

WEST BENGAL

Pollution and State Terror

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The Press has been continuously pouring new items on the 'success' of the campaign of the joint forces in the Jungle Mahal area of what is now known as the Paschimanchal region of West Bengal. It is of course true that the reckless actions of the CPI (Maoist) and their policy of relying on killings of individuals many of who can by no means be called class enemies have weakened the mass base of the movement that started as an uprising against state repression. The Maoists have made a twofold blunder that has caused incalculable harm to the movement. First of all, they relied on the power of guns and as corollary, relegated the initiative of the masses to a secondary position. Secondly, they have tried to exterminate all those who did not agree with them totally. On the other hand, the state has unleashed what is a kind of all-pervasive terror. The ruthless beating of the women in the village Sonamukhi by the joint forces has become well-known; only Mr Buddhdeb Bhattacharya is ignorant of it.

The repressive face of the state has been revealed in another way. For a pretty long period, some iron sponge factories have been operating in the Jhargram area, generally around Lodhashuli. These factories have done enormous damage to the ecological balance of the area. Even a casual visitor to the place can find thick black layers of dust on tree-leaves, paddy fields or pond water. Public protests and moves against this damaging industrial pollution led the Calcutta High Court to issue an order suspending the work of these factories. But the administration reacted by imprisoning the leaders of the anti-pollution movement, and even instituting cases of treason against them. Upangsu Mahato, an organizer of the movement was thus arrested and implicated in false cases. After more than a month's haggling, he was granted bail by the court.

One section of the masses, sandwiched between state repression and the Maoists' tyrannical method of conducting 'mass struggle', tried to keep the democratic values alive. Out of this urge, they sought to hold a convention in Jhargram town on 25 July with the purpose of chalking out a programme of action. Some environmental and political activists from outside were also to participate in the convention and present their views. But the administration cancelled the permission at the last moment, and the police went on propagating that the convention won't be held. This reveals the traditionally anti-people character of the administration. The administration, which is incapable of carrying on its routine work owing to local political unrest, which has utterly failed to implement official welfare projects, which has demonstrated its callousness as far as the provision of education, health, livelihood and even security of life to the people is concerned, is hyper-active in suppressing the moves against rapidly spreading industrial pollution. It shows beyond a shade of doubt that the administration's real purpose is to suppress all sorts of mass movements against oppression and exploitation, not just to combat the Maoists.

The Maoists have in general shown an apathetic attitude towards this problem of pollution, while the role of the armed forces of the ruling party of West Bengal is to act as the overt and covert collaborator of the administration. These forces of course want to establish peace in the region, but it is the peace of the graveyard or cremation ground (*smasaneer santi*) peace attained by means of absolute hegemony of the ruling party, which is fast losing in strength all over the state, over the people. The ruling party cannot fight the Maoists on their own,; hence they have to rely on the police and the administration.

Yet this initiative against environmental pollution heralds a new beginning. The fighters have neither guns nor legal protection. But they are not lacking in will power, which has inspired them to stand up against all sorts of terror, namely state terror, Maoist terror and party terror. It is reasonable to argue that the more it is articulated, the more will peace be ensured. Democratic people can at least learn from it, even if they are not in a position to assist it actively. □□□