

Dear Friends,

KEC fully supports the heroic and just struggle of the AISMANs. You are not only fighting for your own just demands but for the entire railway workers of India because your demands reflect the demands of many sections of rail workers.

I'll just talk about the demand for filling up vacancies. This demand is of importance to all the public sector and government workers. Out of 40 lakh sanctioned posts in central government departments, nearly 20% of posts have been vacant for nearly a decade. The average annual recruitment just about takes care of yearly retirements. It means the government has no intention to fill these positions. In the last 28 years, the Indian Railway employees have been reduced by 26%. Nearly 3.3 lakh vacant posts have not been filled for years. On the top of that 72,000 posts have been abolished. The number of contract workers is reported to have shot up to 7 lakhs, in complete violation the government's own laws.

The situation is equally appalling in other PSEs, including electricity, petroleum and other companies. Please note that this has been happening irrespective of the party or coalition in the Centre. It is a policy of the ruling class of India, led by the handful of monopolists like Tata, Birla, Ambani, and now Adani and so on who want the number of employees to be reduced before privatisation.

I do not have to elaborate on the very harmful effects on workers due to the large number of vacancies. I am sure you all will tell us much more about it. What we must note is how it is used to justify privatisation. A large number of vacancies leads to poor customer service, which in turn is used to malign workers and to justify privatisation.

Thus, not filling up vacancies is part and parcel of the policy of globalisation through liberalisation and privatisation that is being implemented not only in India, but practically all over the world. It is a program to benefit the monopolies at the cost of workers and people at large. So, the fight of station masters is the fight for all the workers and people of the country.

Those who claim that railways will not be privatised may be living in a dream world. We have seen it happening before our eyes as activity after activity has been outsourced, stations have been privatised, and trains have been privatised, and so on.

It is many years since any struggle has been organised in the Indian Railways though privatisation of railway assets is going ahead in full speed. All the workers doing various jobs face harsh working conditions. Safety is compromised daily. Over 400 track maintainers are killed every year on the tracks alone. This is totally avoidable, so we cannot call them accidents. The main cause of this is the lack of unity among the railway workers.

KEC has been working for many years among the rail workers to bring this unity. In October 2017, when a large number of rail accidents were happening all over India, KEC organised a meeting in Mumbai under the title "What is the cause of the large number of Rail Accidents?" This meeting was attended by representatives of Loco pilots (AILRSA), Guards,

(AIGC), and track maintainers (AIRTU). KEC had also striven to bring various people's and passenger's organisations for this meeting to build the unity of workers and passengers.

To strengthen unity among rail workers KEC then organised 8 physical meetings from 2018 to 2019 in Mumbai. These meetings had the participation of Mumbai and National level leaders of the category association of station masters (AISMA), loco pilots (AILRSA), guards (AIGC), track maintainers (AIRTU), train controllers (AITCA), ticket checking staff (IRTCSO), S&T employees (IRS&TMU) & engineers (AIREF). These 8 meetings were held with the support of the National leadership of these organisations. When the 100-day Action Plan to privatise the IR was announced by the Central Government, KEC along with many of the category associations immediately organised a meeting in Mumbai to oppose it. Over a hundred workers participated despite driving monsoon rain that had disrupted travel.

The 8 meetings greatly helped to strengthen the unity among the rail workers. During Covid, KEC called an online meeting of all rail workers against privatisation on September 5th 2020. At this meeting the representatives of all these category association were present. The anger of the rail workers against their working condition and their burning desire to build unity was reflected in more than 300 rail workers attending this meeting. This led to the reconstitution of NCCRS on October 29th 2020; the National Coordination Committee of Railway Men's Struggle (NCCRS) was the organisation that led the historic National strike of railway workers in 1974.

All the railway workers thought this was a very positive step and supported the foundation of NCCRS. The founding meeting of NCCRS had 16 national federations and unions including KEC as its members, comrade Shiv Gopal Mishra as its convenor and Dr. Raghavaiah, leader of the NFIR as its co-convenor. However, in the last 19 months, no NCCRS meeting has been held despite repeated attempts. This has been a great disappointment for all railway workers who desire unity.

More than a year back, as per the decision of the Committee of the NCCRS, a team from KEC had prepared a booklet in English and Hindi to educate railway workers themselves about the dangers of privatisation and to build unity amongst them to fight against it. Unfortunately, despite several reminders, this booklet has also not been brought out.

Right from its formation, KEC has been participating in the struggles of the working class with the vision of uniting the class to fight against the rule of the capitalists. Whether it is the historic strike of the textile workers of Mumbai, the fight against the privatisation of Modern Foods or the struggles of plantation workers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, activists of KEC have worked hard to the best of their abilities.

KEC worked in the period from 2011 to 2013 among various national federations of public and private sector unions to bring unity among them. It organised a series of meetings in Mumbai involving various public and private sector unions who were on struggle at that time. This included All India service engineers association (Air India), Western Railway motormen's association, Air India Air Craft Engineers Association, All India Postal Employees Union, Indian commercial pilots Association (Air India), Mumbai Municipal Teachers Union, All India Loco Running Staff Association, Air India Employees Union, All India Voltas

Employees Union, BPCL Lab Technicians Union, Maharashtra Association of Residents Doctors and All India Guards Council. KEC members went to all the demonstration and strikes of these organisations and mobilised support from all the other public sector unions for their struggle.

It is this work carried out over decades that has enabled it to play a key role in the formation of AIFAP, of which all of you are such enthusiastic contributors.

Once again I salute the station masters under the leadership of AISMA for their heroic strike on May 31st. I have no doubt that this struggle will inspire all of us to fight better, support each other more and develop a common vision for the future of our country.

Thank you, dear friends and comrades.