

## Calcutta Notebook

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THE LATEST DECISION OF THE new West Bengal cabinet led by Trinamul Congress to take over the land given to the Tatas for the automobile factory in Singur by a bill has evoked a sense of jubilation and has received wide publicity in the newspapers published from West Bengal. The Tatas had refused to part with the land and made it clear that they would consider returning the land to the Government only if they got back the amount they had invested before moving to Gujarat. Mamata Banerjee's cabinet has decided to pay the compensation money the amount of which is to be decided upon by arbitration.

The motive of the Tatas is clear. Along with various other freebies, they received the land almost free of cost, and decided to set up the factory fully knowing that the land granted to them was fertile and under multiple cropping. They also knew that construction of the proposed automobile project would jeopardize the livelihoods of several thousand persons, including sharecroppers, agricultural labourers, vegetable vendors and so on and so forth. When the movement against the forcible acquisition of land began, the Tatas took the help of the armed might of the CPI(M) and the Left Front Government in order to erect walls, install their machines and in this process to render the land totally *uncultivable*. When they departed, they preferred to choose Narendra Modi's Gujarat. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his government drew a flak from well-meaning people all over Bengal for his dogged persistence in backing the Tatas as well as for his policy of wooing the corporate tycoons a la Manmohan. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya has now lost the polls, but the Tatas have not lost. They are getting back their invested money as compensation.

The Tatas came to West Bengal in search of profits, not to industrialize the economy or to create employment, because as cunning businessmen, they know that employment generation and profit maximization do not always go together. They had definitely made a cost-benefit analysis of their own, aimed at reaping as much profit as possible. That is why they refused to go anywhere else in this state, and stuck stubbornly to Singur, even after the resistance had begun. If this matter is looked at in this way, it should be clear to Mamata Banerjee, Purnendu Bose and others that the Tatas should not be given any compensation at all. The Tatas behaved unscrupulously, and they must be made to pay the price. Wooing the Tatas or the corporate lobby as such will not be beneficial to the working people of Bengal in the long run. This truth must be understood.

There is another side to the story as well. The 400 acres that are to be returned to the farmers are no longer cultivable. If justice is to be done to the land-losers, they too must be compensated. Besides, there remains the question of the non-owning working hands who used to earn livelihood from the land of Singur. The new cabinet must take into consideration their case. □□□