

EAST CENTRAL ZONE INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

Jeevan Deep Buildings (1st Floor), Exhibition Road, Patna-800001

Circular No. : 02/2013

Date: 17.01.2013

To, All Members

Dear Comrade,

Recognition to AIIEA: A Basic Democratic Demand

We are all aware that the AIIEA has given a call for One Hour Walk out Strike preceding lunch recess on 22 January 2013. The Strike has been called on the demands of a) Recognition to AIIEA, b) One more option to join the Pension Scheme 1995 as also improvements in the present Pension Scheme and c) introduction of a Scheme for upgradation of RPTs (Regular Part Timers) working in LIC since long.

The demand relating to Recognition of AIIEA has been crying for a solution since long. In fact, the demand has been pending for over three decades now. The AIIEA was the only representative union of LIC employees. But the LIC management and the Government of India conspired to derecognize AIIEA in 1968. It would be instructive to revisit the issue of Recognition and draw proper inspiration from the glorious history of the AIIEA.

AIIEA was in the midst of a grim battle against automation in the sixties. Our objections to rampant mechanization then were basic and fundamental. It was not merely a question of protecting the job security of the existing employees but also protecting the potential job opportunities of the future generations. Today most of the present generation of LIC employees would not be in LIC had the AIIEA not successfully fought the automation struggle in the sixties. Taking advantage of the Indo Pak War in 1965, the LIC management stealthily installed one IBM1401-1410 computer system in the Central Office. AIIEA responded to this by transcending LIC employees' movement against automation into a struggle of the entire working class. On November 25, 1966 LIC employees all over the country went on their first One Day Strike against automation. The General Council meeting of AIIEA at Calcutta in December 1966 decided to go in for continuous strike and confrontation against the Government and the LIC management on the issue of automation. While the industry was on the boil and the employees were restive, on the basis of verification of membership of AIIEA conducted by the Ministry of Labour of the Government of India, it was found that the AIIEA commanded a membership of about 78% of the total LIC employees. On February 13, 1967 the LIC granted exclusive recognition to the AIIEA and its Divisional Units as the sole bargaining agent on behalf of all Class III and Class IV employees.

Along with Recognition to the AIIEA, came virulent attack on its leaders and cadres with an intention to suppress the anti-automation struggle. The General Secretary of Jabalpur Divisional unit and 28 others were charge sheeted and many others were suspended. Com. R.P.Manchanda, the then General Secretary of Chandigarh Divisional unit (subsequently President of AIIEA), was dismissed from service on the plea of his conviction by a court regarding a strike action of the Punjab University Employees' Union. Sometime before the Durga Puja holidays of 1968, the LIC management decided to install the second computer in Calcutta divisional office and sought the help of police. The employees under the banner of AIIEA resolved to oppose it come what may. The historic ILACO vigil started. It was a 24 hour vigil; and the vigil continued round the clock for more than 365 days! And insurance employees were not alone; leaders of the left parties, trade unions, students' and youth organizations, women's organizations, eminent citizens of Calcutta all joined the LIC

employees to keep a vigil before the ILACO building. Insurance employees' movement had become a veritable peoples' movement. The LIC management- Government combine had to beat a humiliating retreat and the computer had to be taken out of West Bengal. This was a landmark struggle of the insurance employees under the leadership of the AIIEA.

The management of LIC was seething in anger. They wanted to take revenge. The LIC management constantly prodded the Government of India to derecognise the AIIEA. The reasoning was simple: how dare a mere union of clerks and peons challenge the policies of the Government? On 16th November 1968, the Government of India called a meeting of the Implementation and Evaluation Committee to consider LIC's proposal for derecognising the AIIEA. In a most arbitrary decision, the Committee held that AIIEA violated the code of discipline. Finally, the AIIEA and all its Divisional Units were derecognized by the LIC on 21st November 1968.

AIIEA was derecognized for challenging government policies. Today also the AIIEA is doing precisely that. We have been challenging the policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. We have been opposing all moves to destabilize the public sector insurance industry. We do not care a hoot for what the ruling classes think about our opposition. We do not care a hoot about the recognition of the management or the government. But the question is, when recognition of the majority union is the essence of industrial democracy and when everybody knows that AIIEA commands the support of overwhelming majority of LIC employees, there is no reason why the AIIEA should not be given Recognition. The International Labour Organisation has adopted Conventions No. 87 and 98 that recognize the freedom of association and collective bargaining as the most important elements of industrial relations. The 66th Session of the Governing Body of the ILO held at Geneva on 3rd June 1981 has adopted Convention No. 154 that categorically recognized the right to collective bargaining. This is reiterated once again in an ILO Declaration in 1988. Our rulers are so fond of giving sermons on the virtue of Democracy. Why don't they concede this basic democratic right of LIC employees?

The LIC management should understand the democratic aspirations and sentiments of the employees. The employees under the banner of the AIIEA have been relentlessly fighting to protect and strengthen the LIC. The employees feel that their interests are closely linked to that of the LIC and therefore they have been trying to further the cause of LIC while safeguarding their own interests and service conditions. The employees must get an opportunity to make their voices heard in corporate decisions. The LIC should without any loss of time frame a policy for workers' participation in management. A representative of the majority union should find a place in the Board of LIC. The one hour walk out strike on 22nd January 2013 is just the beginning. Employees are not prepared to tolerate any delay. The issue does not brook any delay. The sooner the management government combine realize this, the better it would be for industrial harmony.

With Greetings,

Comradely Yours



General Secretary