

Railway Recruitment to Push Privatisation

The Railway Minister announced that his department will recruit to fill 90,000 vacant posts this year. The last recruitment came five years back in 2013, when 20,000 were recruited for jobs like trackman, sanitary staff, office messengers, porters, train clerks and traffic apprentices.

The breakup of these 90,000 jobs is a) 26,000 assistant loco pilots and technicians; b) 63,000 group D workers; c) 400 junior engineers and d) 410 pointsman and station masters.

During 1990s, Indian Railways had about 2.5 million employees. By 2000 this number had come down to 1.54 million and now it is 1.25 million. Yet the ministry shows 2,22,509 posts as vacant, among which those belonging to safety category is 1,28,942 jobs. The intention to fill 90,000 jobs is far less than half of the vacancies. There is no substantial recruitment in the safety jobs such as guards.

The railway authorities announced that not all the posts are going to be filled up by permanent workers. Only what are assigned as “essential posts” will be filled on regular basis, while the will be outsourced.

Indian Railways takes ITI and polytechnic diploma holders as apprentices. Even after completion of their apprenticeship they are not being absorbed by the railways. The hope of joining the railway job of thousands of these apprentices was dashed.

Moreover, the railway authorities have brought down the minimum qualification required from ITI to Class 10. They argue that most group C and D jobs do not need candidates to learn anything more than what they learn at class 10 and that the jobs in railways have to be basic services like cleaning up and maintenance of track and coaches for which Class 10 is sufficient. With this the number of potential job seekers rose from 5 million to 63 million.

This is a double-edged policy: on the one side, railways continue to outsource the group C and D jobs and the posts offered will remain at low level of salary. More over the railways calculates that the same number of recruited people will retire by the end of 2019 with higher salary and technical background saving it more finances.

On the other side, Indian railway is replacing the technical jobs with automation. The railway Minister enhanced the outlay for modernising signalling system by 141 per cent and aims to eliminate human interface in the signalling system. The red and green flags – signature sign of Indian railways – will soon disappear.

The Delhi Metro has been handing over job of drivers to machines. There is recruitment for guards in the present announcement. The Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety emphasised the critical role played by the guards in averting accidents and ascertaining the reasons for an accident or incident and recommended filling up of all the vacant posts of guards. The railway authorities are hell bent upon to replace guards with EOTT machines.

Most of the automation leads to dependence on foreign technology which necessarily involves huge sums of debt financing. Whatever financial gains perceived by the railway authorities by automation will be wiped out in debt servicing and our dependence on foreign companies grow many folds.

Instead of providing more safe and comfortable travel to the commuters, and expanding the railway network with doubling the single track to speed up the trains, the leaders of the central government are squandering the scarce resources on wasteful projects that will not serve the needs of common commuter like bullet trains high speed trains etc. While millions of youth are facing unemployment, the government is curtailing the job opportunities on the top doling out jobs without security for job and at work place.
