

FROM SOCIALISM TO BARBARISM?

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Be it right or left, it is becoming increasingly clear that Governments across the world are eager to get in bed with the corporations. The message is clear in West Bengal: Economic development will be pursued at any human cost. Protesters will be brutally dealt with and killed if required. Critics will be vilified. Facts will be fudged to justify brutal actions. The Ugly Might of the State has descended in an unholy manner on the farmers in Singur and Nandigram. How can CPIM reconcile its conflicting history of 'admirable' land reforms in West Bengal with the recent brutal repression of farmers in its desperate bid of industrialization?

"The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is the revolutionary vanguard of the working class of India. Its aim is socialism and communism through the establishment of the state of dictatorship of the proletariat. In all its activities the Party is guided by the philosophy and principles of Marxism-Leninism which shows to the toiling masses the correct way to the ending of exploitation of man by man, their complete emancipation."? That is *CPIM website*.

Thus reads the website of Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM). Its stated aim and ideals are lofty. Practice is becoming increasingly shameful. The CPIM-led Left Front came to power in West Bengal in 1977 with the promise of achieving social justice and protecting civil liberties and has continued to win every election ever since, largely due to the land reforms, though half-hearted, through the 80's, which did benefit large sections of the toiling masses. Lately though, the Party is increasingly becoming indistinguishable from the Right.

SINGUR BLUES

The Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has issued an open invitation to all and sundry in the investment sector to come and set up shop in West Bengal. Strange Bedfellows? He even offered to acquire the land for Ratan Tata to set up a small car factory near Singur. It so happened that the land Tata wanted was multi-cropped land in fact. Hence it became necessary for CPIM to fudge the facts and use outdated survey records to portray it as a mono-cropped land, thus going back on its declared promise that multi-cropped land will not be acquired for industrialization.

Marxist Chief Minister had stated in early December that they had obtained consent from the farmers to acquire 932 acres of land before the fencing of the area began in December. Later, the Government was forced to admit that the consent had been for only 586 acres of land, prior to fencing. Which implies, once fencing began in early December, the farmers who had not given consent were under pressure to sell the land else they would lose the land anyway.

Naturally, the toiling masses of Singur rose in rebellion against a Government which was exploiting them rather than emancipating them. The moving video "*Abadbhumi*" which documents in detail the dissent of the farmers against this exploitation, leaves one in little doubt. Predictably, all kinds of groups rushed to Singur in support, which ranged from politically motivated Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress to selfless grassroots activists like Medha Patkar and numerous human rights groups. Brinda Karat of CPIM was quick to equate Medha with Mamata, denouncing the former, in an unedited draft article circulated among CPIM lists. Here she was behaving exactly as her counterparts in the Right normally do.

Then the Might of the State was unleashed upon the same toiling masses who had dared to question their exploitation. They were intimidated and beaten along with the opposition protesters, which has been documented by reputed human rights groups. Prakash Karat and Buddha-deb Babu predictably denied that there was any brutality against the farmers. In their eyes, anyone who protested against the car factory necessarily were allied with the opposition goons and deserved to be beaten up. [Reminds one of Bush's maxim?: "You are either with us or against us"] In the meanwhile, the rape and murder of 18-year old Tapasi Malik inside the fenced area in Singur is yet to be resolved and Singur farmers continue to protest.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN NANDIGRAM?

Next stop in the spree of agricultural land-grab for industrialization is Nandigram. The farmers in Nandigram began to be intimidated by the rogue elements of the CPIM. Troubled by the events in Singur, they rose in protest against any forceful acquisition of their multi-cropped agricultural lands and refused to let the CPIM cadres and the police inside their village. [Sure

enough, the situation was taken advantage of by opposition parties which had dug up roads and cut off access to Nandigram.] What followed next is a tale of carnage: On March 14th, the police fired indiscriminately into a crowd of unarmed people of Nandigram, killing 14 persons and injuring hundreds including women, men and children. Many young women were raped by anti-social elements. Eyewitness reports suggest that the people who fired at the crowd included uniformed police and CPIM goons in fact and that many children were brutally torn apart, killed and thrown into the pond.

Predictably, Buddhadeb Babu defended his actions saying that the protesters were armed and were allied with opposition and that the brutality had to be carried out. In left-wing circles, many long time defenders of the CPIM continue to defend it in similar vein. But, on-the-ground investigation and fact-finding reports by reputed human rights organizations APDR and PBKMS, based on eye-witness testimonies of 62 patients and 200 villagers, make it clear that many of the people killed and injured were in fact unarmed people of Nandigram, including women and children who were standing up to the organized intimidation tactics of some elements inside the CPIM, some of whom have been identified. Now, CPIM has been forced to scrap the project in Nandigram, but at tragic cost to the locals. It may be that the actual brutality on farmers was perpetrated by a small minority of CPIM cadres, but the Party needs to own up the responsibility and punish such rogue elements.

EMANCIPATION OF THE MASSES?

Where does this leave CPIM with its conflicting history of land reforms in West Bengal and the recent high-handed repression of farmers in Singur and Nandigram? From lofty ideals of emancipating the toiling masses from exploitation to blatant wooing of corporations and taking the side of the latter against the toiling masses? It seems now that it rather stands for the Emancipation of the upper and middle classes as opposed to the proletariat. Notwithstanding its past land reforms, lately it seems to be allying itself with the corporations against the masses.

If it is true that the State of West Bengal is indeed in desperate need of industrialization and has to move on with the times, then why not do it in a more just and equitable manner? One fair compensation to the farmers could be to give them equity in the proposed car factory, in addition to a fair sale price for the land. If the Tatas make profit, which they will, then why not share the spoils with the farmers who give up their lands? Why should the farmers of Singur and Nandigram make all the sacrifice for the development of the State, while the benefits of resulting industrialization will mostly benefit the upper and middle classes, with very little "trickle-down effect" to these farmers?

It may be worthwhile for Buddhadeb Babu and CPIM defenders to listen to the following impassioned words of a farmer in Singur:

"Why cannot the Government and the Tatas leave our multi-cropped agricultural lands and instead build the car factory in fallow lands located just a few kilometers away?" —Excerpt from documentary film "*Abadbhumi*". □□□