

AIDWA's protest against the Maharashtra Government's Population Policy

DF Government's Inhuman Move Betrays Aim Of Disbanding the PDS

The Government of Maharashtra has explicitly proposed to punish the poor for their poverty. Its latest move regarding the PDS will only result in the poor being deprived of cheap food leading to higher rates of malnutrition, infant mortality and birth rates. The Maharashtra unit of the Akhil Bharatiya Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana (AIDWA) strongly condemns the decision of the Congress-NCP Government to exclude children from the PDS in families exceeding the 2 - child norm.

Barely six months ago this Government doubled the prices of ration rice and wheat, making them in some cases higher than the market prices. Today hardly 20% of grains are being lifted from the PDS in Maharashtra. It has continued with the ridiculously low cut-off limit for the poverty line (Rs 4000/- rural and Rs 15,000 urban), depriving lakhs of needy families of the targeted scheme of cheaper grains. From August, 2000 it has stopped sugar to families with annual income above Rs 50,000/-. This latest measure to penalize families with more than two children in the name of population control clearly indicates that the Government is intent on disbanding the PDS.

This decision also exposes the hollowness of the so-called 'target-free', disincentive-free Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Programme espoused in the State Population Policy. In fact this exclusionary step will further reduce the food entitlements of women and girl children, the first to be discriminated against when families face falling access to food.

It is now a well known fact that high levels of poverty are the cause of high rates of ~~population growth~~. Social policies that provide for basic needs - cheap food and nutrition, ~~water, sanitation, education~~ - have historically laid the grounds for lowering birth rates. By ~~pursuing a population policy based on coercion~~ the DF Government has punished the poor ~~for their problems~~. This policy is counter-productive and patently authoritarian and must ~~be withdrawn immediately~~.

Ahilya Rangnekar

Kiran Moghe

Mariam Dhawle