

## Singur Beyond Singur

*[Following is a slightly shortened version of a leaflet circulated by Teachers And Scientists Against Maldevelopment—TASAM]*

The Singur story has four well known actors: the Tata Company, over 1,000 farmers and bargadars, an unknown number of landless agricultural workers, and the State Government. The first three actors are familiar to all. The fourth is also familiar, only it is playing an unfamiliar role.

The first few chapters of the story have already been written. The State Government has bought almost 1,000 acres of land from landowners, some of who do not till the land they own. Each owner got a price that is the average of the price of his land over the last three years. So he got less than today's market price, and much, much less than the likely price of the land after the Tata Company's small car project is realized. Bargadars and pattadars got only six times the value of the current crop yield; unlisted bargadars – there are many - got nothing. Moreover, the State Government is reluctant to entertain any public objection to what it has done.

In the current chapter, the land will be handed over to Tatas. Anyone who resists will be dealt with by the law: thousands of police personnel are already camping in Singur.

But the people of Singur are resisting the deal that is being forced on them. They do not want to give up their land, or their way of life for "compensation" and an unknown future. Land and man have a relationship that is as old as Banga, and perhaps older. It will not break so readily; can we stand by and watch it being broken?

### **The Facts**

- ✍ One of the most important facts is that the car industry is a highly automated industry today. For example, between 1980 and 1994 the labor component of the total cost of making a car in the USA fell by 21 percent, as big companies like General Motors, Ford and Chrysler halved their total work forces from 750,000 to 375,000. (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/mar1999/auto-m04.shtml>).
- ✍ US capitalists are famous for being profit hungry people. Why Tatas are going to be any different? They are not doing social service. They, too, are interested in making profits and giving their investors good dividends.
- ✍ Next fact is about the amount of land being acquired for the proposed factory. Look at the famous Maruti-Suzuki factory. It manufactures complete cars, and doesn't just assemble them from parts made elsewhere. When it started off in 1983, it made 5,000 cars. The number went up to 6 lakh in 2005. The factory also produced 18 different kinds of cars in the same year. It needed only 296 acres of land to do so. Why then does the Singur "small car for the common man" factory need 1,000 acres? Please

remember that the Singur plant will only assemble cars, from parts built elsewhere. This makes the question of the amount of land more acute.

- ✍ The Chief Minister says, "Convert agricultural land to industrial use and increase employment." He says that there will be 10,000 new jobs in the factory. He does not say what kinds of jobs, and with what income? He does not say that members of the evicted families will get first preference. Will Tatas retrain people from those families, first? Will the government do that? Who will bear the cost of retraining? Who will pay the people while they are being retrained?
- ✍ The answers to all these questions are that the Chief Minister has projected a false picture. Tatas have categorically disowned any employment generation for the local people.
- ✍ The State Government is clamoring about the high rate of compensation. But can there be compensation for loss of livelihood? No, there cannot be.
- ✍ Why should Tatas train local people when they can bring skilled workers immediately, and more cheaply, from other parts of India? There is already so much car manufacturing in India, so there are many workers.
- ✍ But the most important fact is that development without the people is no development at all. The people of Singur are being asked to make sacrifices. For whose good? For the good of Tatas' Board of Directors? For the good of the company's investors? Are the evicted people not also investors? They may not bring money to the company but they can be said to have invested their land, the thing that, for many of them, is their sole means of livelihood. How many of the big investors in Tata company shares can say that they have done the same? Can Ratan Tata say it?
- ✍ The right to livelihood is a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution. How will the peasants who have given everything, except their bodies and their families, benefit from the small car factory? They must be made partners in the enterprise. They must be made partners because their risk is at least equal to, if not much greater than, the thousand crores that Tatas are putting into the scheme.

The same story is unfolding all over India. It is a product of the Government's Special Economic Zones Policy (SEZ). The SEZ Bill was passed by Parliament in 2005. It says many things. Most importantly, it says that the parts of India that are covered by it will be treated as foreign enclaves; in other words people who invest there will be treated by different laws than the rest of Indians. More than 180 projects have already been sanctioned since the Bill was passed; hundreds more are in the pipeline.

- ✍ Thus, near Kharagpur, Tatas are going to set up a construction vehicles factory on 1,280 acres of land.
- ✍ The total amount of land in West Bengal alone will be 100,000 acres.
- ✍ In India, as a whole, the magazine *Business World* reported, in its issue dated 12 June 2006, the names of the big players in buying land. The list included Reliance Industries (50,000 acres+), Tatas (20,000 acres+), DLF Universal (50,000 acres+), Unitech (30,000 acres+), Baba Kalyani (27,000 acres+), Sahara (20,000 acres+), Mahindra (10,000 acres+), Emaar and Ansals (both 10,000 acres+), Infosys (2,145 acres in Bangalore and Hyderabad). Since June the figures must have increased manifold. ✍✍✍✍