

## ***Ensure that the opportunity is rightly utilised.***

India is considered to be the biggest democratic country in the world and people get the opportunity to vote periodically to decide who should be the rulers for the next five years. The Election Commission has already announced the schedule of the election to the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> April to 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 and declaration of results on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

Every election is crucial, but this time it is most crucial. Before taking a decision to vote, we should analyse the situation based on our own experiences and come to a conclusion. The attack on pension started with introduction of contributory pension scheme instead of hard fought achieved defined benefit statutory pension scheme from 01.01.2004 by the BJP led NDA government, even without any legislation. The attack is further intensified by the Congress led UPA government with passing the PFRDA bill in the Parliament with the active support of the BJP despite stiff opposition of the left parties. Even the recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee to ensure minimum pension in the bill was not accepted. The next target will be the post 2004 recruited employees and the present pensioners who are getting statutory pension and family pension. This is certain to happen, if the congress or BJP is again voted to power, utilizing the provision in the PFRDA Act for the same.

BSNL is passing through a serious crisis, incurring losses since the last three years and pushed back in the competition with the private telecom companies. 100 per cent FDI is allowed in this vital sector which will pave way for taking over Indian companies by the foreign giant telcos. The proposed merger of BSNL with MTNL is another back door effort to finish the public sector telecom company for the sake of the private telecom companies. Even existing benefits like quarterly medical allowance, Bonus, LTC leave encashment etc. are denied to the employees and pensioners. The Central Government employees had to resort to a two days strike on 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2014 on their genuine demands of merger of 50% DA, grant of interim relief, inclusion of Gramin Dak Sevaks in the terms of reference of 7<sup>th</sup> Pay Commission etc. But the government did not even call them for a discussion which is ample proof of its complete negligence towards employees issues.

Several struggles and strikes are waged by the Central Trade Unions, the latest strike being the 48 hrs strike on February 20 – 21, 2013, on 10 point demands including price rise, minimum wages for unorganized sector, enforcement of labour laws, ensure pension to all etc. Even though the Prime Minister responded positively to the genuine demands of the workers in the 45<sup>th</sup> Indian Labour Conference nothing is done. On the contrary, more retrograde measures are initiated by hiking LPG price, steeply to put the people to more miseries.

We are on 67<sup>th</sup> year of Independent India. It was from the year 1991, a new economic policy was adopted by the then congress government, the main features being, globalization, liberalization and privatization. This is being pursued vigorously by the central governments both under Congress and BJP. Now let us examine the real condition of the people. According to the latest estimation of an international research organisation, 680 million, 56% of the population lacks the means to meet their essential needs. 41% people have not a piece of land. Every 10 minute one woman dies on delivery, 218 children die at every hour due to malnutrition, 34% of the people have no kitchen and 53% lacks Latrine. 3.5 lakh farmers committed suicide. This is one side of the picture. What is the other side? The number of billionaires in 2003 was 13, but now there are 61 billionaires in India. Natural resources are being given to the corporates either free of cost or at throw away prices. When subsidies to the poor on food, education, health and social welfare are cut drastically, the corporates are flourished with concessions; from 2006 to 2013 Rs.28 lakh crore was given to the corporates for one or other pretext. The unholy rapport of the politicians in power, corporates and the top bureaucracy are indulging in large scale corruption and scams. Black money has become parallel to the economy and no action is taken by the government. The question before us is whether we should allow these state of affairs to continue? If the answer is no, then we have to choose those with alternative policies since both congress and BJP are committed to the neo-liberal policies. And we have seen in many instances, these two parties competing each other to please the corporates. The left parties have always stood with the workers and the common people and it is a welcome political development that 11 secular and democratic parties have joined together under the leadership of the left parties and is emerged as the viable alternative against both congress and BJP. Let us strive hard for the victory of this political combine for safeguarding our rights and the bright future of the country.

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