

Press Release of AIFRTE against the MHRD Move to Ensure the Entry of Foreign Universities through Back Door

Stop Centralization of Power In Education

The Ministry of Human Resource Development and its Minister Kapil Sibal are once again in the news (The Hindu June 1, 2012) for the unseemly haste being shown in clearing the way for the entry of 'foreign education providers' (FEP) into the higher education 'market' in India. The Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill, which has been criticized vociferously by All India Forum for Right to Education (AIF-RTE) and other progressive students and teachers organizations and groups, was introduced in Parliament in May 2010. It met with strong opposition, particularly from the Left parties, and was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, which recommended major changes.

What Mr. Kapil Sibal could not achieve through democratic parliamentary procedure, he is now trying to do by browbeating the already pliant University Grants Commission. A scheduled meeting for July 21 was advanced to June 2. No agenda was circulated but apparently members were orally told that issues relating to entry of FEP were to be urgently decided upon. UGC has hurriedly issued a clarification that devising a regulatory framework for such entry falls within their purview and that is what the Commission will decide at its meeting.

When the Bill is still pending before Parliament, resorting to such maneuvers constitutes a blatantly anti-democratic attempt to push through the 'backdoor' what cannot be achieved through public debate and accountability.

The Minister's need for urgency is not motivated by concern for student interest, faculty improvement, or the desire to develop higher education sector in India both in quality and equality. The problems facing more than 500 universities, thousands of colleges, and the lakhs of students studying in them, have been grossly neglected by successive governments over the past three decades. The present MHRD Minister too has displayed no anxiety or concern regarding their fate. Mr. Kapil Sibal's impending visit to the United States later this month, where he must

announce during the Indo-US Strategic Dialogue that India's higher education sector is now 'opened up', i.e. is now a market to be rapaciously exploited by FEPs, is the real reason for throwing even the fig-leaf of parliamentary approval to the winds and racing down to where the proverbial fools rush in.

AIF-RTE strongly condemns the actions of the Minister. Its opposition to the policy of giving a free hand to foreign interests to exploit the genuine and widespread desire of all sections of Indian youth, particularly the deprived, the marginalized and the challenged, to have access to quality education, is well known and articulated in its resolutions, literature and through its protest actions. It has repeatedly warned of the threat to the country's independence and sovereignty that the present policy represents.

AIF-RTE welcomes the prompt response of the CPI (M) in rejecting the Government's moves as constituting contempt of Parliament. It warned the Minister against taking steps which would subvert the system of higher education, increase elitism and promote rampant commercialization of higher education. AIF-RTE appeals to all parties and members of parliament to protest against the Government's moves. We further appeal to all left, democratic and oppositional parties inside and outside the parliament to resist this anti-democratic imposition through protests and struggles and not to confine only to paper statements. We call upon all member-organizations and individual members of AIF-RTE to expose the nefarious designs of the Human Resource Development Ministry and Kapil Sibal and mobilize a strong public opinion against the operations of foreign capital in education in India.

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