

Listening to the People?

They are talking turkey these days –the CPM-people. Faced with the imminent danger of electoral misfortunes in the so-called red citadels of Bengal and Kerala, CPM-top leaders are at pains to tell the people that they are with them, at least not against them. But in their bizarre world of political double standard changed popular stance is more dire than usual populism. Being a part of the ruling system in some corners of the country they have long perfected the art of practising what they don't really preach. While addressing the media the other day in Kolkata, just on the eve of the second phase of assembly poll in the state the CPM-general secretary Prakash Karat demanded an immediate stop on all new nuclear projects, including the most controversial one at Haripur in Coastal Bengal, which the CPM-led Left Front Government, had lobbied for with a kind of religious zeal. But they have not yet officially spelt out their position on Haripur, though as for Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant, their opposition, otherwise confined to issuing harmless press statements, is more pronounced than before. For one thing they are not opposing nuclear power in principle. For all practical purposes, their tokenism of protest is skin-deep. And Mr Karat's party has not declared its unambiguous commitment to a national policy of promoting renewable and sustainable energy resources (solar, wind, bio-mass and others) for power production in place of the proposed nuclear power all over the country and raise people's political and social consciousness about the hazards that are associated with every aspect of nuclearisation.

In truth, political parties, left or right, big or small, never took the nuclear issue seriously despite growing anti-nuclear movement throughout the world. It doesn't find a place on the agendas of mainstream and regional-stream parties, as if Indians won't ever face any nuclear problem. Only a few NGOs have been campaigning against the pitfalls of nuclear power programme for long without much success in making it a point of grave concern to be addressed nationally. At the initial stage of India's nuclearisation the left didn't give any serious thought to the long-term implications of nuclear energy and nuclear bombs as well. In a way they cherished the idea of being a member of elite nuclear club. Nuclear energy—or for that matter environment—is not their headache. They still think environmentalists are a pampered lot, good for drawing-room discourses. It is unlikely for them to take the Jaitapur people's battle against the nuclear power plant into parliament and make it an issue of 'no return' in the streets. Everybody knows the government's claims of the so-called safety reviews are shams and they are too reluctant to expose them. They are so obsessed with the neo-liberal growth strategy that they continue to harbour illusion of massive industrialisation at the cost of peasants, rather poor and marginal peasants.

It may sound hilarious that after so much bloodshed CPM government's state land and land reforms minister Abdur Rezzak Mollah criticises West Bengal's government's hapazard industrialisation and urbanisation plan and he even went to the length of describing 'land acquisition for private investors' as a crime. Maybe they will get punishment for this crime in Bengal and Kerala in due season. But it is too late to repair the damage they have done by exhibiting over-enthusiasm in executing neo-liberal policies.

For good reasons or bad this party—CPM—is recognised by the Chinese Communist Party as their fellow travellers though there is no such thing as international communist movement. CPC despite its new found love for Fund-Bank sponsored growth syndrome, has, of late, realised the importance of rural sector. But Indian communists are unlikely to learn anything from the Chinese because they think they can commit 'mistakes' and at the same time go away with them without being punished. Very recently China's Central Rural Work

Conference reiterated that 'the development of agriculture and rural areas as well as the improvement of rural living condition will continue to be China's top priority, since they are very foundation for the sustainable development of the Chinese economy'. They have adopted practical measures to preserve cultivated land and increase production. And in India ruling circles—left and right alike—have taken one measure after another to destroy cultivated land. India can hardly achieve social stability without agricultural stability and the on-going social unrest across the country from Jaitapur to Haripur, stems from official efforts to destroy farmland and farmers. □□□ 08-05-2001