

NOTE

Nandigram and Beyond

Anirban Biswas writes :

What Singur could not achieve, Nandigram has done. The plan of chemical hub, a show- case of the enclave-type imperial capital sponsored development, in this region is buried for the time being at the enormous human cost, of course. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, elevated to the stature of a good ambassador by the Salim group, the collaborator of Suharto's communist- killing campaign, and to that of a big intellectual by the most influential newspaper group of Bengal, has found himself in an awkward position, although like all authoritarians, he is not going to resign his post. The marxist regime miscalculated the people's side of the equation. The deployment of a huge police force in Singur could deliver the goods but it has not succeeded in Nandigram.

They are trying to say that the police acted in self-defense (killing women and children) although there is not a scintilla of evidence to suggest that a single policeman was injured by bullets. The editor of one widely circulated newspaper has claimed that they had prior information that the police had been instructed by the authorities of the Writers' Buildings to advance while firing bullets from their rifles. The capture of Nandigram by the CPI (M) with the help of the police was, however, short-lived and the reentry of a part of the reorganized villagers forced the local CPI (M) chieftains to flee. The latest report of the discovery of a considerable amount of firearms and the arrest of some hoodlums at a brick-kiln in the affected area has brought out sharply the murderous character of the police-CPI(M) combine.

About the talks of so-called 'development' and 'industrialization', it can be said that Buddha Babu and his colleagues had been resorting to incessant lies, coupled with slander, accompanied by an unseemly arrogance and a display of ignorance of the economics of development. One lie was that for purposes of industrialization, it was essential to acquire farmland, because in West Bengal, only one percent of total land is lying fallow. Mr D.Bandopadhyay, former Director of Land Reforms, Government of West Bengal and an acknowledged expert on the land question, have demonstrated the falsity of this assertion with convincing evidence.

A second lie was that the Tatas and Salims, and Special Economic Zones were indispensable for the industrialization of West Bengal, and so the Government should prostrate at their feet and give them whatever facilities they wanted. The protagonists of this view are obviously not familiar with the history Bengal's success in industrialization, nor they do not seem to have any idea of the political economy of these Special Economic Zones, called Special Exploitative Zones by Medha Patekar and 'prescription for disaster' by Professor Asok Mitra. A third lie was that their industrialization programme had the firm support of the people. That is why it was necessary for them to deploy a huge police force in Singur and to let loose a wave of repression, the scale and magnitude of which invited severe condemnation from a large number of intellectuals including Mahasweta Devi, Sumit Sarkar, Gautam Bhadra, Asok Sen, Sibnarayan Ray, Amlan Datta, Sankha Ghosh etc. A fourth lie was that before the full maturing of such types of capitalism, talks of socialism are meaningless. A fifth lie was put forward in the form of the argument that since it was the era of liberalization and globalization, it would not be wise to remain isolated. Shorn of all verbiage, this simply means; this is the era of imperialism and people have to succumb to eat if they have to remain in power and enjoy the privileges of the worst kind of rightists while professing their own brand of leftism.

Heavy weather was made of the meeting of the U.S Consul General with Mr Siddikulla Chaudhuri, the leader of the Zamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind. But it is noteworthy that Mr Chaudhuri has remained firm in his opposition to the policy of SEZs, while Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and Jyoti Basu are supporters of it. It is also known that creation of SEZs is meant to promote a colonial outpost type economic development linked with the needs of metropolitan capital. One intriguing feature of the whole scenario is that Ms Mamata Banerjee is also not opposed to the creation of SEZs; her only point of dispute is the acquisition of farmland.

The opposition to the official policy has led to some sort of stone -walling on the part of the CPI (M). One of the arguments heard against the Zamiat is their involvement with the Khilafat Movement, which supposedly linked religion with politics. But if the Zamiat can be held guilty on that score, was Gandhi any less guilty? Was the role of the Communist Party very glorious when the issue of Pakistan was raising its head all over the Indian subcontinent? Another nefarious tactic is to call it communal, it is a historical fact that this organization did not support the communal partition of India. There is another question; namely whether Muslims' plots of farmland are singled out for acquisition. This suggestion, however, is not acceptable, and the number of people killed in Nandigram by the police and the hooligans belonging to the CPI (M) include Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Such suggestions only reduce the strength of the movement against tyranny.

A further point is whether the tracts of land belonging to the now closed industrial units cannot be acquired for industrialization. The official explanation is that there are legal complications. Given the fact that the land of Singur was acquired by invoking the Land Acquisition Act of 1895 and in the name of public interest, this claim is hardly credible. There are reports that some of this land is being utilized for building housing complexes.

One or two points about the geographical entity called Nandigram should be mentioned. The Quit India movement of 1942 swept this area, and a swadhin sarkar (independent government) was set up there. Later, the wave of the historic Tebhaga movement led by the undivided Communist Party of India penetrated the area. It is one of the places in which the limited land reform measures of the Government have been most successfully implemented, and the share of absentee landowners in the total cultivable land is insignificant. Besides, land is fertile, and most of it is under multiple cropping. Nobody except a fool would expect the fanners of this area to part with their means of livelihood for the sake of a future that was uncertain.

Objectively the struggle of the people of Nandigram is also a struggle against the forces of globalization and imperialism. The people have set at naught the might of the police and thugs employed by the CPI (M). Besides, the spontaneous mass reaction all over West Bengal has made it at least one thousand times difficult for Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his men to acquire farmland in other places for the purpose of his brand of industrialization. ✍ ✍ ✍