

AICCTU Takes up cudgels for Tramway Workers

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The Calcutta Tramways Company Bus Drivers-O- Karmachari Samiti (CTCBDKS), the newest union (an affiliate of AICCTU) in the Calcutta Tramways Company (1978) Ltd, an undertaking under the Government of West Bengal, has created ripples among the staff and workers in the CTCL. This is yet another expression of rapid erosion of confidence-level of CITU, AITUC and INTUC unions among tram workers.

For over a decade, over 200 bus drivers in CTC were kept as casual/contract workers. But for the emergence and activism of CTCBDKS, 69 of them would not have been in substantive employment. They now get Rs 10,000 a month (excluding PF and other statutory receivables) as they are now on the permanent roll.

Casual bus drivers used to get Rs 60 a day (on days of work only). Sustained agitation by the CTCBDKS caused a raise of Rs 10 (effective from 10 months back, although arrear payment is yet to be disbursed). Ever since these bus drivers were recruited, they have been victims of calculated repression : deprived of casual and earned leave, even leave due to illness or medical grounds. Normal benefits like PF, gratuity, ESI and uniform allowance or annual allocation of free uniforms are all denied.

The tendency to deprive CTC workers - not bus drivers alone - is not new, although CTC chairman Rajdeo Goala is a national working committee member of CITU and a member of Kolkata district secretariat of CPI(M). He is also the president of CITU-affiliate in CTC. Last year, bus drivers were paid ex-gratia of Rs 1000. The CTCBDKS leadership "moved the Labour Commissioner of West Bengal and drew the attention of the latter of the rules in vogue to compel the reluctant CTC management to pay Rs 3500 as bonus to every CTC staff/worker", said CTCBDKS president Dibakar Bhattacharya. "We have demanded that the management pay Rs 2500 for the previous year", he added.

Bus drivers previously were denied of casual leave. Now they get eight days' CL every year with full pay.

In ditching CTC workers - not bus drivers alone- the company stops no where, a CPI(M) senior leader at the helm notwithstanding. Some of the gross violations of workers' rights include : ESI dues of about Rs 70 lakhs ; keeping PF money which is but workers' money at the CTC, instead of depositing the same to the Regional PF Commissioner (workers not apprised of where and how much of PF money is invested) ; CTC authorities remaining aloof when bus drivers have to incur the cost of legal expenses and attending courts for violation of traffic laws, and get victimised by traffic police ; treating drivers injured in accidents as laid-off workmen during the period on convalescence ; and leaving them to bear the cost of treatment.

Nonetheless, Comrade Dibakar warns against any complacency about instances of success. "We have achieved some but the volume of unachieved is mammoth. We have to wage struggle demanding criminal prosecution by the PF and ESI authorities for deceiving workers. CTC chairman

and directors as also concerned executives ought to be issued non-bailable arrest warrants as per rules and practices. Another deliberately vindictive decision by the Left Front government is promulgation of an ordinance, if a person is run over by the CTC, CSTC or government-run transport bus, the police will lodge a case against the concerned driver under Section 304 of the Indian Penal Code. This is highly unethical. Culpable homicide doesn't mean murder. There are many such burning issues which we have to take on."

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