



TAMILNADU BANK EMPLOYEES' FEDERATION

(Affiliated to AIBEA)

Singapore Plaza, 164, Linghi Chetty Street, Chennai-600001

Phone & Fax : 2533 1522, 2533 1422

e mail ~ tnbefchennai@gmail.com

97TH Birthday of Com. P.K. Janardhana Pillai The Founder General Secretary of TNBEF (4th December, 1921)

Com. P.K. Janardhana Pillai was the founder General Secretary of Tamil Nadu Bank Employees' Federation when it was founded in 1953. In 1956, during Calcutta Conference of AIBEA, he was elected as Assistant Secretary of AIBEA. He was also the founder and first President of Syndicate Bank Employees Union and Canara Bank Employees Union. 4th December, 2017 marks the 97th Birthday of Com Janardhana Pillai.

Please read some excerpts of the interview with Com. Janardhana Pillai taken in 1996 during the Golden Jubilee of AIBEA. You will get an idea about this leader :

I have studied upto Matriculation. Before joining the Canara Bank, during the period 1940-45, I have worked as Army Wireless operator. When war ended in 1945, my job also ended. It was at Kollam in 1946, I joined the Canara Bank as clerk. From the beginning, **I was protesting very much against the practice of working from 10 AM to 10 PM every day.** Knowing my rebellious attitude, the management transferred me to a number of branches. Finally, at the Erode branch in Tamil Nadu, an incident happened.

As usual, the employees were asked to work till mid night and the front doors of the banks were closed. I secretly lodged a complaint with the Shops and Establishment Inspector who inspected branch. This created turbulence within and the manager became very angry. He was one by name Sri Raghupathi. He personally contacted the then General Manager of the Bank, Shri P.S. Nayak and informed him that Mr. Pillai is a big trouble maker and a dangerous element. I was transferred to Madras.

In the beginning, other employees avoided in making any contact with me. But slowly, I was able to build a comradeship among others. Those were the days, when there was no job security, no promotion and no overtime. Transfer

from one centre to another at any time was common. Discharge from service was a routine affair.

In 1949, the bank suddenly dismissed 2 comrades by name Com. Chacko and Com. Kuduva. The staffs were informed that the dismissal was due to re-organisation of branch work. We decided to meet together and take necessary steps to safeguard our jobs.

Late at midnight, we met at the Madras Beach. I suggested that we should go and meet the local Director of the Bank, Shri A. Narayan Pai who was also an Advocate. The same night, myself and 4 comrades went to his house. Mrs. Pai informed us that it was very late and asked us to come the next day. We politely told her that the matter was very urgent and we should meet the Advocate. Eventually, Shri A. Narayan Pai came down. We requested him to intervene and reinstate the two dismissed employees. Mr. Pai got angry. He shouted at us as to why for this purpose we had gone to him in the night. He said whether I knew the law of contract. According to him, as per this law, with one month's notice, Bank can terminate anybody and any employee can leave the job by giving one month notice.

I lost my temper against him. I shouted, "You are cruel monsters. You cannot go on removing from service employees and throwing their families on the road. No roughshod tactics." I was so upset. I was virulent also. Opposite to us, Mr. Narayan Pai was standing with a cigarette. He was a heavy smoker. He was stunned and surprised at our vehemence. Suddenly, he fell down unconscious, his forehead hitting the corner of the table nearby. There was some bleeding. My colleagues ran away helter skelter. But I was there. Mrs. Pai rushed in and shouted that I have killed her husband, However, I calmly explained the situation. Perhaps, the heavy smoking had some effect. He recovered and I also came out. Sri A. Narayan Pai, Advocate, later retired as Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court.

Outside, my colleagues were standing behind a tree. They feared summary dismissal the next day of all of them. I said whether right or wrong, the Director's blood has been spilled. We shall win. I was confident.

Around mid-day 29.11.1949, myself and K. Narasimha Shenoy came to the bank. Earlier, we went to the Manager's house requesting him for reinstatement. He refused. Next day, we decided counter offence as the best policy. We began a strike. No preparation. We reached office at 8 A.M. One by one, we stopped other employees and explained the situation. Surprisingly all agreed. Come what may, we shall strike and demand reinstatement of the two comrades.

From Linghi Chetty Branch, staffs were brought to break our strike by the Manager, Ganesh Rao. We stopped them also. The strike was total. It was a

spontaneous reaction against brutal victimization. No preparation and no notice. We marched to the Labour Commissioner's Office and met the Labour Commissioner Sri Venkatachalam and explained the position. He deputed Mr. Venkatesan, Conciliation Officer for intervention. We returned back to the branch. Mr. Venkatesan came. The Manager, Shankar Rao, asked the Conciliation Officer to get out. He reported the matter to the Labour Commissioner.

The Labour Commissioner told over phone that the Manager will be put behind the bars for preventing a Government servant from intervening (performing his duty). The Head Office at Light House Hill, Mangalore was contacted. The table of the Manager was heaped with cheques and cash. The strike electrified other bank employees. Head Office directed immediate compromise.

A conciliation settlement was signed. Myself and Mr. Shenoy signed for the striking workmen. There was no union. The management was represented by Shankar Rao and N.A. Prabhu. Bank agreed to immediately vacate the dismissal orders and take back Com. Chacko and Com. Kuduva. No penal action for strike. Thus, without a union victory was won. It electrified everybody amongst the bank employees.

Just around this period, the AIBEA from Calcutta gave a call for strike. At Madras, T.S. Ramanujam, President, Madras Provincial Bank Employees Union called for a meeting. Mr. V.V. Giri, Labour Leader addressed. The hall was packed. However, T.S.R. moved a resolution requesting the AIBEA to cancel or postpone the strike. He was also basically a paper tiger. Never bothered to fight against injustice towards bank employees. The audience kept quiet.

Suddenly, I was inspired. I sought permission to speak. That was my first public speech. I opposed the resolution. I said that when the AIBEA has called for a strike in its wisdom, bankmen in Madras should not hesitate. It will be a disgrace if we back out. The resolution is reactionary. Everybody applauded. But nothing happened. The resolution was passed. However, this incident opened up new possibilities. Many comrades marked me. Built contacts with me. Some of them were Com. D. Natarajan, Soundar Rajan, G. Srinivasan and others. We began moving together. We planned to remove T.S.R. from the leadership.

However, T.S.R. faded away. A new awakening was beginning. By then, AIBEA gave a call for strike on 23.9.1954. While we were preparing for this strike in all banks, a young man from Bank of Baroda directly came to Federation Office. He asked me whether he could participate in the strike, even though he was a probationer. He showed records to prove that he had been working in bank from 1950 onwards in various centres and was continuously treated as a probationer with no confirmation at all. I advised him to go ahead and participate. He became a convenor for the Strike in Bank of Baroda. The strike was over.

A few days later, this person namely, Com. P.S. Sundaresan, came to the Federation Office and showed his termination order. There was no time to call the Federation CC. It was at 7 P.M. Even the union could not be consulted. Myself and P.S. Sundaresan went to GPO and phoned to the Deputy General Manager of the Bank, Mr. Choksi at Bombay. I told that this victimization will not be allowed by bankmen in Madras. He told us to contact the General Manager, Mr. Mathew D'Souza. He was also contacted. I spoke to him. He also declined.

That night and the next day morning, we both went to the houses of employees in Bank of Baroda. The next day at 8 A.M. before the bank gate, we again approached everybody. All agreed. All were angry. As a spontaneous reaction, a few hours after the dismissal order was served to Com. P.S.S. on the previous evening the strike began.

The Manager, Mr. K. Gopal Rao, called me inside. After some discussions, he said he would come to a deal. He offered that the dismissal will not be vacated, but PSS will be appointed as an officer in Bombay Branch. PSS had to go immediately. Outside the room PSS was waiting. He reacted violently.

I told Mr. Gopal Rao that it is an insult to the trade union and to AIBEA. You dismissed him and now you want to remove him by offering a promotion. **You are offering bribe. I have to report to the Labour Commissioner on this score.** You are attempting to bribe a trade Union and the individual.

Mr. Gopal Rao immediately apologized, but refused to vacate the dismissal order. The next five days, the strike was total. I contacted Bombay. Com. P.K. Menon who was then General Secretary of the Bank of Baroda Unions organised a powerful demonstration before the Bank. Com. G.N. Trikannad was also there. They threatened the bank with All India action. A circular was issued. The management realized their error. They were afraid of a total strike. Bank agreed for immediate reinstatement with no penal action for all other employees and a compromise was arrived at.

With a view to save the face of Sri K. Gopala Rao, bank requested that P.S. Sundaresan will be posted to Bangalore with a right to return to Madras after sometime. This was agreed. In a way at this point of time, I feel this was a good compromise. PSS never came back to Madras. What he did in Karnataka and how he resigned the job after one year so that as a full timer he could build a movement is well known. I told PSS when he left for Bangalore "You are going there with a mission, accomplish it". I am happy he accomplished it. The date was 12th December, 1954.

I now return to the Canara Bank Union affairs. Before Sastri Award, I represented the Union. Before that, there is a story. When employees were victimised and harassed, we approached a veteran trade union leader in Madras by name Sri

S.C.C. Anthony Pillai. He was a very big figure. Both myself and K.N. Shenoy requested him to be the President of our union. He agreed. But Canara Bank played a mischief. They privately called K.N. Shenoy to Bangalore and gave him an offer. The Bank would recognize the Canara Bank Employees Union. This will be the first such kind of recognition of any union by any bank in India at that time. In return, the outsider should be removed. I am sorry to tell you that without involving any one of us Com. Shenoy yielded and somehow Shri S.C.C. Anthony Pillai left us.

That was the time of the Sastry Tribunal. There at Bombay I met Com. Prabhat Kar and Com. Parvana. They took me into their fold. The great Com. A.S.R. Chari, veteran Communist Advocate, night and day worked for us, and argued our case without accepting a single rupee payment. Both Prabhat Kar and Parvana played a very important role. The forum of the Tribunal became a meeting point for around 300 employees from various unions throughout India to meet and establish contact. In fact, the Tribunal became the harbinger for AIBEA to grow.

Sastri Award benefits were meager. Legal challenges were also made. But as I said earlier, it indirectly benefited the AIBEA. Meanwhile, the Communist Party leadership and AITUC at the All India level decided to offer all kind of support for developing AIBEA. In various States, party members began helping us. We were not compelled to become party members. One by one, some of us joined; that was never a condition for support.

At Madras, D. Natarajan, Subramanyam of Indian Bank, Gajapathy of RBI, Com. Parthasarathy of RBI and a few comrades, came under the influence of Com. Mohan Kumaramangalam, the party Chief who was also a leading Advocate under Rao & Reddy firm. Com. Mohan daily invited us and gave various useful guidelines. Strategy and plan for the growth of MSBEF (now TNBEF) was exclusively the genius of Mohan. How to organize bank employees, he taught us. He advised us to fight before Labour Forums against all types of mal-implementation of Award and get financial benefits to individual employees so that they will understand the power of the union and strengthen it. We did this in numerous cases.

During Sastri Award at Bombay, the Syndicate Bank employees were in touch with me and eventually we formed a union at Bombay with myself as President at Madras. When this was reported to Sri T.A. Pai, the then Managing Director of the bank, he became angry and said that PKJ Pillai who is a communist will not be allowed even to meet him. T.A. Pai contacted P.S. Nayak, General Manager of Canara Bank and asked as to why a Canara Bank employee should meddle and trouble him. PS Nayak called and politely explained to me. **I told that all bankmen are brothers.** There ended that subject.

At that time Com. K.K. Mandal who belonged to the Praja Socialist Party established contacts with Syndicate Bank employees at Bombay. He became a CPI member at that time. He took over as President of the Union from me.

Many cases of defence before Tribunals I have fought. I remember the case of Com. G.S. Nayak who was dismissed. I got him reinstated by the Tribunal. He came to Karnataka, worked at Davangere, helped in the formation of SBM Union there to some extent, later became KPBEF leader and died.

In Guntakal, I conducted the case of an employee who was charge sheeted for altering the figure in the pay slip (value Rs. 25/-). Prima-facie, the bank had a strong case. The Tribunal permitted me to argue. I told that I am an ordinary bank worker and the Tribunal must give me more time. For 2 hours, I argued. The employee was a cashier with a heavy load of attending both payment and receipt simultaneously. Basically, this is wrong. Both are opposite types of transactions. Payments and receipts were heavy on that day. Vouchers got mixed up. Probably by mistake, he has altered the figure. After the dismissal, the victim is now in a government job.

The case before the Tribunal is academic. If he is dismissed the new job in the Government will also be lost. Thus, a sword is hanging upon his head. I requested the Tribunal to physically look at the face of the employee who was sitting by my side with an innocent look. The Tribunal was moved. We won the case. Even the bank advocate congratulated me.

Com. Mohan Kumaramangalam used to advise us. "**Learn by yourself**; even by mistakes learn by yourself and by your own efforts. No spoon feeding by me. I will help you, assist you and advise you. I myself will not come for defence or become your President".

In the year 1957-58, many unions sprang up. I was General Secretary of TNBEF. Four days in a week, I will be outside on tour. **Heavy loss of pay. Net salary was around Rs. 30/-.** **I pledged jewels and began borrowing.** The situation was precarious.

Another case. The Mercantile Bank, by mistake, had fixed working hours half an hour more than the usual hours for all. We fought the case before the Tribunal. Settlement was reached. All employees received 2 months full salary as compensation.

One Satyamurthy of National Bank of India – his arrears of salary was not paid. He was a sub-staff. We won the case after a mighty demonstration with red banners before the Bank building. Mr. Lamberth, called me inside. "Mr. Pillai, you are attacking me with pistol in your hand". I said no. Please come out and see the huge crowd and their peaceful nature. The Manager was moved. The employee got the arrears and dismissal order was vacated.

Eastern Bank – One Comrade Tulasingam was charge sheeted for being absent during godown delivery. Again demonstrations and protests. The European Manager told me he was not bothered for he was an Ex-Army man. Next day, I showed him my Army Service Record. We became friends. The employee was saved. He sent a cable and from London by cable reinstatement order came.

The whole period was one of turmoil protests and actions. Coming back to Com. Tulasingam, he was an inspiring personality with exemplary character, highest degree of integrity and was a great visionary. He was the very oxygen of AIBEA in Tamilnadu.

One Ramachandra Rao, of a small bank, namely, Premier Bank (staff strength 4) was terminated. Pressure was applied. Bank remitted the case to the Tribunal. Because it was a one State Bank, the Tribunal has no jurisdiction. I appeared before the Board. One Bank Director threatened me. I ignored him and gave indication to the Chairman about the weaknesses of some of the deals of the bank. I told that 5000 bankmen will demonstrate continuously before the Bank. The Board decided to pay Rs. 8,000/- as compensation. It was a huge amount. It was accepted. Com. Ramachandra Rao came to Federation and thanked and offered a sum of Rs. 200/- as donation. We declined. We asked him to supply a cup of coffee which was just 15 p. or less, to all working comrades there. Thus ended that affair. I recall numerous such individual victimisations, the Federation has fought. Every victory strengthened our movement.

But my association abruptly ended. In 1958, my financial problems were beyond my capacity. By nature, I could not accept help from any source including my union. I was engulfed with frustration. My family was looking upon me for food and clothes. I resigned my job, collected a few thousands of rupees as retirement benefit for 10 years of service, discharged my debts, became a medical representative and the next 25 years I was quietly working as such in Karnataka.

I must say one thing here. The Canara Bank management made all attempts to retain me in service. Sri P.S. Nayak persuaded me very much.

There is a story here. Earlier, on one occasion, a violent demonstration was held against the Manager, Sri D.S. Sastri, a big banker, before Central Bank. Mob fury was unleashed. Nobody could control the anger of the crowd. Physically, Mr. Sastri was about to be beaten. I rushed from the Federation, appealed to the bank employees and somehow enabled Mr. Sastri safely to leave in his car. This incident was reported by Mr. Sastri to Canara Bank management. They developed some respect towards me for my responsible conduct.

The bank called me to Bangalore to discuss alternatives instead of resignation. I was even given indications of a tempting offer in other Centre. I politely declined. I felt that problems of financial nature that arose out of my trade union work and

heavy loss of pay cannot be compensated in any manner either by the bank or by the union at that period of time. I left the service. I chose a job with HQ at Bangalore.

A general remark. In those days, we never collected money in the form of donation for trade union work. Now-a-days, this has become the culture. This is very bad. I am nearing 75. I have no land or house. I have no property or cash. I am feeling free from all encumbrances. I owe nothing to anybody. I own nothing. When I leave, there will be no regret. Philosophically speaking, I am just awaiting my departure.

Regarding AIBEA, it has achieved so much, you can write volumes about it. Recently, AIBEA has given even pension to bank employees. **AIBEA will live as long as bank employees are in India.** AIBEA has played a premier, prestigious role amongst while collared employees in India. It has set up a glorious example. I am very proud of my association for over 8 years with the great AIBEA.

One thing I wish to say. **The unflinching loyalty of the ordinary members is the real source of strength for AIBEA,** and not the ability of a few leaders. These leaders are there to lead them and they did a good job. But it is the loyalty of the members that eventually count.

A suggestion – I feel bank-wise unions in many cases are coming in between the ordinary members and AIBEA. The name AIBEA is utilized by unions. A structural change is called for. All bank men should be direct members of AIBEA and AIBEA should have branches in the States and lower levels. This will bring into contact physically, emotionally and organizationally, bank employees directly under the influence of AIBEA. The infirmities in between members and AIBEA will vanish.

Bankmen should never forget the great role of the CPI and AITUC in the development of our movement. Com. S.A. Dange used to guide us on a day to day basis in those good old years. The party functionaries in all States advised us. The party never demanded membership. Bank employees also understood that for fight against exploitation, for demanding better service conditions and improving their lot, CPI and AITUC always stood behind them in all forums.

Reproduced by:
Union Bank Employees' Union - Tamilnadu
To: All MC/EC/Spl Invites/Advisory Committee Members
Circular No.153:2017 Dated: 04.12.2017