

## **Suresh Dhopeshwarkar (President, AIBEA)**

A **short biographical note** on Suresh Dhopeshwarkar interviewed by Anil Rajimwale in Mumbai on June 19, 2003

I was born in February, 1942. I studied upto graduation and joined Maharashtra Bank in 1961 and was retired in 2002. I am president of All India Bank Employees Association and general secretary of Maharashtra Bank Employees Association.

I belongs to a middle class family and father was a railway clerk. For me, 1955 was the turning point of my life when I joined the singing squad of famous Communist singer Amar Sheikh who was collecting funds for Goa liberation struggle. Since then I have always been in touch with the left.

In 1957, I had taken up a job at the age of fifteen in a laundry to manage the expenses of my education. Here I came in contact with SG Patkar, Ganacharya (presently leader of the General Insurance) and was brought into Girni Kamgar union, the famous AITUC union of textile workers where SA Dange was general secretary and SM Joshi was president.

In 1959, in the leadership of Girni Kamgar union, action committee was formed for Sanyukta Maharashtra movement giving a new turn to the trade union activities.

I was continuing my studies in a morning college even after joining the bank. In 1962, Bombay university decided to close all morning colleges against which morchas were taken up to vice chancellor's offices. The agitation which was also against hike in the college fees continued upto 1963. By 1964, I was totally involved in bank activities.

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Socialists had tried to sneak in the organisation and take it away in October, 1962 against which the AIBEA workers had launched a struggle. It was a time of Chinese aggression and CPI workers were ridiculed. But Dange made a speech in the AITUC session defending motherland as well as defending class interest and silenced the critics.

In 1964, the Government extended the Desai commission period and thus obstructed the dearness allowance and the step was well within rules. The AIBEA protested in a unique way as they decided to launch "work to rule". It was for the first time the agitation was launched in the form of following the rules without extra cooperation offered by the employees to facilitate the bank work. Within a fortnight, entire system came to a grinding halt and the management had to yield offering 6 to 8 percent dearness allowance. At this time I was in the managing committee of Maharashtra Bank Employees union. In 1965, I was joint secretary and in '67, I was general secretary of the union.

Between 1968 and '69, the AIBEA consistently campaigned for nationalisation of banks with the slogan of "defend nationalisation, defend democracy" with demands of standardisation of pay scales and service conditions.

After nationalisation of banks, I was appointed as a workman director from the board of directors in Bank of Maharashtra and continued upto 1978. In 1980, CITU wanted to split AIBEA and formed Employees Federation of West Bengal but later was proved to be a misadventure.

In 1983, AIBEA reached the first ever agreement on computerisation to meet the new challenges. From 1994 to 2000, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th bipartite settlements were concluded by the AIBEA. In 1996, AIBEA took initiative to form United Forum of Bank Unions to fight the government policies of privatisation. In last one decade, AIBEA has conducted three marches to Parliament against the policies of privatisation.

AIBEA has also shown courage to publish the names of the bank loan defaulters.

I am still the president of the AIBEA and have firm opinion that trade union activity should be free of interference from government, political parties and the employers themselves.

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