

ALL INDIA FORUM AGAINST PRIVATISATION (AIFAP)

AN ATTACK ON ONE IS AN ATTACK ON ALL!

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Support the just struggle of the ST workers of Maharashtra!

Statement of All India Forum Against Privatisation (AIFAP), November 2021

The All India Forum against Privatisation (AIFAP) supports the workers of the Maharashtra State Transport Corporation who have been on strike from 3rd November 2021. They are in a most difficult situation and have been staying in the 256 depots all over the state. They have been explaining to the people why they have had to go on strike. The state government had to bow down before them, but the workers have declared that they will not go back till their demand of merging with the state government is granted.

The state transport (ST) workers numbering about a lakh are very poorly paid. The ST workers serve the whole state, even the remotest villages. They have to drive and run poorly maintained buses for hours, over back-breaking roads. However, their salaries are delayed, sometimes by even four months. Far from getting the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission, even those of the 4th Pay Commission have not been properly implemented for these workers! On joining service, a driver /conductor gets Rs12,000 per month as basic pay and with all emoluments added, he gets Rs 15,000. Every year his basic pay is increased by a paltry 2%. In these days of huge rise in cost of living, how can any worker run a family with such poor wages? Moreover, there has been no periodic wage revision or settlement for them. It is due to this that in this year alone more than 40 drivers and conductors have committed suicide all over Maharashtra State. It is to protest these atrocious working conditions that the ST workers have gone on strike.

The ST Mahamandal, which runs the state transport, claims that it is in a loss. The Maharashtra State Transport Corporation provides bus services to the remotest villages of Maharashtra and to those passengers in towns who cannot afford more comfortable transport. That is why the ST bus is lovingly called the Lal Pari (the red fairy) by the commuters. It provides various concessions such as 50% ticket fare for senior citizens, concessions to differently abled persons, etc. These are social obligations which are met by the Corporation. The cost of these has to be borne by the Government of Maharashtra and it cannot be used to justify payment of poor wages to the drivers and conductors of the State Transport Corporation. That is why the workers are demanding that the Corporation be merged with the State Government.

At the same time the Governments of Maharashtra over the last 30 years has been encouraging private bus operators, who ply on the busy routes such as Mumbai Pune, Mumbai Nashik etc. This has also resulted in increasing the losses of the State Road Transport Corporation.

Ever since the policy of privatisation, liberalization and globalization was launched in 1991 by the then Congress Government, successive governments, whether Congress led or BJP led have all promoted the idea that all public services should be handed over to private corporates for making profit. The government claims that it has no money to spend on public health, education, transport, electricity, roads and so on. Then where does all the tax money go? Nearly 75% of the taxes collected by the Governments comes from the ordinary people as they pay tax on every consumer good that is bought in the market, whether matches, clothes, household items etc.

The government has the right to impose these taxes only because it has the duty of ensuring public welfare by providing affordable health facilities, education, transport, electricity etc. to the people. However, the bulk of the money the government earns by taxes is spent on wasteful expenditure and on providing incentives to private corporate to get richer. For example, these corporates have defaulted on loans taken from public sector banks to the tune of over Rs. 10 lakh crores. Instead of putting the defaulting corporate owners in jail and seizing their assets to repay the defaulting amounts, the Government covers the losses of the public sector banks by using money taxed from the ordinary people!

Today the Central Government is pushing the idea that “Government has no business to be in business”, which means that the Governments must exit from all public services, whether it is railways, road transport, electricity, water supply, education, health etc. and they should be privatized, which means that they should be handed over to private corporates for earning profit. It has also gone one step further and said that the public assets which have been created with the taxes collected from the people should be handed over to private corporates for a period of 30 to 60 years, using the term of “Monetization” and that these corporates can use these assets to earn super profits.

The All India Forum Against Privatisation was formed on July 4th 2021 to oppose this policy of privatization, corporatization and monetization of people’s assets. We must all unite and demand that the government serves the needs of all the working people – the workers, farmers, teachers, doctors, engineers, traders, etc. on the basis of whose work our country runs.

The All India Forum Against Privatisation fully supports the just demands of the State Transport workers of Maharashtra and calls on the Government of Maharashtra to immediately settle their demands while at the same time continuing to provide the essential bus services to the people of Maharashtra at affordable rates.