

Action Alert

Facts in Brief

Singur is in Hugli District of West Bengal. The West Bengal Government has 'decided' to give 997 acres of land to the Tata Group. The proposed factory will manufacture a car worth Rs. 1 lakh. Land acquisition has been made by the State Government for 'public purpose'. Compensation has been offered. Most have refused to give up their land despite subsequent hike in the rates of compensation. Government started the process of physical takeover of the land claimed to be handed over to it from the 1 December 2006. On 2 December, police resorted to unrestrained violence in the adjoining villages. The local TMC MLA and Medha Patkar was physically 'removed' from the area.

An Urgent Appeal

Giving consent or facing coercion, in case of Singur, has become the two sides of the same coin -- both the sides loaded heavily with threat, repression and violence. In this backdrop will those intoxicated with power kindly note that there is no greatness in letting 20000 armed police loose amidst a few villages? Have they started believing that the unarmed have no democratic rights? Have the images of Jalianwala Bagh faded?

The Government of West Bengal with its police, is behaving like a land-grabbing promoter-mafia duo. It is spreading terror and trying to force almost 60% of unwilling individual land-owners to accept compensation and part with almost 50% of the remaining land at Singur. This, notwithstanding the Government's lie that 913 acres, that is 92% of the land has already been 'voluntarily' handed over to the State, which has issued acquisition notice in August. Why else should the state need to send 20000 armed personnel for so little land? Moreover the question of 'voluntary' handing over of prime agricultural land is a joke, a misnomer in the face of the Government's unilateral decision of acquisition. The Government is dispossessing land owners of their private property and following it up by branding them as encroachers and trespassers.

The Government is openly justifying its brutish and bizarre actions stating that they are governed by the market -- Tatas they explain, after all, 'wanted' that specific piece of land at Singur. Obviously the overlord can cut its fiefdom into pieces and the taker will choose the cake -- leftist bhudaan movement, of a different kind.

The farmers here work on two to five crops a year. There are 26 mini-tubewells, 2 deep tubewells and a DVC canal for irrigation. No wonder they refuse to sell there 'mother'. It is shocking to hear that LF leaders say that the womenfolk here, would be able to work as menials in the residential apartments which will come up in the

vicinity when the factory is setup. Is this the paradigm of development for the future?

The Information and Police Minister, like his distant predecessor -- Goebbels -- justifies police atrocities at Singur as 'self defense'. Earlier in the day, however, he had stated characteristically that 'nothing' has happened at Singur. The boastful challenging words "Who will stop us?" with a smug smile on camera, reminds one of a moustached German of yesteryears, though his economic pursuits are being compared by some of his party comrades with a Russian and a Chinese of not so distant past. No wonder this 'International Figure' is bragging -- "We are 235, they are 35" -- in spite of a 50-50 break up of polled votes in the last General Elections. Let us not talk about the single largest chunk of non-voters. When faced with an awkward question from a journalist on camera, he evades, turns away visibly embarrassed, but not before asking threateningly as to what paper the journalist represents. Siddhartha Sankar Roy, the Congress Chief Minister was similarly vindictive and arrogant in the '70's -- before he was dumped. History goes full circle -- Buddha, the Avatar, reverts to his purvashram, Siddhartha.

CPI(M) leaders helped the police on ground-zero to identify the houses of those who have not given up their land. The law keepers selectively broke into these homes, assaulted even the elderly, women and children, torched hay stacks. Some TV channels did a great service by airing footage of the merciless beatings resorted to. It was shocking to witness over TV, hundreds of policemen trampling over crops and human rights. Such brutality and excess reminded one of our colonial past. Has the Left Front chosen to carry on with the British legacy?

Shamefully it is the same Left Front which had once tried to empower rural Bengal. Whither land reforms? What about the pledges? Today empowered by the Black Commando, Rapid Action Force, Combat Force and regular police force it is going for the throats of the hapless tillers. What else can be termed as the arrogance of power?

Yet another shame is the role of the 'legendary' Ananda Bazar Patrika Group. We are in favour of the freedom of press. But the freedom of the press-owner should not compromise the freedom of the readers. The readers have the right to know and the ABP has chosen to mislead. Is this what freedom of press is all about? We categorically state that the LF and the ABP, old foes, are now working in partnership. We denounce the role of ABP and call upon all those to whom freedom of press is dear, to suitably denounce it.

Will we be mere bystanders? We must warn well in advance that one should not look at Singur in isolation. It is not just about paving the way for further acquisition in Nandigram, Haripur, Barasat, Bhangar, Baruipur which, and many more, are all on the anvil. Beware, the hound-like state repression is being unleashed. We should not allow this juggernaut to roll. We must condemn and

protest. Wherever we are, whoever we are, irrespective of party affiliations or non-partisan positions. We must organise and/or participate in protests. In whatever manner we deem fit.

With warm regards

Naba Dutta
General Secretary
Nagarik Mancha

5 December 2006

Please send protest letters to:

**His Excellency
The Governor of West Bengal
Raj Bhavan
Kolkata 700 062**

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