

Students against Privatisation of Visakha Steel Plant

Visakha Steel Plant (VSP) is a PSU which was achieved with a prolonged struggle in unison of people with the slogan “Visakha Ukku-Andrula Hakku”(Visakha Steel is Andhra’s Right). The central govt was put in a fix with the resignation of 70 MLAs and MPs in protest. But, today the Narendra Modi government is gearing up to sell off the Plant which was product of massive struggles and sacrifices of the people to Multinational Companies. Without any mention in 2021-22 Union Budget, the govt preparing to sell off VSP on the behest of Corporates. With the Union Cabinet approving 100% disinvestment of its equity in VSP, the future of lakhs of people who directly and indirectly depend on the Plant for employment is uncertain. Over the past 20 years the central government’s repeated attempts for the sale of Steel Plant to Private Sector was resisted fiercely by the working class. The working class is once again gearing up for a struggle as Narendra Modi, tyrannically implementing anti-democratic policies, has devised a strategy to sell VSP in the name of “Strategic Sale”. PDSO is active in the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed for the protection of VSP and playing a key role in making the students and youth as active partners in the movement.

As soon as the Central Government announced its decision to privatize the steel plant, published 10,000 pamphlets and campaigned extensively, especially in Visakhapatnam City and in some other districts in Andhra Pradesh. Participated in meetings, rallies and other protest programmes organized by the Left and Democratic Forums. As part of the AP State bandh call on March 5th, successfully organized and distributed pamphlets class-to-class in Andhra University. A Student Bulletin is published and taken among the Students, Intellectuals and Democrats, describing the history of the “Visakha Ukku-Andhrula Hakku” movement and how the Imperialist Multinationals were plundering our Country’s natural resources. It received a good response.

On March 17th, the State leadership spoke at a rally with 250 students in solidarity with the relay hunger strike observed by Visakhapatnam Steel Plant employees and people displaced due to Plant. Cultural team of students sang songs of the masses. Prior to this, on March 15th and 16th, distributed pamphlets extensively and campaigned in schools and colleges in the localities of Gajuwaka, Pedagantyada and Kurmannapalem in the vicinity of the Steel Plant.

PDSO has been instrumental in organizing the hunger strike in Visakhapatnam City and has played a key role in making students partners in the movement. With the

initiative of PDSO, JAC was formed with left leaning Student and Youth organisations PDSO, SFI, AISF, DYFI and AIYF. As part of the charted programme of JAC, "Student and Youth March" campaigned with 10,000 pamphlets to make it a success. On April 16th, a massive rally with 1500 students was organised from the Andhra University gate in Maddilapalem to the GVMC Gandhi statue, followed by a Public Meeting.

In the public meeting, PDSO State General Secretary Com A. Suresh said that Students and Youth plunged into the movement leaving schools and colleges under one slogan "Visakha Ukku -Andhrula Hakku". As the movement intensified, police opened fire on November 1st, 1966, killing 32 people, including a nine-year-old boy. As the leader of the then Legislative Assembly, Comrade Tarimela Nagireddy waged a struggle in Assembly and 63 MLA's resigned from the State Legislature. The people of 64 villages were displaced for acquisition of land required for establishing the Steel Plant. The steel plant was established as a result of the immense sacrifices and struggles of the people of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The Central Government is about to sell the Plant worth over Rs 3 lakh crore at a dirt cheap price of Rs 32,000 crore for the benefit of companies like Ambani's, Adani's and POSCO. The process of selling or disinvestment of PSU's is being implemented by the Narendra Modi Government as a continuation of the liberalisation, privatisation and globalization policies adopted in 1991. Modi disinvested Rs 2 lakh crore during his first five-year rule, and in the 2021-22 Union Budget decided to accumulate Rs 1.74 lakh crore by selling the National Highways Authority, Railways, Oil, Natural gas and other Public Sector Undertakings. As part of this exercise, the Central Government has put the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant for sale. Modi has promised to give two crore jobs every year if he comes to power, just to grab the votes of unemployed youth. When he came to power, creation of new jobs is nil but selling of the Public Sector Units picked momentum. So, Students and Youth must struggle against Pro-Corporate, Anti-People policies of the Government, privatization of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant and for the protection of PSUs' and employment opportunities to the Youth. The meeting was attended by SFI State Secretary A. Ashok, Chairman of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant Protection Committee C.H. Narsinga Rao and district leaders of DYFI and AISF.