

On Nandigram

I

When an intellectual of the calibre of Prabhat Patnaik becomes an apologist for a political party ('In the Aftermath of Nandigram', May 26), the result is a sorry spectacle. Instead of using his formidable intellect to develop new ideas with which the communists of the world and India in particular can deal with the current neoliberal onslaught, he restricts himself to explaining why the CPI(M) could do no better in Nandigram than turn the might of the state against the peasants.

What should be the role of a communist party in a situation as exists in India? Should they say that the middle classes demand industrialisation and therefore industrialisation must take place at any cost, even if it means pushing the farmers off the land? Is it sufficient to say that the capital for industrialisation can be raised only by the private sector, and that all states are wooing them, and therefore West Bengal must do the same? For the CPI(M), this is a natural conclusion. Having tailed the Congress at the centre and various regional parties in the states, it has failed to develop any energetic economic policy. Ideas are at a premium. It has been nursing its constituency of the somewhat pampered organised labour – who have shown a distressing tendency to move rightwards with growing prosperity – and government employees who have shown little concern or responsibility for the common people who are at their mercy everyday. So much for communist consciousness. So afraid is the CPI(M) of losing power in these two states, that the retention of these governments has become the end-all of party policy.

But much worse than this is the 'traison des clercs'. If the intellectuals affiliated to the party fail to blow the

whistle, the faith reposed by the poor and marginalised in the communists is betrayed.

GEORGE THOMAS
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II

While I hold Prabhat Patnaik in great esteem for his penetrating analysis of economic issues (he had been to my knowledge the only prominent economist to have seen through the south-east Asian "Miracle" and unswerving commitment to socialism, I am not a little bewildered by his attempt to deflect the attack from the CPI(M). It will not do to say that the criticism of the CPI(M) on the painful Nandigram incident has come from sworn enemies of CPI(M) alone, or that the only purpose behind the attacks is to discredit the West Bengal government.

There is no dispute about the fact that the neoliberal policy of export-oriented industrialisation is to blame for the incident. The point at issue is the West Bengal government CPI(M)'s acceptance of that policy. As in the case of China, the surrender to the masters of international capital by a left government is bound to result in consequences terrible for the peasantry. There is a political decision involved here. Yes, the CPI(M)-led government in West Bengal has been pushed into accepting this policy. There was an urgent necessity of ensuring industrial revival and procuring finance for such a revival, and Jyoti Basu himself had returned empty-handed from tours abroad because of the demands made by masters of international finance capital. Conceding those demands eventually, no doubt under the influence of Chinese example, had paved the way to Nandigram.

But what were the alternatives? To the best of my knowledge, the matter

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was never seriously debated by the Left in India. Was it correct to follow the Stalinist precedent of consolidating gains in some parts of the country and compromising with the enemy elsewhere? Was the social-democratic path viable in a situation where the funds were either controlled by a neoliberal central government or by international finance capital? What other path of development could have been followed in the circumstances? And so on.

HIREN GOHAIN

III

Prabhat Patnaik has argued that the tragedy of Nandigram is an outcome of the neoliberal policy of

corporate industrialisation being imposed upon the country and on all the states. He has stated categorically that the "West Bengal government of course may be faulted for not having protested against this imposition". But, at the same time, he has warned that the neoliberal intellectuals have no moral right to attribute the Nandigram tragedy to the "so-called 'Stalinist' methods of the CPI(M)".

Patnaik's polemic against the neoliberal policy is based on valid arguments. But, the problem lies elsewhere. His strong critique of the "neoliberal intellectuals" does not have much relevance in the context of Nandigram. In fact, the state atrocities in Nandigram are being criticised by different shades of political opinion and civil society

organisations, all of whom should not be stigmatised as "neoliberal intellectuals".

I would like to conclude by stating that the chief architect of the Left Front government's policy of industrialisation, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, perhaps would not concede Patnaik's argument that the Nandigram tragedy is an outcome of the neoliberal policy. In his booklet, *Industrialisation for the Toiling Masses* being widely circulated in West Bengal, the chief minister has expressed the following opinion in the aftermath of Nandigram: "The direction of our efforts in industrialisation is oriented towards the poor. We must explain it to the people."

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