

Ring of Rhetoric

politics these days such labels mean very little. And it is nowhere so glaring as in the left-ruled state of Bengal. All are singing the same tune—the tune of investment. The ‘progressive’ partnership business called Left Front is not in trouble despite a lot of media blitz over the Singur land issue. The reason is simple : the so-called junior partners of the CPM-led house are in reality members of a ‘security council’ without any veto power when it is the question of hard decision. They are too anxious to annoy their big brother by swimming against the tide. The Singur land question could have been snowballed into a crisis into the Left Front had the juniors showed courage to challenge the big brother’s anti-people, rather anti-peasant policy. But these leftists—CPI, RSP, Forward Bloc—are too worried to lose their permanent settlement in state politics and, parliamentary privileges accruing from it. They are too weak to free themselves from the clutches of Margaret Thatcher’s slogan—‘there is no alternative’ (TINA), and quite often they stop short of trying to protest against marxist authoritarianism. It is irrational not to try to change what can be changed and they symbolise irrationality, all in the name of leftism. For them another world is not possible.

The British-induced permanent settlement in eastern India, particularly in undivided Bengal, ruined the peasant masses in general and the ago-old agrarian economy as well. And now in the 21st century brown sahibs are re-introducing a new kind of landlordism with all the evils of permanent settlement and its devastating impact on the peasants. Companies will own land—‘Zamindari’ companies, not zamindars or landlords—but the net result is further pauperisation of the small and middle peasants. Nobody is safe in the CPM-scripted social-democratic brand of neo-liberal regime.

CPI, RSP, Forward Bloc—the juniors—criticise their own government’s land acquisition policy only to have political mileage without any serious intention to protect the evictees. People who don’t want to hear about their leftism because of the failures of what they believe to have been leftism are making perfect sense. What they see day in and day out is a bizarre scenario where left meets right.

Unplanned urbanisation coupled with mushrooming of thousands of semi-urban enclaves with semi-rural environment and without any civic amenities that are generally available in municipal areas, across the state, has already destroyed thousands of acres of prime agricultural land.

Singur—a multi-crop area—has been chosen by the Tatas for their small car factory, may be, for easy availability of water. But Santaldih in arid Purulia has been successfully running a thermal power plant for decades by buying water from a DVC project located in the adjoining state of Jharkhand.

In the wake of fresh criticisms from CPI leaders over the Singur fiasco, the marxists hurriedly convened a left front meeting to pacify the aggrieved, the juniors to be precise. There is every reason to believe that the CPI is shedding ‘tears’ for the landless and marginal peasants of Singur because they have virtually no electoral stake in Singur.

After Singur it would be the turn of Nandigram to accommodate Salim Group's grandiose schemes of chemical hub, long bridge and special economic zone. And the CPI people are more concerned about their very own constituency in Nandigram where land acquisition will be on a much bigger scale, hopefully with a lot of state brutality. If Singur is a disaster, Nandigram may well be a catastrophe.

In the absence of labour-intensive industry, subsistence agriculture has been a source of livelihood for millions of poor and marginal farmers throughout the country. As they are returning acquired land to new landlords called industrialists while pampering agro-industry having foreign tag, destitution of vast rural masses seems irreversible unless there is a mass upheaval.

The way the marxists are campaigning against small scale agriculture and the peasant community as a whole is unprecedented in the history of peasant movement in India. They think they have already done sufficient land reforms and there is no need to save self-employed jobs in agriculture.

Rhetoric cannot change the reality. But the juniors and the far left as well cannot go beyond rhetoric. ~~zzz~~