

# How Not to Face Reality

Double talk has been the hallmark of communist culture for decades. For the official communists of India, their game of self-deception is ultimately about their survival and security at a time when they are trying desperately to get rid of their old class position otherwise historically sanctioned. Unless they get fully integrated within the system that cannot deliver if they remain half in, half out. While the marxist chief minister of Bengal vehemently opposed bandh and strike the other day at an interactive session of elite gatherings organised by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India, his colleagues representing the central trade union wing of the party he belongs to, made it eloquently clear that they would resort to bandh to raise the voice of dissent in the future. It all came in the aftermath of nationwide August 20 bandh (or strike) called by the left unions. In a way it was a government sponsored bandh in the states of Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. That was the reason for quick reaction from the Chambers of Commerce. If they do one thing as a government and say something else from the platform of party it is because they still have some compulsions to address their traditional constituency.

Right to strike is a hard-earned right. And the communists and their so-called left allies do hardly exercise this right with all seriousness hopefully to demonstrate before the investors that they are not really labour-friendly. Nor would they oppose unprecedented labour-bashing by the captains of industry. Also, the meet was organised against the backdrop of Tata's veiled threat to abandon the 'Nano' small car project at Singur where a revival of anti-land grab agitation by the unwilling peasants whose small parcels of land were forcibly acquired caught the left front government on wrong foot. After the reversal of electoral fortunes in the recently held panchayet polls the marxist left government had to accept the allegation that they acquired a substantial portion of land 'forcibly' from the unwilling peasants. Though Singur agitation is now hovering around the demand for the return of 400 acres of fertile land, the CPM-led left front government is visibly panicked by the remotest possibility of Tata permanently leaving the space. Come what may the industrialists are unlikely to risk leaving the beleaguered marxists with a troubled state that would be more, not less difficult to deal with.

As for bandh, politicians from both the left and the right, sponsor it and oppose it according to their convenience. In truth a bandh or two can hardly make any difference in the prevailing situation. Yet it is the only option that can make the authorities pay by measures such as reconciliation, not using 'muscular rhetoric'. Despite so many strictures from the judiciary, no political party is really interested in waving 'goodbye' to bandh. But the marxist ploy is too clever by half. If strike is a thing of the past as they are saying from the podium of government establishment, their communist brand name would be a thing of the past, not in the distant future. Whatever reformist tradition and 'popular' mass support they still enjoy, though with declining authority, at regional level, it is because of their fighting past. Ironically though, they are trying to salvage their reputation as champions of corporate capital by disowning their own past.

Today Bengal is not really a special case when it is the question of land acquisition. It is a national issue directly stemming from new industrial and agricultural policies of the Centre. What formally appears as government policy is actually scripted by the chambers of commerce. All state governments are affected by land-agitation. It is the problem of a right-wing coalition government in Orissa. It is the problem of a Congress-led so-called centrist government in Andhra. It is the problem of a saffron government in Chattisgarh. And it is also the problem of a 'leftist' government in Bengal. The situation for the poor and marginal farmers is worsening and worsening. And denying bandh as a peaceful weapon against social and economic injustice poses grave risks to the system itself. And the official left is making a serious blunder by assuming too soon that they could draw respect from both the worlds of haves and have-nots by resorting to double talk all the time.

Given the ensuing crisis of identity, the marxist left is at a tipping point, too weak to jeopardise corporate connections, much less spark a renewal of partisan warfare for the underprivileged even if it means it will ultimately turn the tide against them. □□□