

Why Union Should Oppose VRS

After the submission of proposal for VRS by BSNL management to DoT, a discussion is going on among the BSNL employees on the issue and some are suggesting the unions to accept VRS and bargain for a better scheme.

BSNL Employees Union is strongly against VRS. The undisputed fact is that VRS is for reducing the number of employees. It is retrenchment with some additional compensation. Union agreeing for VRS means union agreeing for reduction in the number of employees. This is nothing but union agreeing for the attack on employees.

Some may say where is the question of attack, since the retirement is not forced, but voluntary, with certain additional benefit. If it is voluntary, why a target of sending home 1,00,000 employees was fixed by Sam Pitroda Committee? In BSNL, the number of employees was reduced due to retirement and ban on recruitment, from 3,97,000 on 1-10-2000 to 2,87,749 in December 2010. But coming under the pressure of Indian and foreign big capitalists in telecom sector the Government implemented policies intentionally creating losses for BSNL. As a result BSNL posted a loss of Rs 1823 crores in 2009-10 and more than Rs 5000 crore loss in 2011. The Government and management are trying to prove that the reason for this loss is the expenditure incurred on salaries of the staff. According to the BSNL management the expenditure on staff salaries in 2009-10 was 42% of the revenue in case of BSNL, where as in case of private telecom companies it is only 5% of the revenue. As per the reports in news papers, while the number of employees in BSNL is 287749, it is only 25000 in Airtel although it is having customers more than BSNL. Therefore a campaign is going on by the anti worker forces like Government, management and pro-privatisation advisors in the corridors of power that a large number of BSNL employees (one lakh as per Sam Pitroda) have to be sent home by VRS. Since the figure 100000 is frightening and will not be accepted by the employees, now the management and DoT are saying there is no target and only those who are willing will be given VRS. But this is self contradictory. In case only 10 employees will take VRS, then what will happen to the aim of reducing staff in large number? If the aim is not large scale reduction in staff then what is the use of it? Therefore the "voluntary" in VRS is only a bait to catch the prey. Once Union agrees for it thinking it is voluntary, the resistance against the attack on employees is finished. Thereafter the management can create so many problems to the employees compelling to opt for VRS. In several other countries in telecom sector, once the union accepted VRS, employees were given transfers to faraway places to compel them to accept VRS.

Therefore we should not accept VRS. It is because even if the union agrees for reducing 10 employees by VRS, it becomes the encouragement for management to reduce employees further. It is like a hole allowing water in the boat leading to its submerging. If union accepts VRS, there will be no resistance against the attack on job security and it will lead to removal of one lakh or more employees as recommended by Sam Pitroda. It should be noted that the comparison is with Airtel with 25000 employees. Hence VRS introduction is intended for reducing the employees to a mere 25000, by removing more than 2,00,000 employees. We should not allow this process to be started in the name of VRS.

VRS is not only a threat to job security, but also a threat to pension security. VRS is a step in the direction of privatisation. The employees are to be reduced drastically so that the selling of BSNL becomes attractive for those intended to purchase it. Therefore accepting VRS amounts to accepting privatisation. Once BSNL is privatised, the pension security will be in danger since the pension payment by DoT is funded entirely by BSNL. Although Government assured to pay pension even in case BSNL is unable to fund the pension expenditure, it cannot be believed. Privatisation creates problem to the pension security in case of even those who will take VRS.

Hence union should not accept VRS.

Note: - *The view of BSNLEU is proved correct. As per the news in "Business Standard" dated 23.6.2011, the DoT directed BSNL to see that 50000 employees are sent home in the name of VRS and DoT agreed to bear the expenditure for the VRS. It will not stop with this. We have to remember Sam Pitroda recommendation for sending one lakh employees home by VRS. Therefore VRS is nothing but a serious attack on the job security of BSNL employees and all employees should oppose it.*