

TEACHERS' UNION

By M. J. Audi

For the first time in history of India has admitted that there is such a thing as the teacher's point of view. During the strike, enemies of teachers created an impression that their prime concern was pay-hike. In a money-based society, they are obliged to respect the lucre but the teacher's first love is knowledge. The teachers' union should strive to revive the pristine purity of the profession. They should work hard to convince the society that if excellence does not strike roots in Indian soil, the fault is not of teachers. What, then, are the duties of teachers' union?

Loyalty

Some teachers used the strike to reaffirm their loyalty to college managements and university administrations. Knowing that benefits of strike would flow to them, they prepared ground for the most favourable treatment during implementation of scales. The teachers' unions should end such opportunism in the tribe. They should identify and expose them. Whenever colleges and universities show favouritism, the unions should challenge it at appropriate forums. The fixation of every teacher in new scale should be circulated to all teachers within every college and every university. There are also teachers who are quickly kicked upstairs through political pulls. They openly defy university administrators but the latter dare not touch the former yet promptly issue memos to teachers without godfathers. The unions should insist upon academic discipline in colleges and universities.

All universities are victims of corruption in the appointments and promotions of teachers; construction and maintenance of buildings and purchases of library, laboratory and secretarial requirements. In every university annual expenditure runs into crores of rupees. As corruption kills excellence the unions should work to clean springs of education defiled at source.

The universities should declare their policies of promotion to ascertain whether they are fair for all and are faithfully implemented in all their departments. The creation of posts of Readers and Professors in every department needs thorough scrutiny. It is widely suspected that the authorities formulate proposals with specific persons in mind and justify them by inventing laudable reasons. The discretionary powers are exercised in ridiculous manner. What is roundly condemned as a defect in one teacher is warmly praised as a feat of genius in the other because he or she is a blue-eyed baby of high-ups.

His and her doodles are orchestrated as sparks of excellence. The unions should save the universities from becoming laughing stocks and compel them to respect merit on the basis of precise criteria. The organs of universities specially planning boards, academic councils and executive councils presently record only final decisions. They should be compelled to record entire discussion along with decisions. Thereby the teachers would know not only the issues involved but also calibre and competence of the members of these bodies. Expenditure on such recordings would be lesser than that on entertainments hosted by universities.

Autonomy

University autonomy has become autocracy of educational bureaucrats. Educational bureaucrat is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction controls our universities using a few teachers that become willing pawns. Why should particular principal and particular professor be a member of the most important bodies of university as well as a member of its various committees and sub-committees? For a few crumbs, he deserts the cause. When their black deeds see the light, noble profession looks ignoble to the society. Why should academic positions go only to principals and professors when their calibre does not differ from that of teachers in different categories? Why should the UGC delegations going abroad be composed exclusively of its office-bearers and the vice-chancellors? Is this funny snobbery of status pathetic or pathologic? Unions should insist upon immediate scrapping of perrilous colonial legacy of positions and prizes such as attending international conferences going ex-officio. They should also insist that the membership of UGC delegations is within the reach of every college and university teacher regardless of category working in any corner of the country.

Management

Why are not the teachers actively associated with the managements of their colleges? Why should colleges be in private hands when they contribute only a negligible percentage of total expenditure? Nowadays, people start colleges not to give education but to collect money through donations that are never completely accounted and for using huge grants given by the Governments to meet immediate needs of their personal enterprises. The teachers should be given effective representation on the governing bodies of the col-

leges. Their representatives should not be the handpicked nominees of managements but should be selected by themselves.

The present structure of universities breeds cliques and coteries that specialise in self-perpetuation and promotion of vested interests. General belief is that only politicians plot. Before the machinations of some members of planning boards, academic councils and executive councils, the politicians pale into insignificance. University organisation in India cries for structural changes. No person should be a member of more than one organ of university at any time. No person should have more than one term in any organ. No person should be eligible to be the member of any organ after two terms. The terms of all bodies should be restricted to four years. The teachers should have 70 per cent representation in every organ of university. In our times the methods of nomination and election stand discredited. Nomination always means favouritism, servility and sycophancy. Election means malpractices, manipulations and play of money. Selection by lot is cheap, fair and just. The teachers should be selected by lot from common register of college and university teachers in each university. Only such an organisation will end unholy alliance between bureaucrats and teachers and make our universities academic and democratic. Same principles should govern the organisation of the unions of teachers. Their office-bearers must set up examples in integrity which alone will enable them to remove hindrances from the path of excellence.

Status

Public monies given to colleges and universities must not be squandered recklessly on furnishings and fittings of the residences and offices of their high officials. Every campus presents a contrast that is glaring and sharp. The areas inhabited by the high officials are clean and hygienic. Not so are the students' hostels and staff-quarters. Even places of work and working tools are infected by the virus of status as could be seen from quality of rooms, toilets, typewriters, tables and chairs. The unions should strive for clean and healthy campuses. All are human beings first and status-creatures afterwards.

It is strange that a poor country with poorer resources does not provide rigorous checks on its finances. The accounts of colleges and universities should be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

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The auditing must be done within three months of closing of the financial year. Audit should not be a random sample but thoroughly exhaustive. Improper expenditures should be recovered within six months from the persons sanctioning them. Delayed audit without recovery of mis-spent monies are useless post-mortems. Between the lines of written agreements with architects, builders and suppliers lie unwritten understandings between them and decision-makers. The opportunities for making money at the expense of universities and colleges are infinite. So are the pretexts for frequent air travels and stays in expensive hotels. The teachers' unions should be ever vigilant to prevent public monies pumped into private pockets.

The Goa Government deserve congratulations for their decision to give the public an access to the files. That by itself cannot eliminate corruption but

is certainly a sound step. The unions should demand that files relating to every aspect of university administration and college management should be accessible to any teacher without the payment of fees. No document should be removed from any file on grounds of confidentiality. Truncated files are covers for corruption. It is a mistake to think that public interests are better known only to the rulers and decision-makers.

Excellence

The universities will acquire name and fame when their teachers are devoted to the pursuit of excellence. As Jawaharlal Nehru said "if all is well the universities, all would be well with the nation." The teachers' unions should serve the nation by creating true temples of learning in India.