



ALL INDIA BANK EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

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LET US REMEMBER ONE OF OUR STALWARTS Com. G.N. TRIKANNAD ON HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY TODAY

He was Former Vice President/Asst. Secretary of AIBEA from 1950 to 1960.

He was General Secretary of Bombay Bnk Employees Federation (now MSBEF)

He was leader of Bank of India Union/Federation

Com. G.N. Trikannad was born on 18.2.1922. He was educated in those days upto British India Education Institute Class. In that Institute itself, he joined as a clerk and the salary was Rs. 30/- per month.

His boss by name Mr. London, behaved like a bull dog. One day, when Com. Trikannad took leave on personal sickness, his boss told him that there is no such thing as sick leave for Indians for the simple reason Indians cannot become sick. The boss also reprimanded him for not wearing a Tie.

Com. G.N. Trikannad requested for payment of a Tie allowance so that he can purchase a Tie. His boss, Mr. London, was annoyed with him. He suggested that it would be better if Com. Trikannad leaves the job as otherwise he will be fixed.

Later Com Trikkanad joined Bank of India in 1941 and became one of the great leaders of AIBEA.

We quote herein the personal interview with him recorded in 1996 before the Golden Jubilee of AIBEA:

From this interview, you can get an idea of the situation prevailing in the Banks in those days.

“I had held responsibilities in AIBEA as Vice President as far back as 1950 (Jalandhar Conference) and thereafter I was elected as Assistant Secretary of AIBEA in 1959 Bangalore Conference and again as Vice President at Hyderabad during 1960 at the 11th Conference of AIBEA.

I also held responsibilities as first General Secretary of the Maharashtra State Bank Employees Federation in its formative stages and has also led our movement in Bank of India for a long time under the banner of All India Bank of India Staff Federation.

It was in 1941, I came to Bombay as my father was transferred to that city. Mainly due to economic reasons, I had to seek a job instead of concentrating on college studies.

During student days, I was very much involved in the students movement and freedom struggle. In 1942 in a bomb explosion case, I was involved along with other students. All of them went incognito to avoid arrest and were staying in a room in Bombay with a doctor's name board fixed outside.

In that room, I and my friends used to work till late in the night, drafting pamphlets and posters against the British Imperialism. It was in 1941, I secured a job through application and interview in Bank of India, Bombay.

I joined duty on 1.1.1941 at the bank's Head Office on a salary of Rs.40/- with dearness allowance of Rs.10/-. The very next day, the accountant asked me to write two supplementaries with 6 ledgers each. I was asked to balance the ledgers. When I requested for some training in the work, the same was denied.

Everyday, the work will start at 10 AM punctually. Even for a few minutes late coming, the employees will be

publicly reprimanded, shouted at, fined and humiliated.

One day a nephew of a senior executive could not complete the day's job. The European manager used highly abusive words. The poor fellow was very much terrorized. He wetted his pants and ran to the bath room.

“The year was 1942. Outside, the Quit India movement was gaining momentum. Inside the bank, we suffered, but we could not do anything. All of us were afraid of losing our jobs. The senior employees behaved like cronies. Many felt that they belonged to the upper class and despite suffering they behaved as if nothing has happened.

“I will tell you about a cruel incident. There was a Peon working along with us and suffering from serious Asthma. One day, he had an attack of Asthma. He could not breathe. He went on leave. The same was refused. He was dismissed.

The poor man along with members of his family was lying outside the bank premises. We took him to a doctor who gave a certificate of sickness.

An appeal was prepared seeking reinstatement, enclosing the medical certificate. The letter was typed in the bank by me.

The Chief Cashier examined all the type-writers of the bank and discovered that I have typed this letter on my typewriter. He got angry. He called some employees and obtained a certificate from them that the appeal of the dismissed employee was typed on my typewriter.

I was asked to explain my conduct. I politely denied the same. Though nothing happened immediately, the Chief Cashier swore to finish me off.

In Bombay around that time, there was a general trade union catering to workers from various factories and companies, known as the Bombay Labour Union. The Vice President of this union wrote to our bank asking the management to reinstate the dismissed employee. But nothing happened.

At that time for some sickness an officer went on leave and the bank permitted him. Whereas in the case of sub-staff, as I told you earlier, he was dismissed. Later, we came to know he died due to starvation.

Broadly speaking, many developments like this incident provoked us to plan formation of a trade union. Outside, the Congress was leading the freedom struggle. Political leaders like Sri S.K. Patil, the Congress Party Treasurer were openly encouraging rebellion and revolt by workers in all British managed establishments.

The period was 1944-46. At this time, we heard of a strike in National Bank of India. Three employees, including the Union bank leader, Shri Cursetji, were dismissed. The strike was crushed. This strike action in National Bank prompted employees in Bank of India and other banks to think, argue and debate among ourselves the need for a trade union, preferably a union covering all banks.

A trade union leader by name, Shri Abid Ali Jaffer Bhoy, President of B.E.S.T. contacted us. He chided us for our middle class attitude and urged us to boldly come out, but many of us were afraid.

However, one comrade in our bank by name Com. M.G. Shirali, a communist party member was determined to organize a union and take whatever risk involved therein.

He was ably supported by another Comrade Shri Gonsalves. Both of them began organising the employees one by one but with great conviction and courage. I too joined them and expressed my readiness to work with them.

Surprisingly, the European management never attacked us. They indicated that they will consider our demands.

Meanwhile, Com. Shirali began contacting employees in other banks. Slowly, unions were formed in Bank of Baroda, Central Bank and Bank of Jaipur.

All these unions joined together and we formed the Bombay Bank Employees Federation. Sri Abid Ali Jaffer Bhoy became its President. I became the General Secretary of this Federation.

When demands were served upon various banks, there was no response. Strike became inevitable. Shri G.L. Nanda, the then labour Minister never interfered. The Chief Minister of Bombay, Shri B.G. Kher, refused even to meet our delegation.

The strike continued for 11 days. The Defence of India Rules were in vogue. As Com. M.G. Shirali was a Communist, a political colour was given to our strike,

even though our demands are mainly for improvement in service conditions.

Somehow, the Bank of India management felt that a settlement will be better. They were concerned about the image of the bank. The strike ended on the 11th day. A settlement was concluded. This joint meeting took place in our Head Office which was located near Jeejee Bhoy Tower where today the Bombay Stock Exchange is located. I remember that Shri Jagjivan Ram also to some extent used his good offices.

Around this time, from Bombay Bank Employees Federation, I gave a call for demonstration before Canara Bank which was terrorising the employees. Many were terminated.

The bank boasted that its employees will not go on strike as the union account is in the same bank and funds will be frozen. I may mention here that when Bank of India comrades were on strike for 11 days, employees of the bank in other centres like Calcutta, etc. could not support us in our strike action. There was also a communication gap. But financial help was received from Delhi, Punjab and Madras comrades to the extent of Rs. 670/-.

I now come to the Sen Award period (1951-52). Bengal comrades boycotted the Tribunal. Bombay Bank Employees Federation along with many other unions appeared before the Tribunal through our lawyer. This Tribunal, with a view to decide on our demand for interim relief, visited many centres like Madras, Calcutta, Delhi etc. I attended all these proceedings in various centres.

At Delhi, I came into contact with Com. H.L. Parvana who appeared on behalf of the Bharat Bank Employees Union. I appeared on behalf of our union at Delhi. The Tribunal functioned in the Supreme Court premises Shri N.V. Phadke, Advocate, appeared on our behalf. Our main demand was interim relief. We succeeded in getting this relief in all other centres, but somehow lost the case in Bombay. Even though Bengal comrades boycotted the Tribunal, Justice Sen visited Calcutta. I argued the claim for interim relief. On behalf of some unions in bank which authorised me, including the Lloyds bank Employees Union, on behalf of its victimized employees. The Tribunal allowed the relief.

Later, as you are aware many were re-instated, except our great leader Com. Prabhat Kar. I remember one of the reinstated comrades, Sen Gupta, who later became the Chairman of the United Bank of India.

Those were very harsh days financially. When I reached Calcutta I was having only Rs. 10/- in my pocket. It was Sunday, but many Calcutta comrades received me, lodged me along with them and were very good to me.

I went to Madras along with the Tribunal. Com. T.S. Ramanujam was the President of the State Federation there. I met Com. Nagaiah of Indian Overseas Bank and also Shri R. Venkatraman, at that time appeared before the Tribunal. We were arguing on behalf of the employees for interim relief.

There was an article on Consumer Price Index in the Labour Journal published by the Government of India. This was also our record for reference. Even judges were impressed when our Advocate quoted the working class index figures from this Government journal.

Even privately, the Tribunal members offered to help, as they understood our sufferings. However, at Madras, the Tribunal referred to the index figures and compared them with figures for other big towns and said, "the cost of living is so cheap in Madras and therefore why interim relief should be given."

I observed that the particular issue of the Indian Labour Journal contained a foot note in the bottom which said that this is only a sample survey, not checked and not comprehensive. I pointed out this reference to the Tribunal and told that the judges should not depend on the data because of the foot note which states that it is neither checked nor comprehensive. Advocate Shri R. Venkatraman could not say anything. I further pointed out that it is only a note and not a full survey. The judges were impressed. We got the interim relief.

Also at Calcutta, I came into contact with Com. R.C. Chakraborty, Com. Prabhat Kar, Com. Naresh Paul. I was very much impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment.

Likewise at Madras also, I came into contact with several comrades. The judgement of the Tribunal granting interim relief at Madras boosted our image and this helped several bank-wise unions coming up there.

At Bombay, somehow, we lost our case for interim relief. But all cases of dismissal pending before the Tribunal were won.

As you are aware, after tremendous pressure by the unions, Justice Sen recommended and Government eventually accepted that during the pendency of the Tribunal without its permission, no alternation of service conditions like dismissals, etc. can take place and also for payment of TA and duty relief.

I now come to some interesting story. The AIBEA held its Conference in 1950 at Jalandhar. It was not a conference in the strict sense. It was more a meeting of conciliation, adjustment and actions to resolve our differences. Com. Soumen Tagore clashed with us. Com. Jhoti Ghosh and Com. Mohan Majumdar somehow wanted to take over the control of AIBEA and dominate the same with the help of their union which of course in size was very big (SBI). Com. Prabhatkar made many moves and attempts for reconciliation.

I remember that whenever Shri Soumendranath Tagore came to Bombay, he always used to stay at Taj Hotel. Through marriage, he was well connected with the family of Mrs. Krishna Huthee Singh and Ahmedabad Textile magnate families. Shri Soumendranath Tagore was not a man of the masses.

When we went to Jalandhar Conference, we were actually not an affiliate of AIBEA. Com. G.G. Metha and Com. Soumyendranath Tagore were moving together. Though I was proposed as President of AIBEA, this was not acceptable to them. In the end Com. Soumyendranath Tagore again became President and I was elected as Vice President. Anyhow in the interest of the organisation and to avoid conflicts, I kept quiet.

In 1953 at Lucknow another AIBEA conference took place. The whole proceedings were dominated by the issue about the structure of AIBEA. Delegates from Imperial Bank of India argued for a bank-wise structure with no place for State Federations.

Very rightly, Com. Prabhat Kar with pragmatism and forth rightness opposed the idea and argued in favour of a structure with State Federations playing the main role.

Eventually, delegates from Imperial Bank of India Staff Union walked out. In that Conference, Com. Benoy Roy became the President and for the first time Com. Prabhat Kar was elected as General Secretary.

Later, as you know, Com. Prabhat Kar, like a Titan, led the bank employees movement for several decades.

I already referred to you about the two recommendations of Sen Tribunal, i.e., regarding victimization of comrades who appeared before him and T.A. / Bata for appearances. Let me add something to that. Around that time banks were indulging only in transfers or dismissals of union leaders who were camping in Bombay for the Tribunal work. We represented to Justice Sen that at that rate very shortly, there will be nobody before his Lordship to appear as all of us would have been terminated. There was no law to protect the representatives. We politely told the judge that we shall boycott the Tribunal and in fact we did that.

I remember the judge having requested our lawyer, Shri N.V. Phadke to be an amicus curiae.

We approached the then Labour Minister, Shri Jagjivan Ram through a delegation from Bombay. When we were about to meet him, Shri Jagjivan Ram said that he had to go urgently to meet the Prime Minister.

Our delegates lost their temper. They literally pulled the minister from his car, surrounded him and demanded an audience.

For the next two hours, Shri Jagjivan Ram patiently listened to us. In the end, his anger disappeared. He

appreciated our difficulties. The result was an Ordinance which amended the act giving us relief, as I said earlier.

I remember another development in this connection when we were arguing for interim relief. We placed our arguments on the basis of a report by one Shri Subramaniam on consumer price index published by the Government of India. It was not a Labour Law Journal, as I told you earlier.

At Bombay, before the Tribunal, the now famous lawyer Shri N.K. Phalkiwala was assisting the bankers lawyer, Shri Kanga. Anyhow, after the award, many developments took place. On technical grounds, month later, the Sen Award was nullified.

Immediately, the Bank of India increased the working hours and the service conditions were reversed. Employees became angry. Com. Madhav Menon in Bank of Jaipur began organizing the employees for a resistance campaign. In Bank of Baroda, the employees demonstrated. Shri G.G. Metha, the then President of Bombay Federation called for a meeting.

Unfortunately, the leadership could not understand the feelings of the employees. They were hesitant to give a strike call. But the employees in Bank of India,

Bank of Baroda and Bank of Jaipur decided to go on strike.

Shri G.G. Metha went to extent of publicly saying that the strike was wrong. But we never bothered. Moreover, the All India Bank of India staff Federation also gave the call and strikes took place in Bank of India branches in Calcutta, Madras, Surat and Ahmedabad.

Somehow, a political colour was to given over strike. The Government painted a picture that the strike was a political one inspired by opposition parties. At that time, there was strike in Air India and also in L & T. The totality of these strike actions and association of some prominent political leaders and their support to our cause perhaps made the Government think that the strike was more political than on the demands of the employees.

I also faced a personal problem at that time. Our decision to go on strike against the nullification of the Award was sudden. But my marriage was fixed around that time. I was on two months leave around that time. The period was around December. My absence in connection with my marriage preparations was misunderstood by some of my colleagues as if I was

against the action. I had only one way to prove my bonafides.

I postponed the marriage date. I told my parents-in-law about my problems. I told the girl whom I was destined to marry and who was employed in the office of the Accountant General Office, about my problem. They appreciated my difficulty. They encouraged me to postpone the marriage date and concentrate upon the strike action. I can never forget this positive understanding of my family members. I cancelled my leave and conducted the strike.

In Calcutta around that time, 250 persons were working on a temporary basis. While in Bombay, nobody was touched during the strike period, in Calcutta 13 temporary employees were removed from service. Calcutta became nervous.

At that time, the leaders were Com. Mrigen Guha, Com. Ramadas and Com. Sushil Ghosh. Though by themselves, they were courageous, they could not stop other employees in Calcutta getting demoralized. Somehow, they withdrew the strike call. Unfortunately, while sending a telegram to Bombay intimating us about their decision to withdraw, this telegram fell into the hands of the management and

was widely circulated. This in turn demoralised us. Meanwhile, the two strikes in Air India and L & T were crushed.

At this juncture, somebody planted a new idea in the minds of the management that banks can resort to a procedure called 'lay-off' and thereby remove unwanted elements. The Bank of India came out with a list of 180 employees and under law formal criminal complaints were lodged against union leaders. We were all very much agitated. Huge demonstrations were held. I remember one incident.

One senior sub-staff activist by name lythappa Karte went inside the bank to find out whether any black sheep are there. He was hand-cuffed and assaulted by the management.

Many provocations took place in other banks. Our friends in Bank of Baroda and Jaipur could not withstand. They called off the strike. But we continued.

I rushed to Delhi. I realised that Government has concluded that our strike was political and anti-Government and not against the nullification of the Sen Award. I met the then Labour Minister, Shri V.V.

Giri. He could not do much. But the Central Labour Commissioner visited Bombay.

We planned for a big rally to prove that our agitation was not political nor against the Government, but supported by various political leaders. The bank employees assembled in very large numbers.

Com. S.A. Dange and Dr. Ashok Metha, representing diverse political views, came to a single platform and supported our agitation. Many other well-known leaders expressed their sympathy. The Government realised that the strike was mainly against the nullification of the Award. The Government also noted the united approach by several political parties developing in support of our strike. The Labour Commissioner was asked to mediate.

In Bank of India, which alone was on strike at that time, the 'lay-off' list of 180 comrades was withdrawn. We, on our turn, called off the strike. The Government appointed Justice Divatia once again as Tribunal to adjudicate. But this time, we protested. We proved that Justice Divatia was having shares in Bank of India and hence not qualified. However, Justice Divatia himself resigned. Then came the constitution of the Sastry Tribunal.

Many instances took place in and around this development. Ahmedabad and Surat firmly stood observing the strike till the end. Madras comrades called off the agitation a little earlier.

At Bombay, our General Manager. Mr. A.C. Clerk, everyday used to come out carrying his gun and taunt us with an imperial look, but we kept quiet and never allowed ourselves to be provoked.

Com. G.G. Dholakia and many other comrades were with me moving together and keeping up the morale of the employees.

There was one more incident around that time. After the constitution of the Tribunal, we called off the strike. But the management was provoking us. Mr. A.C. Clerk talked all nonsense to Com. K.J. Joseph who was then one of the emerging leaders of our organisation. But Com. Joe kept cool.

One day, Mr. A.C. Clerk came to me and disturbed my work. I told him openly and in louder voice, "Sir, you are the General Manager. You are disturbing my routine work. You teach me about discipline. Now please let me know who is disciplined". There was a loud applause. He was shocked. He simply turned back and went away.

At AIBEA level, I was again elected as an office bearer in the Conference held in 1959 at Bangalore and 1960 at Hyderabad.

In Bank of India, I developed a new practice. Though I was continuously working in the union, I used to step down for some time as an office bearer which enabled me to get a break, move with ordinary comrades as a free man, understand their ideas and problems and once again I used to get elected as an office bearer and again step down and again get in. Somehow, this experiment helped me very much.

I am sorry to inform you that at the Bombay Federation Level, there was a lot of problems created by political leaders like Dr. Ashok Metha and Shri Abid Ali who all wanted the Federation to be affiliated to their respective central trade unions like H.M.S. or I.N.T.U.C I was totally opposed to it.

I was the General Secretary of the Bombay Federation from 1946 onwards, But somehow around the Sastry Tribunal period, I resigned to avoid being a party in any conflicts. Com. Bhagwadia from Union Bank took over from me.

In Bank of India upto the period 1960-61, I worked as General Secretary of the Federation. Later, I stepped

down. In between, I also had worked as President of the union in SBBJ. Bombay. I remember the development about this bank when Gajendragadkar was hearing our case. The bank was down graded from 'B' class to 'D' class. I took up this issue vehemently before various forums and eventually succeeded.

Thus before my retirement from service, my trade union responsibilities slowly ended. I would say I rather withdrew from active life.

I have no records. I remember with a great sense of pride my association with the AIBEA leaders both at Bombay and at the national level.

I know that from among the comrades in Bank of India, many AIBEA leaders germinated both at the national level and at the State level in many States.

I am also aware that some of the glorious strike actions had taken place in Bank of India and we had been a source of inspiration to others.

I must say something about customer service. There is no doubt it has deteriorated mainly in metropolitan centres. But there is no use blaming the younger generation in this connection. They are exposed to the vagaries of city life and specially to numerous

problems outside their place of work. Further, the Government policies and the attitude of the customers and the collusion of big customers with executives in cheating the banking industry are all responsible for not creating a proper motivation for the employees also. Still, we demanded nationalisation and we got it. Therefore, it is our duty to remove the problems of the ordinary customers within our means. I am sure that AIBEA will play an educative role in this connection.

My happiness is really great when I realise that I am alive today when AIBEA is celebrating its Golden Jubilee.

I am looking forward to come to Calcutta along with my wife and participate in the celebrations. I am happy that the AIBEA leaders have remembered the old comrades like me and the AIBEA is now preparing a compendium of our remembrances. I am sure that this publication will inspire the younger generation.

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of AIBEA, I am sending my warmest greetings and good wishes to all the members of AIBEA throughout the country.

