

Oppose Market Oriented Reforms in Higher Education!
Organize Workshops, Seminars in Universities and Colleges against the
Higher Education Bills in the Parliament!

Collect Signatures against the Bills

Send the memorandum to the Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee on HRD and
 Send copies to the Prime Minister and to the HRD Minister!
 Also, send copies to Speaker, Loksabha and Chairperson, Rajyasabha

Call of AIFRTE

28TH September, 2012

Dear Friends

The UPA Government implemented the 'Right to Education Act' from 1st April 2010. The result, as everybody can see, has been the weakening of public education system and big hikes in fees in private schools. The Right To Education Act, as it is under implementation, is only creating further stratification in school education against the long cherished goal of Common School System. However, the Minister for Human Resource Development Kapil Sibal, having destroyed the school system, has now initiated market reforms in higher education. A series of Bills related to higher education are before the Parliament and may be passed in the forthcoming winter session (November-December, 2012) this year. If enacted, these Bills will make higher education an unprotected prey for both domestic and foreign corporations. The academic consequences of such 'reforms' will be catastrophic. The privately-borne high cost of education will put a premium on disciplines and courses that is directly linked to the demands of domestic and foreign markets that currently generate some jobs and the biggest salaries for few. Fundamental research, both in social and natural sciences, and pro-people research and democratic syllabi will suffer an inevitable decline. As a consequence, the critical and transformational purpose of institutions of higher education will recede into the background, as they are rapidly turned into 'providers' of a commodity called 'knowledge'. No need to say that both the 'merit' and 'social justice' will be replaced by money.

New Bills:

'The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, 2010', which was introduced in 2010, opens flood gates for foreign trade in education sector. 'The Educational Tribunals Bill, 2010' seeks to establish a draconian grievance redressal system in conditions in which unionization and collective action, and even recourse to the courts, would be denied to all sections of the University community. 'The Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Technical Educational Institutions, Medical Educational Institutions and Universities Bill, 2010' defines only those exorbitant demands for fees that have not been announced at the time of admissions as constituting 'unfair practice' and thus legitimizes the rest of all unfair practices! 'The National Accreditation Regulatory Authority for Higher Educational Institutions Bill, 2010', which was again introduced in 2010, is intended to set up an Accreditation

Authority, has the declared objective of maintenance of quality. Yet its main purpose is not academic; it at the best can function as an aid to students to decide where they should 'invest' to get the best 'returns' from the system. These accreditation agencies can, even, misguide the students on facts and figures about the colleges they give accreditation to. In an educational environment as historically, regionally and socially diverse and unequal as contemporary India, it would seriously compromise those courses and institutions that would in fact merit the most support. In the new regime, if established, private agencies will give accreditation to private and public Universities.

A 'National Commission for Higher Education and Research', is proposed to be established through 'The Higher Education and Research Bill, 2011' as the 'single-window' entry point, so favoured by corporate capital, to replace bodies like the UGC, MCI, AICTE, NCTE which have been regulating diverse academic streams. Now these are seen as hurdles in the onward march of trade in education. The important point to be noted here is that the World Bank suggests to and the World Trade Organization imposes on their member countries to set up a single and 'independent' regulatory authority in every service sector. These independent regulatory authorities will be independent of democratic pressure from the people and regulate trade in favour of corporate houses. Again, the proposed 'Universities for Innovation Bill' empowers the central government to establish new or 'elevate' the existing universities and go for collaboration with foreign universities on trade lines bypassing all existing norms including reservations, procedures of appointment of teachers and admission of students with the only condition that they enrol 50% students from within the country. These Universities will bypass all other rules of recognition. There is an all round attempt to push for implementation the project of the so-called Public Private Partnership - a euphemism for siphoning public funds to private agencies.

Since the 1990's it has become very well-known that 'reform' in any sector only means privatization, globalization and liberalization of trade regulations. The current agenda of HRD Ministry is to bring these 'reforms' into the education system and convert it into a market for domestic and foreign corporate capital. That is why the singular purpose behind all the higher education bills is to bypass regulation by the legislative, judicial and executive systems and clear the path for unrestrained trade in education.

The Crisis in the Educational System:

Corrupt practices under the pressure of profit oriented private institutions on the one hand and the failure to invest public funds in a sustained manner, on the other, contributed largely to dereliction of duties in existing regulatory bodies. What is required at this stage is to bring about genuine reform - to ban trade in education on one hand and decentralize and democratize regulatory bodies on the other. Again, the expansion of the system (only about 12% of young people in the relevant age group are in higher education institutions) and ensuring greater access to students from marginalized and weaker sections of society must form the basis for improving and reforming higher education. However the corporate guided reform process is going in the opposite direction. Commercialization of education and concentration of regulatory powers are aimed at restricting entry into this sector only for the wealthy elite and with the onset of global trade in education, the Indian education system will lose whatever democratic nature it has been able to retain till date. Public Private Partnership will result in dissolution of public institutions and establishment of a few elite institutions and many 'teaching shops' in the private sector. Public money will be siphoned off and public facilities and assets will be transferred to private agencies while, the poor and disadvantaged will have to spend their prime period of life for poor

quality education which will neither beget knowledge nor jobs for them. Public Private Partnership is said to be a project for inclusion of disadvantaged but, it actually is designed to benefit corporate houses. The NDA government had already 'offered' the higher education sector as a tradable commodity to be regulated by General Agreement on trade in Services (GATS) under World Trade Organization (WTO). The present UPA government is continuing the 'offer'. In fact, the higher education Bills introduced in the Parliament are aimed at putting in place the legal structure that would facilitate implementation of the regulations of the WTO. If the offer is not withdrawn before the completion of the Doha Round of trade negotiations, Indian higher education would be governed, in perpetuity, by multilateral trade regulations under WTO. This would pose a grave threat to academic independence and national sovereignty.

A People's Alternative:

It is high time for students, teachers, educationists democratic organizations and activists and for all progressive people to stand up against commercialization and commoditization of education and wage a determined struggle for Common School System and public-funded democratic and egalitarian education from 'KG to PG'. Clearly, no pro-people higher education system can be built without laying its foundation firmly in a public-funded Common School System. This would ensure equal opportunity to all young people after Class XII to participate in higher education. A fully public-funded higher education system is also a pre-condition for promotion of courses and research aimed at disseminating and creating knowledge in wider social interest, rather than in the interest of global capital alone. It is time for all to struggle for a truly democratic education system that excludes inequalities and includes diversities, an education system that liberates human creativity and an education system that builds egalitarian, secular, scientific and humane values and, at the same time, strengthens society to stand against any threat internal or external to the democratic rights and freedoms of the people.

Let us all unite and resist higher education Bills!

With Compliments from
All India Forum for Right to Education
 306, Pleasant Apartments, Bazarghat, Hyderabad -4,
 Ph: 04023305266, E-mail: aifрте.secretariat@gmail.com

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Presidium, All India Forum For Right To Education:

Prof. Mehar Engineer (Chairperson), Ms. Madhu Prasad, Prof. Anil Sadgopal, Prof. Wasi Ahmed, Prof. Haragopal, Sri Kedarnath Pandey, Sri Prabhakar Arade, Sri Sunil;

Contact:

Sri D. Ramesh Patnaik (Organizing Secy.) 09440980396,
 Dr. Vikram Amrawat (Off. Secy.) 09429519037

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Name and address of the local Organization

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