

THE CHOMSKY LETTER

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Civil society in West Bengal has split. International luminaries, including Noam Chomsky, want the gap to be bridged and have signed a letter to this effect.

The basis for the split lies in

- (1) the recent change in CPI(M) policy, identifying big investments by multinationals and domestic big capital as 'industrialisation' by the CPI(M)-led government of West Bengal (this is a recent change of policy),
- (2) the fascist onslaught of gunmen of the CPI(M) and the police on people affected adversely by this onslaught of big capital.

The section of civil society linked to the ruling CPI(M) party is supporting this onslaught of big capital, offering 'industrialisation' as the excuse. The other section is supporting the adversely affected people, wherever and whenever they are attacked. Is the gap bridgeable?

A fact or two regarding the sham 'industrialisation'.

The recent Tata automobile factory at Singur, which saw the first determined resistance against land grab on behalf of big capital, is supposed to provide 10,000 jobs, including jobs in downstream industries, as claimed by supporters of Tata. Apart from landowners who received compensation (of disputed adequacy), estimates of those who lost their livelihood, without compensation or resettlement, reaches 10,000 (even the figures quoted by the CPI(M) politbureau leader Vrinda Karat support this estimate). Net result is zero rise in employment. In any case, even a high school student can appreciate the hopelessness of employment generation in thousands, when the West Bengal finance minister himself admits to an unemployment figure of 3.34 million in 2004-05. What is needed is a new policy, not a fascistic imposition of neoliberal trash. The people affected by this 'industrialisation' offer resistance because they know well that the 'industrialisation' will not spread in the surrounding countryside. The huge US \$ 2.2 billion investment in Haldia Petrochemicals (HPCL) and its downstream industries generated 4000 jobs in HPCL and 10,000 jobs downstream. 90% of the downstream units and 80% of the jobs were created not in the district of Midnapore (to which Haldia belongs) but in the Kolkata municipal area. The bankruptcy of this 'industrialisation' and the need for a new policy are underlined by the fact that every year 80,000 people are added to the 15-59 age bracket in Midnapore. (for sources see author's article on Haldia in sanhati.com).

A fact or two regarding the convergence of this 'industrialisation' with penetration of international big capital, including US big capital may be self-revealing.

In 1996, there was no FDI to speak of in West Bengal. By 2003, the cumulative FDI flow reached US \$ 1.346 billion ('Public Private Partnerships in India', 01.04.07, Ministry of Finance, GOI), an amount equal to the contribution of the entire registered manufacturing sector to West Bengal's SDP in 2004-05.

Now, the US has smiled on West Bengal. Although US FDI amounted to \$ 48 million between January 2000 and March 2006 (as estimated by the American Consul General in Kolkata on 07.03.07), the situation is about to see dramatic

changes. US giant GE will invest US \$ 8 billion in India over the next three years, of which a 'substantial amount' is earmarked for West Bengal. GE Equipment Services has already acquired a 15% equity worth US \$ 37.5 million in the West Bengal railway wagon company Titagarh Wagons Ltd. (tdctrade.com. 07.011.07, Hong Kong Trade Development Council).

Noam Chomsky wants unity. Does he really want a civil society united in support of US big capital and its allies? Or, should the signatories have followed the golden rule of "No investigation, no right to speak"?