

## CPI (M) calls for unions in IT sector



Saturday, November 4, 2006 (New Delhi):

The CPI(M), ruling in West Bengal and Kerala, has strongly advocated for trade unions in the sunrise IT sector but would not favour forced closures during strikes and bandhs.

"Any BPO unit employees can form unions and we would encourage that if it happens. Our trade unions would encourage them to form unions."

"That's the best way to protect their interest and rights. If they (workers) don't want to form unions, it's fine," said Prakash Karat, General Secretary of CPM.

He said the IT sector also had manufacturing aspects like hardware, where unions would exist. Probably there need not be forcible closure of the IT sector during strikes and bandhs, he added.

### Increasing complaints

"We are getting complaints from all over the country that they (BPO employees) do 12 hours continuous work but do not get any of the elementary facilities and rights that the employees should get and many of them (companies) are fly-by-night operators.

In one or two years they close shop and shift somewhere.

So those employees want to get unionised to protect their rights. Now why should they not have unions for them, that's the issue," he said.

The software and BPO industry has expressed its opposition to unions in the sector. On the other hand, trade union leaders have accused the BPO unions of violating labour laws regularly.

Karat contended that the BPO sector was no different from other sectors.

"If the employees of any enterprise want to form a union, the laws of this country allow them to form unions. What is so sacrosanct about the BPO sector?"

"Even in the essential services there are unions. Production of electricity and its distribution can be called an essential service. But how can you ban a union in that. You may ban a strike may be under the Essential Services Act," Karat said.

### Foreign examples

Given the fact that BPO is a 24/7 and high forex earnings sector, Karat countered that saying IBM, one of the biggest computer companies has unions in Europe and America.

"Why can't IBM units in India have unions?" He was not endorsing the argument that the BPO sector is doing well as there were virtually no unions in these industries.

"Some of your best manufacturing production units in this country have unions and their productivity is high and they make profits.

So you cannot ipso facto argue that a sector will do well if there are no unions. And there are many sectors, which do well.

Most of the Tata companies do well. They have unions in various sectors," he said.

There are hundreds of small ITes enterprises coming up, BPOs coming up and they are exploiting the employees.

The Indian IT-IT Enabled Services industry has recorded 33 per cent growth in exports to \$23.6 billion in FY 2005-06.

Of this total, the ITes-BPO segment revenues reached \$6.2 billion, recording a growth of 37 per cent. (PTI)

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