

NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF BANK EMPLOYEES

EVOLUTION AND GROWTH

We consider it highly essential of the young generation of Bank employees to be conversant with the history of Bank employees' Trade Union Movement and the evolution and growth of NCBE. Pioneers in Bank Employees' Trade Union Movement, the first and foremost are the predecessors of the All India State Bank of India Staff Federation – The imperial Bank of India Indian Staff Association – that was formed in 1920 much before the advent of Indian Trade Unions Act in 1926.

The pioneers of Trade Union Movement worked with missionary zeal, sacrificed their lot to build up the Trade Union Movement of Bank Employees and, in their pursuit of the twin-goals of Nation's independence and amelioration of Bank employees, led crusades of Bank employees and were instrumental in formation of AIBEA in 1946. In fact, it would be a surprise for many to know that the first General Secretary of AIBEA was one of the pioneering Trade Union leaders of State Bank of India Employees' Trade Union Movement, Com. Roshan Lal Malhotra. But, unfortunately, the united movement of the Bank employees was shattered by the political stooges within AIBEA.

Hence, in 1954 the All India Imperial Bank of India Staff Federation seceded from AIBEA. All India Bank of Baroda Employees' Federation also seceded from AIBEA soon thereafter in 1960. The All India Indian Overseas Bank Employees' Union remained independent right from its inception but was never a part of AIBEA. All these three organisations began functioning independently on Non-Party Independent lines, shedding away remote control of the Organisations by any political lackeys.

Though all these Unions were not functioning under one banner, yet a common thread was running through each one of them. – the ideological akinness to keep the Bank employees' Trade Unions away from narrow partisan party policies and to stop exploitation of Bank employees by the political parties to further their own vested interests.

In 1969 the Government of India nationalised 14 major Commercial Banks in the Country which brought about a new challenging situation in the Banking Industry. The Bank employees, who were demanding Bank Nationalisation, now found a new responsibility in fulfilling the objectives of Bank Nationalisation, an opportunity to build the national economy. Bank Employees' Unions aspired for a standardisation of wages and service conditions of all Bank employees in the country. To achieve the goal it was imperative to raise a national trade union platform of the

Bank employees to voice their demands and to ensure expansion of union banking policy for the upliftment of the have-nots of the country.

Against this backdrop on the 10th September 1969 a letter was sent by All India State Bank of India Staff Federation(AISBISF) to different Unions functioning in public sector banking industry calling upon them to form an organisation with the sole object of providing a common platform exclusively for all the employees in the nationalised banks-so as to enable these employees to lead their own destiny.

In the letter addressed by the Secretary of the AISBISF, Com. Nirmal Chowdhury assured that the All India State Bank of India Staff Federation – representing 48,000 employees – which constitutes about one-third of the total strength of the Bank employees in the country – and having rich experience in the matters of handling problems relating to the employees of a Public Sector Bank, rightly feels it to be its solemn duty to take the lead in initiating measures of the family with a clear and open mind. He drew the attention of all concern to the issues emerging out of the Nationalisation of Banks, which are required to be tracked immediately. He has also cautioned that all these will largely depend on the quality of “Industrial Relation” that may develop in this sector, the bargaining power that the

employees are able to wield and the influence generation from an impregnable collective force that the employees can assert over the combined strength of the Government and the Management. He also felt that effective plans and programmes will have to be chalked out to secure better living conditions for the employees – to remove anomalies and hardships which the employees have been subjected to, and to secure identical wages and improved and uniform service conditions for all the bank employees in the public sector. One could hardly expect to achieve success in these directions by making piece – meal efforts.

Response to the letter from All India State Bank of India Staff Federation, dated the 10th September 1969 was quite encouraging.

On the 26th January 1970 National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE) was born in Bombay. The five unions viz., All India State Bank of India Staff Federation, All India Bank Employees' Federation, All India Bank of Baroda Employees Federation, All India Indian Overseas Bank Employees Union and Canara Bank Staff Union have met at Bombay on the 26th to 28th January 1970 and discussed about the dominant character of NUBE as envisaged by the founding members:

1. Each constituent member can deal with the Management that it is concerned within the manner

that it thinks fit, keeping in view the national perspective of NUBE.

2. Full participation of the rank and file in the functioning of their Unions.
3. Development of Trade Union Cadre on a big scale.
4. Decentralisation of decision making process and even development of the trade unions.

The pioneers of NUBE forecasted with greater foresight, wisdom and maturity, that the paramount need in the days ahead will be to forge a strong organisation of Bank employees as common source of determining the fate of the Bank employees would, in future, be the Government and to meet the might of the Government, greater unity of Bank employees will be needed.

The first convention of NUBE was held on 22nd and 23rd March 1970. A large number of representatives of all 5 Unions and a number of bank-wise and regional unions functioning in the 14 nationalised banks, subsidiaries of State Bank of India and Reserve Bank of India met a convention at Bombay. The convention was called in order to adopt a constitution for NUBE, to formulate organisational perspective and policies, to decide the demands for revision of pay scales and other service conditions and the strategy to be adopted to achieve this demand, question of bonus to

employees, recognition to NUBE as the collective bargaining agent for the employees in the Public Sector Banking industry and to elect office-bearers.

The inaugural session of the convention was addressed by Com. Mohanlal Mazumdar, President of All India Bank of India Staff Federation who also presided over the proceedings of the convention on both the days. Com. V.N. Sekhri, General Secretary, All India Bank Employees' Federation, Com.S.R. Chandrashekar, President, All India Indian Overseas Bank Employees' Union. Com. K. J. Dixit, President, Canara Bank Staff Union, Com. Nirmal Chowdhury, General Secretary, All India State Bank of India Staff Federation, Com. Charles Choutto, General Secretary State Bank of India and subsidiary Banks' Employees' Union, Com. M. Rajagopal, General Secretary, All India Bank of Baroda Employees' Federation, addressed the inaugural session.

Guiding Principle of NUBE

NUBE decided to guide itself and confine its activities solely within the well defined principle of collective bargaining and in matters connected with labour welfare alone.

NUBE decided neither to dabble in or associate itself with political affairs having no bearing on the labour nor to allow itself to be influenced or dominated by any political ideology.

The speakers narrated their unhappy experiences as regards the manner in which the interests of the Bank Employees are being bartered away for political purposes. With the nationalisation of Banks in July 1969 and in absence of any fixed criteria for recognition of Unions, the intrusive and exploitative political parties dominated in many banks exploiting the interest of the majority members of the Bank. NUBE grew in strength and duly staked its claim in as a biggest organisation of Bank employees for a place as a bargaining agrees in negotiations with the IBA in 1970.

IBA changed their policy abruptly and decided to deal with exclusively with a National Union supported by a political party which was at that time a partner of Central Government in political affairs. IBA whimsically adopted majority concept in negotiating with the unions but refrained from explaining how it would determine the majority criteria. The Bank employees became a victim being caught in the knot of political alliances in national policies.

Again at this background, the convention passed unanimously a resolution declaring that NUBE represents majority of Bank employees in the Public Sector. Therefore, it calls upon the Government of India and Indian Banks' Association to recognise it as the sole collective bargaining agent for Bank Employees in the public sector. But the

Government of those times, due to its political dependence on the political party controlling AIBEA, ignored the claims of NEBE.

As days passed by several other Banks employees' trade unions grew disenchanted with AIBEA and seceded from the strong fold of AIBEA and formed INBEC in 1973, under the leadership of Com. O.P. Gupta.

The scenario altered dramatically in 1975-76 during the dark days of National Emergency. NUBE was ignored as a party to the industry-level. Tripartite Forum convened by the Government. At this juncture, some of the circle associations of AISBISF directly took affiliation of INTUC in April 1976 and much to the chagrin and hesitation All India State Bank of India Staff Federation confederated with INBEC and took affiliation of INTUC and constitutions of NUBE were in disarray. Thereafter, all the partners of NUBE joined INBEC which became a mighty organisation.

Soon after lifting of emergency, INBEC snapped its ties with INTUC and once again emerged, in letter and spirit, as a true and genuine Non-Party Independent Organisation subscribing to the philosophy, ideology and ideals of NUBE and working in the direction in which NUBE and INBEC had set for themselves.

During the Third Bipartite when a tiny fraction of disgruntled political elements began resorting to litigation after litigation claiming to be real INBEC, in a meeting of the National Executive Committee at Delhi on the 17th June, 1979, INBEC renamed itself as "National Confederation of Bank Employees"(NCBE) – to avoid vexatious litigation and to facilitate early signing of Third Bipartite Settlement in the larger interests of Bank Employees.

It can thus be seen that the evolution and growth of National Confederation of Bank Employees dates back to 1920s. Today several Organisations of Bank employees, both small and big, led by employees with missionary zeal to safeguard the interests of the Bank employees and to secure a better future for them, are the proud partners in the onward march of NEBE.

Since 1979 the triumphant strides of NCBE progress with unflinching courage and firm commitments to follow the independent path of non-political trade unionism. NCBE remains firm in its commitments to help the economically weaker section of the country and to safeguard the interest of the bank employees against all sorts of exploitations. Though affiliates of NCBE might have been under different banners in the past, today a common thread of fraternity, ideological affinity, unanimity of purpose and endeavour to achieve similar goals runs through all the affiliates, binds

and unites the affiliates into a strong and viable organisation.

Indeed, the history and struggles of the affiliates of NCBE is the history and struggles of the Bank Employees' Trade Union Movement of the Country. NCBE has assimilated, several Unions in course of its chequered history and has grown today to its present structure. Every member of NCBE has ample reasons to be proud of their heritage in the evolution and growth of NCBE.

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