

Deceits and Lies

THERE IS NO DEARTH OF POLI-tically biased people to defend the notorious land acquisition policy of the CPM-led Left Front Government of West Bengal by all sorts of deceits and lies. In the *Economic and Political Weekly*, the famous journal of cultivation of social sciences, one veteran economist (vide E.P.W, April 28, 2007) has opined on land acquisition in Singur that had the Tatas purchased the land through local agents, there would have been no opposition and movement. Raising such hypothetical bogeys, which nobody can prove or deny, is the trick of every escapist. The economist has gone on to claim that the Government began the process of consultation with farmers after the latter had given their consent to acquisition. The economist concerned has found it convenient to suppress the fact that in the affidavit submitted by the government to Calcutta High Court, it has been said that for only 283 acres of land, no contest money was taken. Regarding the policy on economic development, the economist has gone a step further. He supports in principle Professor Amit Bhaduri's ideas on decentralized development but goes on to say that the Left Front Government should take the advantages of the changed circumstances created by the policy of liberalization prescribed by the World Bank. This glaring self-contradiction apart, this economist has also suppressed the fact that the Tatas have gained much, almost to the extent of Rs 100 crore, at the expense of the public exchequer in the process of land transfer. The total freebies they are going to obtain as a result of their agreement with the government is, according to Prof Ashok Mitra, of the order of Rs 850 crore. And they have made no definite commitment regarding the volume of employment generation. The veteran economist considers all these a big advantage for West Bengal!

In his writings on economic development—he has written quite a few articles and a monograph—Prof Amit Bhaduri, has noted the disastrous policy of competition for currying the favour of corporate capital. One of the thrusts of Professor Bhadun's writings is that local institutions like the panchayets must be strengthened for promoting decentralized development. That the state government did not take the opinions of the panchayets either in Singur or in Nandigram before taking the decision of land acquisition has demonstrated the falsity of claim of the CPM ideologues that they have effected decentralization through the panchayeti system. But the hypocrisy of these ideologues notwithstanding, Bhadun's argument contains a large measure of truth, at least in the present state of relationship between the state and the civil society. Organizing the people of Nandigram for resistance to the acquisition of land began with holding meetings of the gram samsads and invoking their constitutional rights. Even under the limited constitutional options, there are at least some potentialities of democratic functioning with the participation of the people. Of course, there is the draconian Act of 1894, the act that gives power to the state to act as an omnipotent dictator. But invocation of the right of the gram samsads can make people realize that it is not always judicious to expect the state to respect the norms of democratic functioning. When the Nandigram episode will be closed, or what turn the present balance of forces will take, cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty, but the way democratic contents have been introduced into the struggle will serve as a positive lesson to all future democratic struggles, just as the lessons of the 'independent government' formed during the Quit India Movement have played their part in shaping the modalities of the struggle of Nandigram even after more than six decades. □□□