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India

Solidarity with striking FTII students

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Radical Socialist condemns the unlawful detention of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) students and those in solidarity, assembled outside Shastri Bhavan in New Delhi on 3 July. We extend solidarity to the struggle of FTII students against the Modi government's attempt at interfering with the institute.

The FTII student's protest entered the 21st day against the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan and four other members to the governing council of the FTII. Students of the institute are on a strike since 15 June against the BJP government's interference in the institute of the country by nominating individuals that have no contribution to cinema or any art and are puppets of the Modi regime.

FTII stands among the many autonomous institutes and government bodies of the country that the Narendra Modi government has tampered with since coming to power. Since coming to power last year the Modi government has attempted to render the spheres of education and culture as puppets in the hand of the government.

Some of the educational institutions and cultural bodies where the Modi government has appointed party loyalists are the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), IIT Delhi, Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) and Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The de-recognition of Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle exposes the government's no tolerance policy to any form of dissent.

This is part of the larger design of BJP led NDA government to coerce autonomous institutions and bodies into fiefs of the Sangh Parivar. In the throes of this onslaught on democracy by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, the continuing resistance of students of FTII is significant. Students of the institute have pointed out that they are against interference from any political party, let alone the communal right-wing BJP in the affairs of the institute.

FTII represents a democratic space where various class, religion and political views find expression. An example of thriving democracy was on anvil when the FTII students invited Kabir Kala Manch, a cultural troupe to perform at the institute in August 2013 at a time when there was widespread apprehension of hosting them anywhere in Maharashtra. The FTII students braved the ire of the BJP student wing- ABVP's attack in the aftermath of the performance.

FTII is in the league of film schools world-wide like the Prague or Moscow and enjoy's autonomy. In 1968 a FTII Society was formed with powers of appointing members to govern the institute. The right of appointment of members to the society was retained by the government. Though, successive governments have continued the practice of appointing members on the Film society, members have been chosen carefully so as not to tarnish the image of the institute worldwide. Several film personalities having contribution to cinema like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal and Saeed Mirza have been the obvious choice of governments to the committee.

The Modi government's appointment of Chauhan and 4 other members is a departure of the practice of forming a governing council. Chauhan's only role to fame as Yudhisthir in the Hindu mythological T.V. saga Mahabharata, do not go in his favour as the choice for chairperson of the governing council. In a recent television conversation actor Anupam Kher showed up Chauhan for an ignoramus. Another name that has found itself to the governing council is Anagha Ghaisas, whose only film is a propaganda piece on Narendra Modi named 'Shapath Modi'. Also, among the members appointed is a Maharashtra president of BJP's student's outfit ABVP who has been nominated under the category of eminent persons with contribution to art.

Solidarity with striking FTII students

We believe that art bodies and institutes be managed by artists themselves. Interference of the government and any political party, in the matters is unwarranted. We support the students' call for a committee to look into the student's demands and scrap the present council and form it afresh with credible persons having contribution to art and culture.

On 3 July the students met with the I&B officials, but the latter were not ready to concede the demands. Students' apprehensions that Chauhan name as the chairperson came from the Prime Minister's Office found some weight with bureaucrats fearing to reverse the decision of the appointment to the institute with the fear of angering the Prime Minister. It is clear that the Modi government is bent on imposing a rightwing political agenda, and therefore urge all democratic forces to support the students and intensify the struggles. The striking students have already found immense support from artists and student activists across India and there is need for more people to participate in the intensifying theatre of protest.

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