

Violence Over Land

The CPM-led left regime in Bengal has blood on its hands. It is responsible for inciting sectarian and communal violence in the name of maintaining law and order, causing numerous civilian deaths. Official communists these days pose themselves as dangerous democrats as their democracy is not something that is necessarily going to last for ever. The suicide of a Singur farmer a week earlier in protest against the marxist government's forcible acquisition of land for the Tatas seems have added a new dimension to the helplessness of the people before the authoritarian marxist rule. Meanwhile, the police allegedly in league with CPM-hired goons massacred poor peasants, mostly women and children who refused to sacrifice their land in favour of a notorious foreign investor. At the time of writing the CBI was probing the unprovoked police firing in Nandigram in which unofficially about 100 died while the number of wounded and missing persons was still unknown. It was a planned murderous assault to teach the dissenters of Nandigram a lesson. Ex-facie the allegation that CPM cadres with the backing of police and administration butchered the innocent and terrorised the poor villagers while indulging in large scale looting and raping was corroborated by circumstantial evidences. After the Cossipore-Baranagore genocide in the 1970's the bloody Wednesday (14 March, 2007) was the most heinous genocidal crime in the history of progressive movement of Bengal. For the first time intellectuals on the left otherwise patronising the left establishment in one form or another came out openly and took to the streets to protest against the barbarity of the CPM-led left front government. And Nandigram turned out to be the 'killing fields' of Bengal virtually shaking the poor people's belief in left politics, the impact of which cannot be a happier one for the marxist left in the next panchayet poll.

When die-herd rightists masquerading as Marxists throw off their masks, they propagate all sorts of lies and slanders, and try to count on the eternal gullibility of the people. When their arsenal of false arguments gets exhausted, they rely on the police and their armed cadre force. West Bengal of today presents a typical showcase of this phenomenon. In truth the West Bengal scenario has shown that the struggle against liberalisation and globalisation has reached the doorsteps of the common people.

The work of fencing the chosen site of the automobile factory of the Tatas is going on, although the mood of the local people does not tally with the propaganda of popular support for the Tatas. The falsity of the claim of the CPI(M) ideologues that 99 percent of the land has been acquired by consent from the owners stands exposed by two facts. In case of voluntary sales and purchases, deeds are signed between the district administration and the land-givers. Then why should the draconian law of 1895 be invoked? Secondly, why should the police be employed and section 144 be imposed? Something more about the so-called compensation package should be said. A cultivating landowner parting with his multi-cropped plot of land gets a little more than Rs 12 lakh per acre, which, if kept as fixed deposit on a monthly income basis, should fetch him Rs 8500 per month. At the current market prices of agricultural commodities, this is more than one can hope to get from one acre of land. But given a 4-5 percent rate of inflation, the real value of this money will undergo a steady erosion with the passage of time, and if the experience of the last three decades is any guide, it will be equal to about Rs 2000—2500 at current prices after twenty or twenty-five years. More-over, the cultivating landowner will lose his entitlement to work. Besides, unregistered bargadars and agricultural labourers who earn the greater part of their livelihood by working on these plots of land have got nothing, while registered bargadars who are legally entitled to a share of 75 per-cent of the produce are going to have only 25 percent of the amount received as compensation. The displaced

agricultural workers and unregistered bargadars will try to eke out a living by working as casual labourers here and there, or by means of petty trade. Some may become beggars, or engage in other dishonourable ways of living. And why? For the sake of the super-profit of the Tatas and Salims. Never before have such a brazen show of subservience to big capital by official communists been observed. Of course, the absentee landowners will be happy, but they have no links with the production economy of the countryside.

The conception of industrialisation dished out by the CPM-ideologies is very much linked with the so-called liberalisation, although the way they are talking seems to suggest that they have the monopoly of the notion of the two terms 'industrialisation' and 'development'.

The companies that are going to set up their factories in SEZs will be free to choose their own technology and products, and the existing labour legislation will also be relaxed. Such sort of 'industrialisation' will, of course, find favour with the upper middle classes who have been doing well in this era of globalisation, and whose sons are dreaming of high salaried jobs in such zones. It goes without saying that the people belonging to these classes care little for the problems of land-losers as well as of the displaced. But the employment generating potential of these SEZs is minimum. Those who are familiar with the history of Industrial Revolution in Britain know well that the *Industrial Revolution* was accomplished by drawing away labour force from the agricultural and handicraft sector and employing them in manufacturing with relatively low capital-intensive techniques. But the industrialists willing to set up enterprises in Special Economic Zones are not concerned with the provision of jobs, their sole concern is with maximisation of profits, and in this era of globalisation, they are certain to imitate Western-style technology. So, what is being talked about is not real industrialisation, but a kind of pseudo-industrialisation. One may also call this a kind of jobless growth. And yet the official communists are going to parade the argument of job creation in support of their programme.

Bengal is now in turbulence as the ruling marxists are unmasking themselves as fascists but the far left is in no position to take advantage of the situation. More turbulent days are ahead and the coming future is pregnant with new possibilities.

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