

## Student Power

GONE ARE THE DAYS OF TUR-bulent student rebellion of the 1960s. That was a worldwide phenomenon. Student Movement got radicalised to such an extent that the ruling authorities everywhere irrespective of their political colour began to see growing threat to their vested interests. And India was no exception. Students in the most sensitive states of Bengal, Andhra and Kerala revolted with tremendous vigour and new ideas against the system. No doubt student revolutionaries sounded crazy in those days. But revolutionaries often do. And things are pole apart today. Anything called student movement with a cause does hardly exist. The situation is no better even in the so-called left-ruled states.

Student politics these days revolves around union election and how to enjoy union funds. Also, their activity includes partisan admission and extraction of undue advantage in promoting failed students even by forcing the administrative authorities to kowtow under humiliation. All student bodies, left and right alike, do not differ in their approach to student politics. Even left student organisations do seldom resort to student mobilising on pressing issues like Iraq war, human rights violators by security forces in different states. Nor do they think it is their duty to respond to critical issues that affect the society at large.

What worries academics and social activists most at the moment is a recent proposal by the Students Federation of India (SFI), the student wing of CPM, seeking permissions from the party hierarchy to spread its wings in schools, otherwise still free from organised politicisation. Boys and girls who in most cases do not understand the intricacies of parliamentary opportunism will be utilised as pawns. One reason SFI is tempted to capture schools is the lowering of voting age as new voters who are too enthusiastic to exercise their adult franchise abound at the higher secondary school level.

Surprisingly, students unions in universities and colleges never agitate for primary education for all. Nor do they find any reason to protest vigorously against the government policy of systematic dismantling of government-aided higher education. They spend their energy on reservation and job quota while perpetuating ugly casteism.

Education, even school education, not to speak of higher education, is a costly commodity. Private players are investing in education in a big way only to make it inaccessible to middle class families. As for leftist unions like SFI, only thing matters in their student world is how to create a vote bank among the school-level educated. They are looking for immediate gains. Politics for school boys and girls cannot be anything but a disaster. □□□