

INDIAN FEDERATION OF WORKING JOURNALISTS

(Founded on 28 October 1950 at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi and registered as trade union: 1992)

C-48, Manas Apartment, Mayur Vihar, Phase-1, Delhi -110091

President's address: 7 Gulistan Colony, Bandariabagh, Lucknow-226001, U.P., Phones: Res.- 0522-2238823/2235466

IFWJ Mob.: +91 94150-00909 / +91 9818627033/ +91 9880199099

E-mail : ifwj.media@gmail.com

Website : www.ifwj.in

President : K. Vikram Rao
Secretary General : H B Madan Gowda
Vice President : Gopal Mishra
Treasurer : R. P. Yadav
Secy. (HQ.) : Vipin Dhuliya

Dated: 10th April 2018

For Favour of Publication

NDA Government warned against curbing Press Council autonomy IFWJ defends PCI Chairman's actions

New Delhi: April 10: The Indian Federation of Working Journalists (I.F.W.J.) has urged the Modi government to respect the autonomy and independence of the Press Council of India. In a statement here today the IFWJ ridiculed the demand by eight media organizations last week for Modi government's immediate intervention in the Press Council affairs. "This will be a direct attack on the freedom of the press", the IFWJ said. Seeking BJP government's interference in the Press Council matter will amount to an invitation to the butcher to enter a Vaishnav temple to slaughter a cow. The IFWJ recalled that the fascist regime of Indira Gandhi in 1975 emergency had dismissed the Press Council. Thanks to the Moraji Desai government, the Press Council was revived in 1978. The IFWJ, India's oldest journalist trade union and a professional body, had in fact midwived the Press Council after the first Press Commission had in 1955 recommended its creation. Ironically the PCI Chairman, Mr. Justice C.K. Prasad rejected the IFWJ claim for the 13th Press Council on flimsy grounds. But the Chairman had also rejected the unlawful and bogus precedents which denied for many years the rightful representation of media bodies. Only three media bodies, limited to the Delhi-NCT region dominate the Press Council through manipulation. The Press Council rules stipulate that the claimant-applicants must be registered bodies and must have members in 12 states. None of these protesters fulfil these conditions. The Editors Guild of India and the IFWJ, both cut out from the 13th Press Council, were not signatories to the so-called protest by the eight media bodies.

These eight organizations , including the Indian Newspaper Society (INS), since last month are represented by their 20 nominees in the 29-member Press Council,

besides three nominees of the UGC, Bar Council of India, the Sahitya Academy and five M.P.'s

So what is the dispute ?

The Chairman Justice C.K. Prasad had not accepted old precedents as they grossly violated the provisions of the Press Council Act, 1978. These nepotist precedents were supinely set and followed by previous chairmen, knowing well that they are not lawful. These precedents had led to spate of writ petitions against the previous Press Councils in Delhi High Court. But the PCI counsel, seeking repeated adjournments ensured that the writs became infructious.

Mr. Justice C.K. Prasad broke this vicious circle and in his note of Dissent, listed the blatant and unashamed practice of the selection process in all the previous Press Councils since 2002. In the garb of free-lancers many non-journalists gate crashed into the Council. The Chairman ended it. He insisted that only those persons as defined by Section 2(f) of the Working Journalists Act, 1955 could qualify to be candidates. A look at the list of members of the Press Council since 2002 will show that the same faces dominated the Council. Mr. U.C. Sharma, who claims to be the Editor of the Muzzafarnagar Bulletin, owned by his wife, has been for 15 long years in the Press Council and has again got into the 13th Press Council. A working journalist who has proprietorial interest in a newspaper is statutorily disqualified. But the situation has worsened when. Sharma nominated his domestic help in the Editors category to the Council. Luckily the Chairman cut out his name.

All the previous Union Governments shuddered to reform the Press Council Act, 1978, to make it truly representative of the national media. Here is an example. The Committee to scrutinise claimants for every new term of the Press Council had all previous associations who themselves voted for their own claims and thus eliminated new applicants. Thus a prosecutor becomes a judge in the PCI Scrutiny Committee. Because the Chairman does not have veto so decision is taken by majority, those who get in are for eternity. The pertinent question here is, why only three old associations of Editors and four of working journalists alone constitute the Press Council. There are hundreds of media associations and journalist unions all over. Press Council has become like an unreserved rail coach, those who once are in, do not allow other passengers to get in.

What is intriguing is that the three Unions of working journalists among the eight sat in the lap of newspaper barons whom they fought on Majithia wages issue in the Supreme Court.