees of the bank. Thereafter he joined the Bharat Bank in Delhi and became

successful in forming a union of sub-staff employees of the bank in 1945, presumably the first union of bank employees in Delhi. He became its President. In a two-hour negotiation with the Chairman of the bank, he was successful in clinching wage increase for the employees. Such a feat was unheard of and unthinkable of in those agonizing days. The news spread and Parvana also started to come in the limelight and undertake greater responsibilities. He was promoted subsequently as a clerk. Again in 1948 when Bharat Bank employees went on a 9-day strike demanding improvement in service conditions and also recognition of the union the disputes were referred for adjudication. Inspired by his role unions came up in Punjab National Bank, Comilla Banking Corporation, Allahabad Bank in Delhi and as the prime leader of Bharat Bank Employees union he co-ordinated these unions in Delhi and also in Punjab. On March 8, 1949 the employees of the bank again went on strike for 16 days. Now the government and the bankers unleashed a combined attack to break the strike. 450 of the total staff strength of 527 of the bank were arrested. The strike had to be called off. 35 of the union leaders including Parvana were dismissed from the bank. But Parvana continued to lead bank employees movement till his last.

Exchange Banks employees also raised their united voice on their demands resulting in constitution of Mercantile Tribunal, Calcutta.

It may however be noted that reading the writing on the wall the British government came out with certain legislations during last decade of their rule -

‘Indian Plantation Labour Act’, ‘Miners Act’, ‘Payment of Wages Act’ - all these came in 1939.

During the Second World War draconian ‘Defense of India Rules’ were enacted whereby all rights and privileges of the workers were denied.

In 1947 came The Industrial Disputes Act’ which was, however, different from other Acts as it empowers workers with certain provisions whereby they may avail the opportunity to refer their grievances to a machinery set up for the purpose.

However, well before all these ‘Indian Trade Union Act’ in 1926 was enacted that gives workers right to form unions and resort to collective actions.