

**ALL INDIA INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION**  
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To

All the Zonal /Divisional /State /Regional Units

**9<sup>th</sup> January 2024- Golden Jubilee of the Historic Lockout Struggle**

9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 marks the Golden Jubilee of AIIEA's historic struggle against the partial lockout of LIC. It was on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1974 that the LIC management declared to lock out four Divisional Offices of Delhi, Madras, Bangalore and Patna and Machine Department of Dharwad Divisional Office to crush the struggle of AIIEA on the demand of wage revision. On 13<sup>th</sup> January 1974, Meerut Divisional office was also locked out. Subsequently, on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1974 the entire Dharwad Divisional Office was locked out. This was for the first ever time that Lockout as a weapon to crush the militant struggle of middle class employees was deployed in India by the LIC management in connivance with the then ruling class.

Wage Revision concluded in 1970 had expired in March 1973. New wage revision had become due from April 1973. The Charter of Demands had already been submitted. But the Madras (present day Chennai) Conference of AIIEA during 9-14 May 1972 had forewarned the employees that the crisis in the Indian economy was deepening and the ruling class would spare no efforts to shift the burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the working class. Calling upon the cadres of AIIEA to remain prepared for vicious attacks by the ruling class, the AIIEA conference made an assessment that the wage revision struggle was going to be a long drawn and protracted one. The AIIEA had correctly analysed that the Congress government headed by Smt. Indira Gandhi was basking in the glory of the victory over Pakistan in the Bangladesh war and was slowly acquiring authoritarian overtones. Unable to manage the crisis of the economy, the government had already started mooted the idea of curtailing the rights of workers including the option of freezing DA payable to workers. Adept as the AIIEA was in foreseeing the lurking dangers in the horizon and prepare the employees accordingly, employees were asked to remain prepared for a grim battle on the issue of charter struggle. What ensued in the following months was a massive campaign all over the country followed by series of industrial actions.

After series of negotiations in between middle of 1973 and last part of December, a settlement was about to be reached. The management of LIC, the then Chairman Sri K.R. Puri in particular, was adamant on one point. He virtually demanded 'a pound of flesh' in lieu of wage revision. The preamble to the wage agreement had a clause that the unions would have to give in writing that there would be no union activity inside the office, during lunch recess and even beyond office hours! The AIIEA rejected this with the contempt it deserved; how could a trade union barter away the fundamental democratic right of organising the employees into trade union for some economic gain! The AIIEA refused to sign and the negotiations broke down on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1973. The government then, the LIC management and the corporate media launched a fierce campaign of calumny against the AIIEA and employees in large numbers were victimised on flimsy and fabricated charges. Suspensions, issuing of memos and chargesheets, large scale transfers of the employees became the order of the day. Such was the scale of the reprisal by the management that, one after another, almost all other unions except AIIEA succumbed to the pressure and gave written assurances to the management to show their loyalty to LIC. AIIEA alone however stood firm.

In this context, finally came the partial lockdown. Emboldened by the crushing defeat inflicted on the movement of Indian Airlines employees under the Chairmanship of the infamous P.C. Lal, the government prodded the LIC management to do something unheard of. The idea behind the management's decision to lockdown only divisional offices and not the branch offices or zonal offices was obvious. They wanted to demoralise employees of the locked out offices and instil a sense of fear among

employees of the non-locked out offices that their offices may also be locked out if they persisted with struggle of AIEA. The basic objective was to divide the employees and crush the movement. The management felt that AIEA would do something drastic which would be difficult to sustain for a long time and finally employees would wilt under pressure. Criticising AIEA for the struggle, The Hindu newspaper wrote on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1974: "LIC officials hoped that the "limited" lockout would serve as sufficient warning to the employees and wiser counsel would prevail on them to resume normal duties forthwith in the interest of the policyholders and other sections of the public". So adamant was the then LIC chairman that he thundered: "The LIC would not hesitate to declare a total lock-out if the situation so warranted" (The Statesman, Calcutta, 10.01.1974)

The AIEA however outwitted the management. AIEA did not give any call for all India Strike. AIEA gave a call that employees of all the offices in locked out divisions only would go for an indefinite strike and employees of the non-locked out divisions would resort to a 'work-to-rule' agitation. The effect was disastrous for LIC; the entire institution almost came to a grinding halt. When the management miserably failed in this attempt, they resorted to something disgracefully bad. The top rung leadership was spared, but common employees and cadres were suspended in large numbers. This was a cheap tactic to show the leadership in poor light and divide the organisation. The members however saw through the designs of the management and remained solidly behind the AIEA. It is to be noted that even probationers in Bangalore division enthusiastically participated in this strike. The management government combine was at its wits' end. What followed was historic.

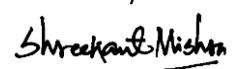
The struggle that followed was so intense that the then Union Labour Minister Sri R.K. Raghunath Reddy flew down to Calcutta on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1974 to meet AIEA leaders. He invited AIEA for a tripartite conference at Delhi on 13<sup>th</sup> January and sent the air tickets. Com. Chandra Shekhar Bose (then President), Com. Saroj Chowdhury (then General Secretary) and Com. Sunil Moitra (then Joint Secretary) negotiated on behalf of AIEA. The tripartite conference was followed by series of negotiations with LIC management stretching for almost 10-12 hours a day and finally at about 10:30 in the evening on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1974 the agreement was signed. It is to be noted that this was the last bipartite agreement signed in LIC under the Industrial Disputes Act. Apart from the wage settlement, AIEA also forced the management to withdraw all the punishments including suspensions and the struggle came to a glorious end. The most important lesson of this struggle was the rock solid unity of the employees and supreme faith in the capacity of the organisation to struggle and succeed. At the request of the management, the then General Secretary of AIEA, Com. Saroj Chowdhury opened the locks of Delhi Divisional Office on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1974 amidst thunderous rejoicing and excitement. Addressing the jubilant employees in Delhi Com. Saroj cautioned them, "One great battle is won and another begins today to retain the benefits secured". That was prophetic. Lockout was lifted on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1974 and Emergency was declared on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1975. With this, the struggle to protect what we had won began.

AIEA congratulates insurance employees on the fiftieth anniversary of the glorious struggle and conveys Red Salute to all our senior leaders and members who courted enormous sacrifice and waged a relentless struggle. AIEA calls upon the employees to draw proper lessons and inspiration from this historic struggle and maintain our unity in the polarising times we live in so that we meet the challenges of the present with courage of conviction.

We call upon our units across the country to observe 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024 as Victory Day.

With Revolutionary Greetings,

Comradely Yours



General Secretary