

Talks of Employment

ONE OF THE MAJOR POINTS IN the propaganda campaign of the ruling Left Front Government of West Bengal and the CPI(M) in their advocacy of the so-called programme of 'industrialization' is the creation of employment. Nobody actually knows how many people are going to be employed in Singur, although at least 10,000 have lost their entitlement to work because of the Tata small car project. West Bengal's performance in the matter of implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, that was supposed to provide at least 100 days' work to every toiling hand every year has cast doubts on the Government's real intention. Whatever work has been done is relatively planless and as regards the creation of rural productive assets, the performance is rather poor. But the programme has at least a potential from the demand side. By enhancing rural income, it can enhance the size of rural markets, which in the long run has a salutary effect on the production of mass consumer goods.

What is the performance of the Left Front Government that is wedded to the aim of employment generation? From April 2007 to December 2007, 75 mandays of work were to be provided to each person. The 'pro-poor Government' of West Bengal has been able to provide only 12.10 days' work while the all-India average is 32.76. Creditable performance indeed! The figure provided by website of the Ministry of *Panchayets* of West Bengal are revealing enough. In the year 2006-07, the number of candidates was 3.424 million households, and each household got 14 days' work on the average.

It cannot be gainsaid that despite its many inadequacies, the NREGP has a rich potential for rural development. If at least 75 days of work can be given to the rural households, and this army of labour force can be utilized in a planned manner for the creation of rural assets such as digging of ponds for fishery, creation of roads for better transport, reform of canals, afforestation etc, the productive potential of the rural economy can be significantly, if not spectacularly, developed. The creation of better infrastructure and the multiplier effect generated by the increase of rural income and expenditure can also induce many producers of industrial mass consumer goods (not of motor cars, however) to come forward and invest. Then why this neglect? The neglect is possibly due to the ties that the CPI (M) leaders have formed with corporate capital, coupled with their ignorance of the dynamics of a less developed economy. □□□