

# HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Neither Congress nor communist left has shown awareness of the immense cost of ceding so much of India's economic sovereignty to America. If they do not see eye to eye over the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal it is because the Left is desperately obsessed with balancing off its declining progressive image by adding weight to anti-Americanism. But the issue that has triggered the speculation of snap poll is too weak to develop a swing for the Opposition otherwise perennially wandering in political wilderness. Both Congress and Left endorse each other's persecution of people in the guise of development and slavishly compete to woo multinationals, particularly American multinationals. And voters have no choice. If there is a mid-term poll the possibility of which seems remote for reasons other than nuclear drama, they will have to obey the rules. No political party is serious about polls at this stage and the Left is equally in two minds as to how to embrace a new alliance to be designed to thwart saffron advance.

The much publicised mock fight between Left and Congress over India-US nuclear pact is simply irrelevant to the starving millions of India. Also, it does hardly reveal the ground reality. Whether they officially admit it or not, America has already capped nuclear capability of India and Pakistan. Given the changed geo-political context in Asia they are in no position to nurse their nuclear ambitions even at the 1970s level. After the all important parley of International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohammed El Baradei with the nuclear hawks of New Delhi, the Left seems to have lost momentum to re-agitate over the '123 Agreement', thereby retreating a bit in their showbiz of anti-imperialism while allowing shadow boxers more time, not to precipitate the political crisis to the point of coalition-rupture. And Congress has heaved an audible sigh of relief, thanks to El Baradei's conciliatory posture. Despite widespread economic chaos the Singhs and Gandhis hope to continue alliance with the Left beyond polls, mid-term or otherwise, without much hassle.

The real issue that is missing in the on-going nuclear opera is nuclear energy business. The opponents of the Indo-US nuclear deal like its advocates are equally enthusiastic in espousing the cause of atomic power. And there lies the danger. They have already selected a number of sites along India's eastern coast to build a chain of reactors. A large scale displacement apart, destruction of ecological balance is likely to affect India's economy in a big way. They are ready to oblige America's nuclear industry at a time when all are trying to get rid of this bastard called atomic power. France, the biggest producer of nuclear power so far, finds it increasingly difficult to dump enormous wastes it generates every year. Exporting hazardous wastes to some African countries, particularly the former colonies of France, have reached its limit. The Chernobyl shock has virtually doomed the prospects of nuclear energy business. So some third world countries with newly acquired economic muscle like India and China, are being targeted to absorb the future nuclear nightmare. Not that India is the end point

in America's nuclear game. Similar agreements with other pro-American client states are likely because they want to save the ailing nuclear industry.

Communists in India have developed a habit of calling the wrong shots all the time. While people throughout the world are desperately searching for alternative sources of energy they are inviting disaster with open arms. Anti-nuclear movement has never been a strong political current in this part of the globe. Nor is peace movement. In their attitudes to nuclear bombs they do not differ from jingoist saffronites. Whatever feeble voice against atomic establishment one hears, somewhat occasionally, more specifically after an accident or two, comes from some social groups having little resource and manpower to influence public opinion. Besides major accidents, slow radiation emanates at different levels of nuclear power production is fatal to unconscious people. The chief source of uranium is Jadugoda hillocks of Jharkhand state and the plight of tribal people living around Judugoda defies description. They are dying slowly because of slow radiation-related diseases that have engulfed the entire region. Barring Jadugoda the other sources of uranium are yet to be developed and they are too inadequate to fuel even the existing capacities of Indian reactors. One reason New Delhi is so shamelessly desperate to clinch the nuclear deal is shortage of fuel—uranium. Nuclear Energy is not cheap by any standards and it cannot be for India when imported uranium will be required to generate electricity. If India's atomic establishment otherwise a pampered white elephant, gets its way, it could not be anything but a big catastrophe for the economy.

In reality the Left's opposition to the deal is weaker than most people realise. A sustained campaign against nuclear power and nuclear weapons as well is all that is needed to save the impoverished millions of India. The authorities have nothing to worry about so long as anti-nuclear campaign remains an area of agitation by a few individuals and some nuclear-specific social groups. It's simply illusory to count on the Left's purposeless noises against the Indo-US nuclear agreement—after all they are not going to sacrifice parliamentary privileges for people's interests. □