

Calcutta Notebook

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THE TRINAMUL CONGRESS rose the crest of the anti-CPI(M) wave generated in the wake of the events in Singur and Nandigram, and reflected in the last Lok Sabha polls. After assumption of office, Miss Banerjee took the decision to return the land of Singur to unwilling farmers and has had a bill passed to this effect. The bill, however, has not mentioned the case of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, without whose participation the movement of Singur would not have taken place at all. One may also be curious to learn what stand persons like Manish Gupta, Amit Mitra, Rachpal Singh etc took when the movement in Singur was on. The announced reason for the takeover of Singur land by the new government was that the land was not used as promised. But instances of such breach are legion in West Bengal, and it is not known whether Mamata Banerjee's government is going to do anything about them. What is of more fundamental significance is that the model of 'industrialization' that the government led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharya tried to implement in West Bengal was to woo the corporate tycoons, Indian and foreign, which essentially meant a path of jobless growth with huge amounts of investment creating only few high-paid jobs. The existence of massive unemployment does not imply that corporations have to be given a red-carpet treatment *a la* Manmohan; it only implies that an alternative way of industrialization has to be evolved. That Mamata Banerjee is not averse to the path of jobless growth has already been demonstrated by her gestures to the corporate groups. These groups, it must be emphasized, will undertake projects that will maximize their profits, they are not launching their productive activities for social ends. The signs are clear. Mamata Banerjee does not want to project 'bad image' of her cabinet before the big business, and she also has come to believe that 'there is no alternative'. In other words, Mamata Banerjee wants the corporate club to play the role of central actors in the process of development and industrialization of West Bengal. Those Naxalite leaders of yesteryears who have for quite some time been striving to discover 'leftism' in Mamata Banerjee's political-economic agenda should take into account this fact unless, of course, considerations of power sit heavily on them.

For the countryside, the immediate programme should be a full implementation of the NREGP, and that with a more productive purpose, keeping in mind the objective of creating permanent productive assets through a process of decentralized decision-making. The other immediate issue should be a drastic revision of the BPL list by relying on the *gram panchayats* and *gram samsads*. It may be mentioned that among the powers given to the *gram samsads* by the 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution, poverty alleviation is one. So why entrust the task of preparing BPL lists to government employees instead of *gram samsads*? If Mamata Banerjee seeks to maintain her image with the people, she must undertake these two programmes.

It is significant that the new cabinet is opening the cases of the Sainbari killings of 1970, in which Malay Sain, Pranab Sain and Jiten Ray were killed by a mob led by CPM, and the Kashipore-Baranagar massacre of 1971, in which anybody suspected of Naxalite connections was killed with police acquiescence, and even relatives of Naxalites were not spared. But it is not less significant that an event of 21 July, 1993 in which 15 Congress workers were killed by police firing on the occasion of a demonstration led by Mamata Banerjee—the outfit Trinamul Congress was then non-existent—has taken a back seat, although Mamata Banerjee has every year observed a martyr's day on that occasion. A person with the minimum democratic sense should admit that this firing was utterly unjustified, because granted that the demonstrators behaved in a disorderly fashion, there

were other less violent means available to disperse them. One may recall that the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights held an independent investigation and denounced the firing. It is well known that Mr Manish Gupta, the minister of Development and Planning in Mamata Banerjee's cabinet was holding the office of the home secretary then. One may here recall the quarrel of Mr Prasad Ranjan Ray with the Chief Minister—Mr Ray was then the home secretary—and Alimuddin bosses in the wake of the barbaric Nandigram episode in December 2007. But Mr Manish Gupta rose to be the Chief Secretary in the period of the all-pervasive *daltantra*, under which loyalty to Alimuddin Street (the CPM headquarters) was reckoned the foremost criterion of promotion in the administrative ladder. It is anybody's guess whether he approved of the police brutality. It is also intriguing that there is as yet no demand on the part of the Congress or Trinamul Congress for a probe. This is one kind of 'politics of accommodation' under which big functionaries serving one supposedly oppressive regime with all their heart and mind are welcomed by next supposedly popular regime. Of course, this trend is not without historical precedents. Among the Indian officers of the ICS, who, in order to please their British masters, dealt with the nationalists with ruthless cruelty, were retained by the Congress regime, and there was no instance of cashiering as far as the civil servants were concerned. The reason was simple. What the new ruling politicians wanted from them was only loyalty to the Congress. The rationale was plain. The Congress for suppression of whatever opposition they would have to confront, could utilize their expertise.

So far there is no indication that Mamata Banerjee's government is going to initiate any new process of economic construction and governance and participatory democracy. It is also significant that various kinds of self-seekers and opportunists who had been vociferous supporters of everything the CPI(M) stood for are now flocking to join the Trinamul Congress. How far they succeed will also determine in some measure the future political equation in West Bengal as well as the future composition of the present ruling party of West Bengal.

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