

Our response, dated 9 December 2006, to the Status Report on the Singur Project from West Bengal Government

Friends

This has reference to an email, which mentions about a "factsheet on the Tata Motors project in Singur compiled by the West Bengal Government", being circulated on its behalf as an attachment by one P M S Grewal, Secretary, Delhi State Committee CPI(M).

We have some reservations, to say the least, about the content and purport of the said "factsheet". We are mentioning just a few of them restricting ourselves to the said factsheet.

1. The last land-use map available with the Government of West Bengal was drawn during the '70's. At that time the classification was based on the intensity of agriculture considering this area to be 'rain-fed'. Since then the WB Government has set up four deep tubewells and renovated three DVC fed canals in this area. Productivity has increased manifold paving the way for 27 privately owned mini deep tubewells and hundreds of diesel/kerosene run mini pumpsets for lifting water from channels. The 'rain-fed' land has become 'irrigated land'. Presently there are 42 power-tillers in the area. Could all these be there if this area was a predominantly mono-crop and partially double-crop land? The Left Front can indeed stake partial claims of success for such a positive transformation of rural economy and even the villagers do not deny it totally. Now which is a 'fact' -- what the map drawn in 70's says or what exists in 2006 on the ground level?

2. The farmers are skilled at agriculture and other land-related activities. Having targeted to 'de-skill' them, having made them virtually 'unemployable', a lot is being made subsequently about imparting training. In fact six of the 14 pages of the said factsheet has been devoted to trainings and trainees. Figures show that 0.7% (179 of the 20000) rendered jobless are receiving training for future employment at Tata factory or in the 'probable' ancillaries. The advertisements of the organisations imparting these training quietly understandably declare that there could be no job guarantee. Now does the 'fact' seem to speak for itself, even if we accept that the number of 'trained' persons will increase over time? Could there really be a realistic assurance of jobs? Were they really in need of jobs in the first place? A Left front leader has gone on record stating that people undergoing training would earn 20 times more than at present! Could the word 'eyewash' have any relevance in the scheme of things?

3. The factsheet claims that there are 237 recorded bargadars "according to the Collector" and that as per "local enquiry", the total number of unrecorded bargadars is 170. Hence according to the Government, the total number of bargadars is 407. As per Government standards, in undivided Bengal and, later,

in West Bengal, right from the days of the Land Revenue Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud, 1940, it is accepted that in any area, over and above the recorded landowners, there would be bargadars, and their number would be at least 20% of the number of landowners. As per the factsheet, there are 9020 landowners "to whom disbursement has been made" and 3000 "persons (landowners) yet to receive payment". So for a total of 12000 landowners there should have been 'at least' 2400 recorded and unrecorded bargadars instead of 407 as stated above.

4. Facts, or rather the lack of it, shows that this Government in its commitment towards its irreversible allegiance to capital, market and globalisation has decided to wish away ground level reality -- since nothing else seems to matter excepting its 'challenge' to go ahead with the project. There are several thousand families whose prime bread earners depends on this parcel of land for their livelihood. The landless labourers; the seasonal tribal migrant agricultural labourers from Bankura and Purulia; the van operators and transporters; the traders who buy-carry-sell agro products to distant wholesale markets; the artisans and craftsmen; and others involved in various occupations earning while providing various services to the community. Compensation can partially offset the cost of land of the land owners but who can compensate for the loss of livelihood? This is a matter of fact which perhaps leaves very little room even for an argumentative loyalist.

5. There are a huge number of 'facts' which this factsheet does not talk about. Though this factsheet has been introduced in the email as the "factsheet on the Tata Motors project in Singur compiled by the West Bengal Government" there is not a single mention made in the factsheet of 'Tata' or 'Motors' leave alone Tata Motors! Some of the many facts which we humbly state should have been mentioned in this factsheet are as follows:

- a. What does the Tata pay for the land which is costing the West Bengal Government and its tax paying citizens Rs.131.49 crores?
- b. What are the 'holidays', waivers, indirect subsidies and so on offered to the Tata by LF Government ?
- c. If comparable car manufactures can do with 300-400 acres of non-agricultural land in other States of India, why is Tata being given 997 acres of first class agricultural farmland?
- d. Does the State really need an automobile hub which will presumably materialise once Tata sets up base at Singur and has there been any study to ascertain what impact it might have in the future?
- e. Did Tata ask for Singur or was it offered to it? On what basis was the land with an average cropping intensity of 3 or above chosen for an

automobile factory at the first place? Which were the other four sites reportedly shown to the Tata Group?

6. The Notice under Section 4(1) of Land Acquisition Act 1894 issued between 19 and 24 July 2006 is the only relevant gazette notification available on the Hooghly District Official Website (www.hooghly.nic.in). It states that "land as mentioned in schedule below is likely to be needed to be taken by Government / Government Undertaking / Development Authorities, ***at the public expense for a public purpose, viz., employment generation and socio economic development of the area by setting up TATA Small Car Project***" (emphasis added). This implies that Tata is setting up its car factory to generate employment for skilled farmers and socio economic development of an already thriving agricultural community. Tata will 'also' make small cars, which we hope will not 'eat' grass in this topsy turvy paradigm of development! Now, the 'public expense for public purpose' is ultimately aimed at handing over 997.1 acres of land to the Tata. As per 1984 amendments the land could have been directly handed over to the Tata, but in that case they would have to deposit 80% of the amount payable as compensation in advance and enter into an MOU which had to be made public as per law. That would 'unnecessarily' pressurise the Tata group and would not allow for any "trade secrets" as stated by a senior Minister. So in walks WBDIC, the face saver. This might have been mentioned in the Notice under Section 6 of Land Acquisition Act 1894 issued between 29th August 2006 and 31st August 2006. But no one has seen this Notice under Section 6 or for that matter any subsequent Notices leading up to the declaration of the 'award'. No gazette notification as yet. The Hooghly District Official Website (www.hooghly.nic.in) has been last updated on 27 August 2006. So much for the right to information.

7. The factsheet states that "from the very beginning of the process of Land acquisition WBIDC (West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation) was engaged with the idea that the compensation payable to the landowners and bargadars need to be commensurate with the market value of land and its present usage pattern of the land" which "necessitated reconnaissance of the land". However "entry to the land to explore the terrain and to ascertain the ground condition by WBIDC team could not be ensured till early December" 2006. This indeed is a total giveaway! The Government issues notice of land acquisition and hands over the land to WBIDC which takes possession in order to formally hand it over to Tata Motors. But ... the WBIDC FIRST disburses Rs 76.64 crores (that is 58.3% of the net payable amount) for 635 acres (that is 63.7% of the proposed area) to 9020 persons (that is 75% of the total landowners). THEN, with the active participation of 15000 to 20000 police personnel including Black Commando, Rapid Action Force, Combat Force and regular police force from various Districts, and in the presence of the District Administration, and the support of State Government machinery, it cordons off the area on and from 1 December. ONLY THEN was it ensured that WBIDC could carry out necessary reconnaissance to ascertain "present usage pattern"

and to "explore the terrain" and "ascertain the ground condition". What for?
The cart is already put before the horse?

We would like to state that the disinformation campaign of the West Bengal Government is also making people like PMS Grewal, Secretary, Delhi State Committee, CPI(M) biased. We too are utterly amazed to find that mere misinformation, deliberately disseminated, is influencing and confusing comparatively pro-people leftist forces. It is unfortunate given the number of peoples' movements they are genuinely siding with in the rest of the country. Phrases like "vicious propaganda", "allegations of police excesses" and "exaggerated claims of excesses" in the cover letter goes to show what ideological blinkers are all about -- maybe the red flags from Delhi would have waved at Singur if the Left Front was not in power in this State.

We request you to circulate this mail to those who have received the earlier mail from your end.

Soliciting fraternal support for the people of Singur,

In solidarity

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