

## **Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of Common Cause**

The Executive Committee of Common Cause met at Common Cause House on August 25, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. It was attended by Mr Vikram Lal, Mr Kamal Kant Jaswal, Dr. B P Mathur and Mr Vipul Mudgal.

The Director reviewed the developments since the last meeting of the Governing Council held on July 20, 2015 and apprised the Committee of the ongoing initiatives and interventions.

### **Enforcing accountability by resolving Parliamentary logjam:**

The EC observed that the premeditated blockade of parliament amounted to obstruction of democracy and was highly detrimental for the country in the long run. It was felt that the institution of party whip in Parliament and the provisions of the Anti-Defection Law, once envisaged as constructive measures, had disempowered the individual MPs vis-à-vis their party supremos. The EC also felt that the ruling formations as well as the opposition parties were becoming unruly and unaccountable to public opinion and even to the feelings of their own primary members.

The matters discussed included the pros and cons of state funding of elections as well as the crisis of transparency in political donations across the political spectrum. It was felt that the raison d'être of a vast majority of political parties, which never fight any elections, was to evade taxes and to take undue advantage of the privileges granted to political parties. While it was noted that the anti-defection law has helped to tackle the "Aya Ram - Gaya Ram" syndrome, or the politics of en masse defections, the anti-defection law has created problems of its own which may have contributed to the present mess. It was observed that the dismal state of political parties and their lack of internal democracy must constantly be highlighted to weaken the hold of the reigning satraps, who consider their parties as personal fiefs.

The Director apprised the committee of the ongoing interactions on the issue with like-minded organisations, including the PRS and ADR. It is strongly felt by Common Cause and its partners that some form of civil society intervention is required to arrest the denigration of the institution of Parliament and also to get

the legislators to concentrate on their primary duty of legislation and exercising control over the executive. It was observed that the issue at hand was not so much about making a legal intervention through a court of law as one requiring multi-pronged action. The Committee endorsed the idea of taking a lead in getting together civil society organisations and other stakeholders for holding dialogues with legislators and experts and for evolving a future course of action.

**Common Cause membership and website update:**

The Committee was apprised of the ongoing efforts to verify delivery of the journal to the society's members and also to collect feedback from them. The EC reviewed the responses from, and issues raised by, individual members through their postal replies. The committee expressed satisfaction at the feedback process and at the number of replies and suggestions received. In all 374 copies of the journal were returned mainly on account of change or insufficiency of address, and the non-availability of members at the given addresses. Another 306 members have responded through stamped envelopes so far and more are expected in the coming weeks. The members endorsed the new website under construction and gave suggestions for making it more efficient and user-friendly.

**Initiative on creation of an RTI portal:**

The Committee discussed the ongoing effort to create a dedicated portal for model RTI initiatives as a repository of landmark applications, replies and orders, as also a gateway of information about the smooth functioning of the apparatus under the RTI Act. It was agreed that collaboration with other civil society organisations, activists and experts was the way forward for Common Cause. The Committee felt that public interest should be the main criterion for highlighting the information extracted under the RTI Act and that, at a later stage, a multi-lingual portal may be considered with the help of state-level partners and efforts made to translate at least the most important applications/orders into English.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

(Kamal Kant Jaswal)

President