

NOTE

Bengal goes to Polls

A B writes:

Right now, the campaign for the assembly polls in West Bengal is going on vigorously. The Left Front is scared, notwithstanding some brags and blusters on the part of the CPI(M) leaders. When the CPI(M)-led Front won the 2006 polls with a margin that was unexpected even to the Alimuddin Street, they thought that it was a mandate in favour of corporate-led industrialization. This stupid thinking was followed by the events in Singur and Nandigram, which heralded the change in the election equations. The winds of change were very much apparent during the Lok Sabha Polls, and almost everywhere the prevalent pre-poll notion is that the Trinamul Congress, the outfit led by Mamata Banerjee, is going to win at the hustings and to form the ministry. Should it be supposed that the anti-Left Front wave is due to some positive expectations on the part of the people? The answer is a categorical 'no'. It is somewhat like a miniature replica of the events of 1977. In that case, the slogan was to oust the Indira Gandhi-led Congress, and now the slogan is to vote the CPI(M) out of power. There is hardly any indication that Mamata Banerjee will offer any alternative to the Manmohan Singh-style of economic development, development led by the corporate tycoons. The struggle against forced acquisition of land in Singur and Nandigram was objectively a struggle against this type of development, and Manmohan's Central Government stood by Buddhadeb & Co in the wake of the events of Nandigram. Mamata Banerjee has found it convenient to forget this episode, and the alliance between the Congress and Mamata Banerjee is a clear manifestation of the fact that finally Sonia Gandhi has the last laugh. She has been able to keep Mamata within her fold, i.e. within the orbit of liberalization and Washington Consensus-oriented globalization. From the *panchayets* now controlled by the Trinamul Congress, reports of massive loot of public money are regularly coming in. In one case where this correspondent had the opportunity to watch the process, a section of those who had campaigned against the CPI(M) in the last *panchayet* and parliamentary polls brought out glaring examples of this corruption and only an unholy alliance between the local administration and the local Trinamul leaders has prevented the arrest of culprits. In the areas under its command, Trinamul Congress activists are attacking anybody carrying a red flag. Just as the CPI(M) wanted to impose a party bureaucracy on the people, the new aspirants have in many cases decided not to allow any other political force to function. The choice of candidates is also intriguing in some cases. Many IPS and IAS officers who served the Indira-Siddhartha regime in West Bengal faithfully and then quickly switched their loyalty to the Left Front are in the fray. They were amply rewarded and served as wholehearted lackeys of the CPI(M). And quite a few of them are going to contest the polls as Trinamul candidates. One of them allegedly tried to kill Mamata Banerjee during a demonstration led by her before the Writers' Buildings. None of these former bureaucrats and police officers had any connection with the masses. It is very unfortunate that even some Naxalites who have joined Mamata Banerjee and even have been taken into her confidence have not tried to resist this game. This note can be concluded with an observation made by a famous economist, who is incidentally the most consistent and logical of opponents of globalization and liberalization. The observation runs as follows: "It would be foolish to think that most poor people are fooled. The harrowing experiences of daily life and grinding poverty hardly let them ever forget what the political system has so far delivered to them. And yet, the masses still vote, knowing fully well that they would continue to be ruled by the same class... they join a largely hollow democratic process which promises no solution to their problems, but might accentuate them if wrong choices are made." It is perhaps with the purpose of preventing such an accentuation that the masses of West Bengal are going to exercise their voting rights. □□□