

ALL INDIA INSURANCE EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION
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To,
All the Zonal/Divisional/State/Regional Units

01 JULY 1951 TO 01 JULY 2021
AN EXHILARATING JOURNEY OF 70 YEARS AND THE WAY FORWARD

AIIEA completes 70 years of its glorious existence and steps into its 71st formation day on the 1st of July 2021. The journey for the past seventy years has been quite exhilarating. The AIIEA started its modest journey in the year 1951 with an intention to ameliorate the living conditions of insurance employees. However, born as it was in the immediate aftermath of India's independence from colonial rule, its focus has always remained on the larger issues of the country and the people. Its arena of struggle has always been larger than the confines of the insurance industry. The AIIEA started off as a trade union of insurance employees, but went on to assume the mantle of a spokesperson of the people of India at large.

Independence from colonial rule had aroused expectations of the Indian people. There was an absolute need to preserve, consolidate and strengthen India's unity. There was an imperative need to push forward the process of the making of the Indian nation. There was also an urge to build up and protect the national state as an instrument of development and social transformation. The people hoped for a rapid rise in personal and societal prosperity. There was a longing for social and economic equity. Independent India sought to achieve this on the basis of democracy and through the process of accommodating diverse social, economic and regional interests. State planning and a strong public sector were assigned prime responsibilities to accomplish this task. It was precisely during this time that the AIIEA took birth, mobilised the insurance employees against the inhuman exploitation of the private companies, led them in the struggle for nationalisation of insurance business. The AIIEA thus started contributing to the process of the making of the Indian nation right after its birth.

The commitment to protecting the interests of the employees and safeguarding the interests of the nation inform all the struggles launched by the AIIEA during the last seven decades. The struggle for nationalisation of insurance in the fifties, struggle for standardisation of wages after nationalisation, struggle against automation in the sixties or the struggle in the dark days of the Emergency in the seventies or the struggle to fight out lock outs of six divisions or the struggle against the ill motivated moves to split LIC in the eighties, the uncompromising struggle for three decades beginning in the nineties to protect insurance industry in the public sector or the innumerable struggles to secure brilliant wage increases to insurance employees have all borne this unmistakable imprint.

The 71st Formation Day of AIIEA comes in the immediate aftermath of yet another spectacular wage revision in the LIC. Employees all over the country are euphoric about the 16% wage increase with a 15% loading in the framing of the basic Pay. The wage revision was spectacular because it helped realise our position that the wage revision should give benefit to the employees not only during their service period but should also benefit them in terms of their retirement benefits by way of increased pension. In addition to all the monetary gains that were secured, an important residual issue of the last wage revision in terms of the Five-Day Week was also clinched. One has to appreciate that the wage revision has been clinched under the most trying circumstances because increased wages are an anathema to any profit driven business enterprise in a capitalist society. The havoc wrought by the pandemic was an additional factor this time. The economy and polity are in great turmoil. Physical meetings and travels to distant places have almost become a thing of the past. However, it is because of the sheer ingenuity of the tactical line of AIIEA and the unquestioning faith and allegiance of our members in the capabilities of the AIIEA that a seemingly difficult task was accomplished in the most brilliant manner.

AIIEA has mastered the art of clinching victories by overcoming difficult obstacles. This has been possible because of its correct political understanding. With an abiding commitment to the philosophy of the working class AIIEA has an uncanny knack of foreseeing events, an ability to look into the future, an ability to see the dangers on the horizon before they strike at our roots, analyse the upcoming challenges dispassionately in all their social, political and economic ramifications and then evolve the correct tactical line to jump onto struggle. This often attracts criticism from our adversaries that the AIIEA is political. AIIEA believes in being political in the interest of the poor, the downtrodden, the suffering people, in the interest of the economy, society and the people at large. AIIEA believes in the politics of questioning the present exploitative order of the society. AIIEA is accused of being political because it dares to challenge and question the ruling classes. The ruling classes and their apologists want unquestioning adherence to the principles laid down by them.

There is a concerted attempt today to weaken the AIIEA. This is because our unity has become the biggest stumbling block for the ruling classes to carry forward their destructive agenda. It is true that these attacks are not new to us. But the virulence with which the attempts are being made is new. This change has come about because of the changed nature of the polity today. A false and bigoted notion of nationalism is being invoked to disrupt the unity of the working people. The nationalism that defined our anti-colonial struggle was inclusive, democratic, secular and egalitarian. A nationalism that idolizes the nation over the people and does not care for material conditions of the life of the people is no nationalism at all. Unfortunately, rather than being a tool to broaden our unity and deepen our democracy, the new nationalism has served to do just the opposite. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Indian parliament, Indian press, independent and constitutional bodies, civil society organisations are all under attack. Indian democracy is probably passing through its darkest moments. The pandemic has exacerbated the situation still further. Colonial era laws are being used by the ruling establishment to muzzle freedom of speech. All forms of dissent are being criminalised and opinions critical of the ruling party are being branded as seditious. There is a savage attack on freedom of speech and right to dissent. This is a serious abridgement of democracy as enshrined in the constitution of India. AIIEA is aware that trade union rights cannot remain safe when democratic rights are abridged. The

scrapping of the labour laws and framing of the new labour codes can be seen in this context. Trade unions not only work to promote the interests of the workers, they are also instruments of social change. Any infringement of the rights of the trade unions is, therefore akin to preventing change in the society and an attempt to maintain the status quo.

The AIIEA has learnt with humility that it alone cannot bring about any radical change in the society howsoever pious its intentions might be. There has to be a concerted effort by all sections of the working people. There has to be a broader unity of the people. But this unity cannot come merely by preaching others. AIIEA is conscious of the fact that numerically we are a small trade union. There is no reason why bigger unions would listen to our sanctimonious talks on the virtues of unity and united struggles. The AIIEA therefore advises its cadres to do something more important and more powerful than mere preaching so that others will sit up and take note of us. We are immensely proud of what our comrades have done in the last year. Our support and solidarity to the farmers' organisations in their struggle against the farm bills and electricity bills, our humanitarian interventions to feed the desolate, dejected and poor migrant workers during the lockdown and the ceaseless efforts of our units to provide food, oxygen concentrators and medicines to the Covid affected people are small examples of our contribution to the building up of a more egalitarian society.

Our success at bringing about material prosperity for the employees should not lull us into complacency. We must not forget that the attempts to privatise the LIC through its Initial Public Offer are going on in a feverish pitch. The necessary legislations have already been put in place. The government is working at a breakneck speed to see the dismantlement of India's premier public sector financial institution. Similar attempts are being made to privatise one public sector general insurance company as well. The wage revision issue of PSGI employees has not yet been settled despite the commendable progress registered by them in an adverse economic situation. While we must pay serious attention to launch struggles on these issues, we must also pay some special attention to strengthening the organisation at all levels.

We have learnt from our experience of the last seventy years that our organisation AIIEA is the most potent weapon in our hands to advance our class interests. There is however an ideological attack on trade unions per se. Neoliberalism considers trade unions as an undesirable phenomenon. Trade unions are portrayed as unnecessary impediments to social progress. While we have to launch a counter campaign against this perverted propaganda, we must take note of the fact that a large number of our cadres born after the onset of neoliberalism in India have grown up with this understanding. They are not to be blamed for this; we must make sure. We have to understand that globalisation has not only benefitted the corporate-financial elite, it has also benefitted a section of the urban middle class through the outsourcing of service sector activities from the metropolitan centres. This creates an illusion among other sections of the middle class that they too have a chance to improve their lot. This class therefore not only throws its weight behind globalisation, but becomes ardent admirers of the process. Therefore, we must sensitise these comrades through practical experiences that while a miniscule minority benefits from globalisation, a large majority of our countrymen suffer grinding poverty and deprivation, as has become open now. This is important because with a large number of our leaders and cadres on the verge of retirement from active service, it is now the turn of the young

comrades to take up leadership position of the organisation. Training and grooming them with proper ideological orientation is the need of the times.

As we prepare to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the formation of the AIEA, let's rededicate ourselves to the cause of the insurance employees, the public sector insurance industry and the people of India at large by reinforcing our commitment to the ideology of the working class.

With Revolutionary Greetings,

Comradely Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Shreekanth Mishra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

General Secretary