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So-called cleansing and reforming electoral process

Calculated move to bury last vestige of democratic election

A few months back two Assembly elections were held in Tripura and Karnataka. The Election Commission (EC) claimed that both these elections were held under its strict surveillance and in due compliance with the new code of conduct formulated as part of the reforms it undertook to free the electoral system from any aberration or manipulation. But the way the polls took place does not conform to the claim. Rather, a contrary belief is only reinforced. Let us look into the facts first.

Changes in electoral rules

In Karnataka, the EC completed delimitation of the 224 constituencies and renewed the voters' lists along with issue of voters' ID cards. But it was found that the state went to the polls with improper delimitation of the constituencies as a result of which hundreds of thousands of voters became uncertain about the constituencies or booths they were to exercise franchise in. Many were even deprived of their right to vote because the shoddily prepared voter lists as well as the ID cards prepared by an outside agency were full of mistakes. It was so big a fiasco that some BJP members found no difficulty in printing and distributing fake ID cards and got away with it. Even there was just 11 to 13 days gap between the date of the poll and allotment of symbols to the candidates. Naturally, the recognized parties with fixed symbols got a definite advantage over other candidates in so far as campaigning and other preparations are concerned. Same thing happened in Tripura as well. So

while the EC boasted of having cleansed the system, it actually became discernibly discriminatory in favour of the big bourgeois parties like Congress, BJP, JD (S) and the pseudo-Marxists like CPI(M), CPI who, though fighting each other in the hustings, are all wedded to the task of serving and protecting the decadent capitalist rule ruthlessly exploiting the people and shamelessly dispossessing the masses of their hard-earned legitimate democratic rights. Naturally, these parties had no

difficulty in contesting polls adhering to this much-clamoured code of conduct albeit after making some initial noise at the beginning to play to the gallery. They had not only endorsed the newly-fangled code but found in it an enabler in manipulating results in the states under their rule. So while BJP, JD(S), Congress found it convenient in Karnataka, it became a boon to CPI(M) in Tripura.

Reforms utterly discriminatory

All these changes brought

about in the code of conduct and other rules and regulations in the process of so-called electoral reforms, in fact decisively worked against the relatively smaller parties in terms of the numbers of MLAs, MPs, like ours. These in fact, have put up insurmountable hurdles before us in fighting electoral battles upholding the cause of the poor and have-nots. With the so-called electoral process in operation, it is practically leading to a situation in which we might well be prevented

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Moving Nano car project out of Singur

A ploy hatched by Tata and CPI (M) in tandem for mutual benefit

On 3 October, 2008, Ratan Tata after a prolonged meeting with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the CPI (M) chief Minister of West Bengal, announced that he was going to shift his Nano car project out of Singur in the state. He squarely blamed the opposition combine led by Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress for driving out the project. Two years back when the Singur peasants under the banner of *Singur Krishijami Raksha Committee* (Committee for Protecting Agricultural Land in Singur) launched agitation against the decision of forcible acquisition of extremely fertile multi-cropped land for the proposed Nano factory, Ratan Tata, the head of the Tata empire, said that he would not leave even if someone held a gun to his

head. But now he said he was going because the gun was not only held but the triggers were pulled out. The version of the CPI(M) is no different. Its leaders also blamed the "very irresponsible opposition" for the decision of the Tata house and held that this was a blow to the "industrialization" initiatives its government has initiated in West Bengal. The CPI(M) industries minister who was instrumental in snatching land with bullet, bayonet and riding on a law of the British imperialist rule made a mockery of himself by accusing the opposition of shedding blood in the name of movement. The monopolist-controlled media also have concentrated all their efforts to get this view across and devote most of their space and time to show how

this exit has "sent shockwaves to rattle the entire state which stands shattered" because of the agitation of the opposition "which was motivated by political gains and sustained undemocratic methods." And now with the announcement that the project has been relocated in Sanand, Gujarat, dimension has been added to the propaganda that because of obduracy of the opposition, such a dream venture that would have provided jobs to the aspirant unemployed youth of the state had to be abandoned.

Background

Before we proceed based on facts and reason as to whether this concerted propaganda does have a basis or is heinously planted to

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Under garb of reforms, rich parties are given undue favour

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from contesting any election. Take for instance, the phenomenal raising of the deposit money. After independence, the amounts fixed for Assembly and Parliamentary elections were Rs 250 and Rs 500 respectively. But now the EC has arbitrarily and unilaterally increased the sums to Rs 5000, and Rs 10,000 respectively, effecting a twenty-fold hike. The amount originally proposed, it is understood, was Rs 20,000. The plea offered by the EC has been that such has been done to weed out many non-serious candidates and thus making the elections less cumbersome. So the criterion for distinguishing between 'serious' and 'non-serious' candidates is the capacity to make down payment of deposit money. Thus whatever little rights the Indian Constitution granted to all citizens, irrespective of their financial or social position to elect and be elected are being robbed by creating a smokescreen of reforming electoral system and making it free and fair. Obviously, it is nothing but a clear violation of the very basics of a democratic Constitution. Any thinking person will understand that such is being done to keep parties like us, who run on public charity in fighting for people's rights and interest and are staunchly opposed to the ongoing oppressive capitalist rule, away from contesting polls. EC has also fixed an exorbitant price for procuring voters' list which also is a spanner for small and poor parties in contesting the polls properly by purchasing adequate number of copies.

Similarly the rules of registration have been made so stringent that only the parties and outfits showing allegiance to the ruling class could pass through the eligibility criteria. It is ridiculous to find that while odds are being stacked against parties like us, EC is too quick in giving registration and even according recognition instantaneously to the splinter groups or break away factions of large bourgeois parties making them entitled to all benefits including allocation of permanent symbol, propaganda slot in the media, etc. Thus the parties born the other day as a result of internal squabbles, group conflicts or personal ambitions of individual leaders are given precedence over the existing smaller parties representing the poor, in so far as electoral advantages are concerned.

Candidates of most of these small parties so forced to be categorized as unrecognized and unregistered are deemed as 'independents' and hence denied otherwise due benefits and facilities like symbol allotment on time, some lead time for campaign and public acquaintance and so forth. Inequity is further glaring when it is found that as per EC stipulation, such unregistered and unrecognized parties have to get the names of their candidates proposed by as many as 10 electorates from the constituency as against only one for the recognized and registered party candidates.

Unfair changes in campaign rules

Another menacing blow has been dealt by the EC in the name of reforming the propaganda and campaign mechanism. Everyone knows that right to communicate political stands as well as ideological viewpoints to the electorates is a basic right of the candidates. This is a fundamental principle of bourgeois parliamentary democracy that speaks of free and fair elections and calls for exercise of voting right according to conscience. In other words, the enshrined principle is to give widest scope to the electorates to be acquainted with all political opinions and divergent views so that they could take an informed decision about exercising their franchise. Any asymmetry in information is, therefore, tantamount to counterpoising the very intent of this principle.

As a revolutionary party of the proletariat, we also take part in the elections and would need to do so till the people through their life experience are convinced that no fundamental change could be brought about through the bourgeois electoral system. Till the time this consciousness dawns on the broader section of the people, we avail of the opportunity of electioneering to disseminate our views widely among the people and thereby impart on them necessary political education so that they can understand futility of the exploitative capitalist order and the imperativeness of bringing about anti-capitalist revolution. At the same time, our objective is to win as many seats as possible so that our representatives could reflect inside the legislature the voice of people's movement being conducted without relent on the burning issues

of life and thus combine parliamentary movement with the extra-parliamentary struggles. But the current action of the EC in shortening the campaign time not only debars us of our rightful claim to put across our political analyses and formulations to the toiling people but even tramples underfoot what the ardent proponents of bourgeois democracy strongly preached for. One would recall that John Stuart Mill, one of the best exponents of bourgeois democracy, was unequivocal in emphasizing that "Those indeed, if any such there be, who, under pretence of equal justice, aim only at substituting the class ascendancy of the poor for that of the rich, will of course be unfavourable to a scheme which places both on a level." He also warned of the "danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body, and in the popular opinion which controls it." So while his stress has been on providing equal opportunity to all and raising of political intelligence of the people, the step taken by EC is in fact just in opposite direction. While the big parliamentary parties enjoy the advantage of campaigning with their fixed party symbol well in advance, relatively smaller parties could start the same only 11 to 12 days before the election date as before that symbols are not allotted to them. Needless to say this is too short a time for any serious political party including the genuine revolutionary party who fights election in the course of conducting legitimate democratic movements to reach out to the electorates with their political standpoints. While the government allows recognized parties to even use electronic media for campaigning and most of the bourgeois outfits manage to secure backing of the bourgeois media in airing their views, smaller parties and most importantly the revolutionary party has to depend on meetings and processions for that purpose. If so needed, the big bourgeois and social-democratic parties having financial muscle on account of liberal patronage by the ruling bourgeoisie and corporate world could well hire TV as well as radio spots or even float TV or radio channels to undertake round-the-clock propaganda. Moreover, the monopoly-controlled media is often pressed into action for creating a favourable wave in favour of a

particular party or candidate of the ruling class. This is done in the name of pre-poll surveys or so-called exit polls. Sometimes, the ploy is operative through engineered 'expert opinions' and incessant doctored propaganda. These 'free' media publicities are also drawn upon by the ruling class and its political managers to cover misdeeds, divert anti-incumbency wrath of the people, restrict the electoral choice between two bourgeois or social-democratic parties or combinations and pitchfork an upstart or minion as leader. One can well imagine how tough it is for the smaller parties to override accumulated effect of all this.

The buck does not stop here. The EC has despotically and unilaterally clamped such restrictions on wall writing, display of banners, and even sticking of posters so far and so long considered to be time-tested cheapest modes of creating public awareness, that it has become virtually impossible for the parties and candidates depending on these means to make any impact. There is a ban on using exterior or interior, including outer walls, and external surfaces of government and semi-government buildings or compounds for such graffiti, poster or banner display. The ban will extend to private houses and buildings as well unless the intending political parties or candidates obtain necessary permission from the owners. Otherwise, it will be deemed to be a violation of rule and invite appropriate penal measures. Obviously, while the owners of private buildings and residential houses might be coerced by the big parties wielding enough political clout to give such permission, no owner would dare giving such permission to the small parties in fear of retaliation later by the big parties. Likewise, while government buildings or walls could well be used by the ruling parties flouting rules with impunity, legal provisions will immediately be invoked if any smaller party, particularly the revolutionary party makes any such 'encroachment' on government properties. The servitor parties of the ruling class can also put up large commercial hoardings and carry out extensive paid campaign in print media—something which the smaller parties could ill-afford with their scanty resources.

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EC lenient with big parties, harsh with pro-people forces

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Moreover, model code of conduct imposed by EC of late stipulates that for holding election meetings, permission has to be obtained from the local police authorities informing them of the venue and time of the proposed meeting well in advance. Even for taking out processions, prior police permission has been made mandatory. Restrictions are also on use of microphones. In the recently concluded Assembly polls in Tripura and Karnataka, we had experiences of how these legal enforcements are cunningly used to harass if not deny the due to the genuine spokesmen of the people. Permissions to organize meetings at particular venues were refused to our party on many occasions even in the penultimate hour, giving the excuse that the spots had been booked earlier by other contesting parties. On discrete enquiry, it was revealed that authorities connived with our opponents in taking backdated applications to substantiate their claim over us. Likewise, scheduled meetings could not be held as the police pleaded inability to depute anyone for video-recording the proceedings, another stipulation imposed in course of the reform exercise. Permission was also not granted to us for taking out campaign rallies even. Thus, while we were deprived of our right because of manipulations and whims, the parties or candidates favoured by the class or ruling dispensations got away with undue advantages.

Thus it can be seen that that on one hand there is drastic curtailment of time of campaign. On the other, there is a planned move to keep the hitherto available campaigning methods out of reach of the parties or forces not featuring in the favour list of the class and administration. Over and above, there is plethora of concessions, favouritisms, out of the turn advantages as well as administrative and media backings to the parties and forces reckoned by the ruling bourgeoisie as members of its subservient camps. Cunningly, the whole set up is so revamped as to deprive the revolutionary party, the true representative of people's cause, the due scope of informing the masses about its ideological views and specific opinions on the various issues affecting people's life. It is

also true that the common people who otherwise remain indifferent and apathetic to politics because of increasing social alienation inevitable in a moribund decadent bourgeois system show some interest, some concern about raging political controversies, twists and turns, trends and counter-trends during election time. So if there is an administrative fiat which visibly discriminates one contesting party from the other citing this or that eligibility criteria in so far as availability of the time of propaganda is concerned and if the discrimination is so wide that one of the parties is denied of the minimum necessary scope to present its political view to the people and thus virtually forced out of necessary public contact, the people are denied the rightful opportunity to know which candidate represents what ideology, what are the precise views of the various parties and candidates on the contemporary issues and burning problems of life and so forth. Thus they will go to the polls with incomplete or truncated information about the contestants. It is akin to impeding the very process of developing desired political and ideological consciousness among people. Surely this is much to the glee of the parties subservient to the ruling class and thriving on the ignorance of the people.

Of late, there has been another cunning step on the part of certain state governments like Assam to forbid a section of the intelligentsia, including educationists, teachers and professors from not only contesting but even from participating in the campaign for a candidate in the elections. The service rules of the government-aided educational institutes are being arbitrarily and whimsically framed in such a way that the teachers and professors could be placed on par with government employees. Everyone knows that the government employees are restricted from seeking election or taking part in electoral campaigns. With the service rules being so recast, the restriction is extended to the teaching community as well. Already an educated section like the government employees is kept out of the electioneering arena. Now, another intellectual segment that plays a significant role in moulding and remoulding public opinion is

moved out of the ambit. If the intelligentsia, the thinking populace are gradually phased out of the system in such a planned manner, who but mostly a bunch of unscrupulous traders, contractors, smugglers, criminals would remain in the fray? Strangely, EC who feigns such concern about cleansing the electoral process is observing a code of silence in the matter.

Chapter of expenditure

Next comes the question of defraying electoral expenses. Let us see how has the EC dealt with this issue in its reforms exercise. Pretending that it is seriously concerned at the lavish spending during electioneering, it has fixed a ceiling of expenditure. A candidate is now allowed to spend officially as high as Rs.2.5 million for contesting a Parliament seat and Rs. 1 million for fighting an Assembly constituency. Obviously, there is revelry among the bourgeois and social-democratic outfits who well-aware of being discarded by the people in case of a fair poll, are desperate to tamper the verdict in their favour by spilling astronomical sums. On the other hand, the candidates representing the poorer strata who cannot on this score match the big parties enjoying corporate finance and funding from unaccounted sources, stand visibly disadvantaged, if not virtually out of reckoning. Not only that. These parties of the establishment are openly exceeding the ceilings of expenditure, using the avalanche of funds for either purchase of votes or employing goons for booth capturing, scaring away genuine voters under threat, tampering with the voting machine and so forth to manipulate results in their favour. But in most of the cases, the police-administration or much-clamoured surveillance mechanism of EC remain either dysfunctional or indulgent onlookers. Even formal complaints are not entertained. Inequity of treatment is glaringly manifest in the aspect of procedural compliance as well. Previously, all candidates were supposed to furnish the detailed accounts of expenditure to EC one month after declaration of poll results. Now, the EC in paper made it mandatory for all contestants to periodically submit the accounts in a cumbersome format during electioneering. But anyone familiar with the state of affairs knows how

far EC authorities are serious in checking either the compliance aspect or the accounts of the big parties having backing of the ruling class. Common experience is that EC is either excessively lenient to their deliberate default in compliance, if any, or a customary pleader of helplessness in taking punitive action in case of exceeding the stipulated limits. But there is no escape for smaller parties like ours who despite having limited manpower and other resources compared to these 'bigwigs' are compelled to comply with the stipulation of this 'reform' being harassed continuously during the election period while these big parties go scot-free despite evasion. All this was glaringly manifest in the last Karnataka and Tripura Assembly polls where the money flow was three to four times more than on previous occasions. EC thus, while being extremely harsh on smaller parties like us, is found to be overtly or covertly conniving with the parties and candidates of the establishment to indulge in gaping corruption and palpable rigging. Hence, in the name of widening scope of democratic election, what is being done is total subversion of democracy by indeed reducing election into a farce, making it the exclusive preserve of affluent, corporate-financed political merchants.

What this reform is aimed at

It is thus amply clear from the above discussion that through this set of reforms what has been aimed at, is to put up as many hurdles as possible before the genuine representatives of the toiling people in contesting polls and gradually eliminate them altogether not only from the parliamentary forum but even visibility in and around the electoral process. It is only allegiance to the ruling class, abundant financial resources and backing of muscle-media that will rule the roost. Making a mockery of democracy, freedom of expressing views irrespective of ideological convictions is on the verge of being banished. It is known to all that the big parties are being backed by the ruling monopolists and corporate sector and their space in the rendezvous of power is also secured by the latter through a host of manipulations. The new feature is

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Whole ploy is to banish revolutionary party from the arena of parliamentary democracy

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that the forces the ruling class considers inimical to its class interest are being turned out of the election area by, so to say, collaring. As we stated earlier, the whole ploy is to restrict the electoral choice among parties or combinations of the ruling capitalist class so that there is a kind of rotation policy in so far as saddling in power is concerned. When one party or alliance will be in power, the others will sit in opposition waiting for their turn. To be on the hot seat and secure a prolonged tenure there, these parties or groups will compete with each other as to who could be a better servitor of the bourgeois class interest under camouflage of democratic vocabulary and thus be preferred by their masters. So outwardly, there will be an election with all its accompanying paraphernalia; one will win and the other will lose. It will be projected with much fanfare as reflection of people's verdict in a free and fair poll and there would be no one within the ambit of parliamentary democracy to point out the misdeeds, misfeasance, corruption and discrimination manipulating the mandate as also the anti-people policies of the government. What in the process will remain in tact is the exploitative capitalist order sucking out the last drop of blood of the people, and what will be the biggest casualty is the people's cause and interest. We know that nothing different could be expected from EC, a part of the bourgeois state machine whose head and other functionaries are appointed by the political managers of the ruling capitalist class.

Perspective of undertaking the reform

From the people's perspective, the sign is ominous and the consequences of the reforms will be disastrous. So it is imperative that we understand the basic cause of this.

It is well-known to all that advent of bourgeois democracy was during the days of flourishing capitalism following end of the feudal autocratic rule. Capitalism being the economic base of the bourgeois rule and since this base in the laissez faire atmosphere was following the liberal principle at large; the bourgeois democracy also

was upholding the lofty liberal ideal. One of the main facets of this bourgeois democracy had been the multi-party parliamentary democracy. People hitherto subjugated under autocratic feudal rule were granted political freedom to choose their elected representatives through exercise of voting rights and constitute the governance of their choice. So was coined the slogan "by the people, for the people, of the people". Various parties, groups and individuals began taking part in the elections and a relative administrative neutrality was ensured to have in the results due reflection of true opinion of the people. The electorates also had opportunity to know the viewpoints of the contesting parties and decide their option. Since a party or combination of parties obtaining majority of votes was entitled to form government, those sitting in the opposition as elected representatives were also granted due scope and political freedom to place their views in and outside the legislatures, criticize and oppose the flaws and faults of the government.

In the initial years of flourishing bourgeois democracy, this character of parliamentary democracy was discernible. Elections to Parliament were by and large free and fair. Corruption and degradation did not pervade the electoral process. But that was not sustained too long. With emergence of monopoly, aberrations of capitalist system in which exploitation of man by man took a new, and in fact more ruthless a form, began to surface and extended to bourgeois democracy as well. As the days rolled by, capitalism beset with acute market crisis endemic of the system became decadent. The bourgeois democracy also in its trail was plunged into degeneration. More the capitalist system is becoming crisis-stricken, the ruling monopolists in order to prolong their moribund decadent class rule, are having power centralized in the hands of the bourgeois state and gradually moving towards fascism. Hence, they are out to subvert many of the declared propositions of bourgeois democracy so as to dispossess people of their political rights which, they fear, might come cropper in their endeavour in imposing fascism. The current EC-sponsored electoral reforms are part

of this sinister bourgeois design to progressively curtail the hard-earned democratic rights.

The mark of bourgeois democracy in India has been in this era of decadent capitalism. So right from day one, it was a deformed child. The Indian Constitution from its very inception, it is said, gave rights to the people by one hand but snatched them away by the other. Still however, in the initial years after independence this bourgeois democracy in India especially its parliamentary system had in relative sense operated with some compliance with the laid down rules. Its electoral process was not plagued with all unfairness and corruption, as it is now. But within a short period, Indian capitalism as inalienable part of decadent moribund world capitalism plunged into insoluble market crisis. More crisis-ridden it became, more ruthless was its exploitation perpetrating burning problems in every sphere of people's life – from economy to culture. Unable to bear the brunt of these escalated problems, the people burst forth in agitations, increasingly taking to the streets to protest and resist the onslaught of the capitalist class. And the ire was and has been mostly against the incumbent governments subserving bourgeois class rule. So given the scope the people through elections are dislodging trusted bourgeois outfits from power. Moreover, in course of struggle in demand for mitigating the burning problems devastating them, people are also getting attracted towards parties and forces they find to be identifying with their cause. Inevitably in the process, SUCI, the genuine revolutionary party engaged in organizing the people for anti-capitalist revolution is catching people's imagination and carving out a space in their hearts. So there is increasing rally of the toiling people behind the revolutionary party in the phase of democratic movement. This slow but steady growth of SUCI has not gone unnoticed by the ruling monopolists. They have from their perspective correctly sensed grave danger in this development. They know that if the elections are allowed to be free and fair, there is growing possibility of genuine representatives of the people getting elected in more numbers and

reflecting the voice of people's movement inside the legislature exposing the treacherous pro-establishment role of the bourgeois and social-democratic parties. It is in this situation that the capitalist rulers, mortally afraid of anti-capitalist revolution, cannot afford to take the risk of allowing the elections being held freely and fairly. This is precisely the reason why within a few years, elections in independent India were found to be drifting away from fairness. Rigging in favour of the chosen bourgeois party or combination through manipulation of voters' lists, booth capturing, forced stamping of ballots, perpetration of widespread violence by the mafia — and of late tampering of EVM — with overt administrative connivance became more and more pronounced. More the days rolled by, newer methods of manipulating election results have been coming to the fore in the form of selective media exposures, glaringly discriminatory regulations and administrative approach, blacking out and creating one after another hurdle before the forces fighting for people's cause, reducing them to apparent insignificance, and so forth. By this, the whole attempt is to weed out these forces from the electoral arena and leave the field accessible only by select few parties or combinations that the ruling capitalist class consider capable of articulating its class design. The objective is to ultimately introduce 2-party Parliamentary system like Western imperialist countries where despite all pomp and grandeur of elections, the choice, as indicated before, remains limited between two camps of the same ruling monopolists. Sharing of power by either camp is through rotation basis as in US ; it is either Bush's Republic Party or Obama's Democratic Party which will be saddled in the seat of power in the ensuing polls with the interest of the ruling monopolists absolutely secured in the hands of both of the dispensations. This is how the elections are being turned into a farce.

Motive behind the reform

But much to the discomfort of the ruling bourgeoisie, the design has not been remaining a secret. Let alone the well-meaning and informed

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Build up movement for withdrawal of unjust discriminatory recommendations

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section of the people including the intelligentsia even the common illiterate masses have been steadily losing faith in elections. The saner section does not believe that election results today are true reflection of the people's mandate. There has been in fact a growing resentment among them on this score. With grave agony they have been observing that while criminals and anti-socials were earlier used by the big bourgeois parties to bully the people into submission, it is the very goons and arch criminals who are now making to the leadership of these parties, getting elected to the legislature, the highest law-making institution, becoming MLAs, MPs, ministers and thus are virtually operating as controllers of parliamentary democracy. Money-mafia-media are calling the shots. It is nothing but criminalization of politics. Hence, there has been accumulated wrath among the thinking people and disillusionment about the parliamentary system has been growing fast.

This does not augur well to the ruling monopolists and their servitors. If people especially the middle class, lower middle class, educated and intellectual sections of the people, who to a large degree and extent influence the unlettered and half-lettered masses to grow their consciousness, lose faith in the election, the consequence might deal a mortal blow to the capitalist system itself. Once the futility of the worn out stinking bourgeois order is laid bare, it will dawn upon the toiling people at large that end of their plight and predicament does not lie in changing government through election but in overthrow of capitalism, which can come about if they unite and organize on the platform of democratic mass movement conducive to the revolutionary struggle under the leadership of genuine revolutionary force.

So has been the necessity on the part of the ruling class to pretend that moves are afoot to cleanse the electoral process from corruption and gross anomalies. With that end in view, it, in the name of introducing a fresh set of reforms which would be projected as radical overhauling of the system, sought that a nexus of industrialist-bureaucracy-military-judiciary steer the whole process keeping itself fully insulated. Hence,

in a planned manner, T.N. Seshan, a cunning bureaucrat was made head of EC in the nineties, who made enough noise feigning to be concerned with the loopholes in the electoral system. The government also posed as if it were equally perturbed over the rapid degeneration of the electoral process and announced that an overhauling of the system would be undertaken forthwith. And we have already shown in the foregoing discussion these reforms have rendered the system yet more undemocratic, unfair and anti-people. They are rather fascistic blows on the electoral process. Thus, the ruling monopolists and their henchmen killed two birds with one stone. On one hand, they sought to stem the growing disenchantment about parliamentary democracy as well as voting system by giving an impression of purging the electoral process of all aberrations. On the other, under this camouflage, they made significant advance in preventing the genuine revolutionary party from being represented in the legislature.

People must resist

Thus the motive of the ruling class and its subservient camp is clear. So long capitalism would exist, this mockery of the electoral process would continue. Till the time common people are consciously disillusioned about this farcical parliamentary democracy and be ready, ideologically and organizationally, for overthrow of capitalism, the revolutionary party will have to take part in the polls based on its own strength. In order to ensure that as many as possible genuine representatives of the people could be sent to the legislature frustrating all ploys of the ruling class and its servitors, it is incumbent on the suffering people to resist implementation of this so-called electoral reforms and remove all impediments before the candidates upholding their cause in so far as scope for widest, free and fair election campaigning is concerned. People have only one weapon in their hand—weapon of united organized powerful democratic movement on the edifice of higher ethical and cultural standard. They must use that weapon in right earnest by building up intense movement in demand for

withdrawal of the highly unjust and discriminatory recommendations that under the garb of cleansing the electoral process are purported to curtail the essential democratic rights of the people, subvert the parliamentary system and remove even the last vestiges of bourgeois democracy. Simultaneously, long-drawn struggle must be released

against curtailment of democratic rights as well as restoration of the rights already taken away. It is only under pressure of movement that the ruling monopolists and their bootlickers could be to the extent possible restrained from implementing anti-people measures including staging a doctored election and tampering with people's verdict.

Brass Workers' movement at Muradabad

Brass Workers' Union of Muradabad, UP held a meeting of brass workers at the Town Hall, Muradabad on October 5, 2008 on demands of immediate redress of extremely wretched condition of these workers, who are deprived of even the minimum facilities they are legally entitled. Held with a few hundreds of brass I workers attending the meeting enthusiastically, it was presided over by Comrade Vijaypal Singh, President of the Union. Comrade Achintya Sinha, Secretary, AIUTUC, the invited guest and the

main speaker, pointed out in his address, how the governments remain silent over the owners defying laws of the land, while any worker held for such an act is immediately put behind the bars. He called upon the workers to recognize their strength and build up massive struggle to wrest their demands. It was decided unanimously in the meeting to hold a signature campaign on the demands of the brass workers and submit it to the Chief Minister of the state through the District Collectorate on 17 November 2008.

Seminar at Mumbai against privatization of education

A seminar on Maharashtra Private Professional Educational Institutions (Regulation of Admission and Fees, 2008) Bill was organised by Forum Against Commercialisation of Education (FACE) on 28 September 2008 at Janta Kendra, Tulsiwadi, Tardeo in Mumbai. Students of different streams of professional colleges and their guardians and professors, professional people from different walks of life from Mumbai and some neighbouring districts participated in this seminar. Comrade Sourav Mukherjee, General Secretary, AIDS0 and member of All India Council All India Save Education Committee, Dr. Milind Wagh, Secretary FACE, Associate professor Nashik NDMVP College of Pharmacy, Madhav Jandhar, advocate, Mumbai HighCourt and Mr. Rajesh Jain, member of Parents' Association of medical students spoke in the seminar. Dr. Vivek Kodey President, FACE

coordinated. The speakers pointed out how the bill targets the 2005 Supreme Court passed judgement on P A Inamdar vs State of Maharashtra case where a direction was issued on the formation of a State fees regulation committee to determine fees of the self-financing professional courses and fix management/ NRI quota in such institutions. They indicated that the principles laid down by this bill to determine fees in unaided institutions was virtually the method of fixing commodity-price in market. It even suggests to take into account the market value of the building and land of the institution in determining fees and to auction seats against management quota. It was thus a part and parcel of the ruling capitalist class' drive for privatisation and commercialisation of education, since the introduction of NPE 1986 refreshed with the present National Knowledge Commission's recommendations.

Dastard attack from CPI(M) government left Singur peasants unmoved

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conceal truth and buttress an altogether different motive, let us recall very briefly the background of Singur movement details of which would be available in our past issues. It was in early 2006 that the CPI(M) government raising bogey of a flagship project decided to acquire 1000 acres of fertile agricultural land in Singur. This particular stretch adjacent to newly laid Calcutta-Durgapur expressway was one of the most fertile four to six-crop lands of the country equipped with better irrigation facilities, shallow pumps, cold storages, rice mills and so forth. According to a survey, this plot was as fertile as could be termed as granary of the world. A rough estimate showed that over 45,000 people were dependent on the cultivation and allied activities being undertaken there. Naturally, when the government served notice of acquisition, the local people mostly peasants facing immediate eviction from their land and livelihood burst into protest. Finding the government most insensitive to their cause and instead more interested to serve the commercial interest of a giant monopoly house, the protest got crystallized in organized movement. And the CPI(M) government who found that its so-called promise of job creation and prosperity centring round the project had no taker, bared its tooth and claw in no time. It clamped section 144 in the region to scuttle the movement and forcibly stopped opposition leaders and renowned social activists. The whole country saw how the police pounced upon the agitating peasants and beat them mercilessly. Even women and children were dragged out of their houses and pounded. Modesty of the women was outraged. Raj Kumar Bhul, a protesting youth was killed in police action. Tapasi Malik, a young adolescent activist was brutally raped and burnt alive planfully by ruling party-backed criminals. Besides, some evicted peasants committed suicide unable to bear extreme poverty. And finally, the CPI(M)-led government flaunting its brute majority in the assembly and riding on the monstrous strength of its coercive police-administration as well as unstinted backing of the

ruling monopolists and corporate sector went ahead with the landgrab to hand over the same to the Tatas on a silver platter.

Yet, the government could not make everyone bent down. While the chief minister and his party as well as ministerial colleagues were claiming voluntary handover of over 95% land, owners of over 400 acres filed affidavits in the court in denial of having surrendered land. As everyone knows today, most of these owners have not yet collected the compensation cheques and thus are categorized as "unwilling". Even many of those having accepted the cheques and hence shown as "willing" have done so under threat and intimidation. So though Tatas under full police protection began setting up the Nano plant on the arable farmland so grabbed under gunpoint, the peasants were seething in rage as they could make out that the promise of jobs to locals and evicted people was nothing but a big hoax. Though Singur peasants could not resist the forcible seizure of fertile agricultural land, they inspired others to come out of the shackles and thwart such sinister moves. With grit and determination, Nandigram fought valiantly and succeeded in stalling the proposed chemical hub. The victory of Nandigram struggle and the pro-movement environment created throughout the state stirred the Singur peasants into a fresh struggle. Accepting that the Nano plant was halfway through and as per the version of the Tatas needed around 600 acres, they demanded that balance 400 acres be returned to the unwilling peasants. But the government was adamant that no land would be returned.

The current movement

It was on this specific demand that the peasants under the banner of *Singur Krishijami Raksha Committee* and state level *Krishik O Jiban, Jibika Raksha Committee* (Committee for protection of agriculture, life and livelihood) launched the current agitation. A dharna (sit in demonstration) began from 24 August in front of the Nano plant. There was neither any blockade of passage to the factory nor any interruption in its functioning. But as the movement

received enormous public support, there was swelling of people at the dharna site so much so that a part of one side of the road was occupied. In order to pose that the agitators are 'illegally' blocking the expressway and disrupting supply of essential commodities to Calcutta, the CPI(M) government in connivance with the Road Transport Authority unilaterally stopped vehicular movement at the entry point and raised a hullabaloo. They even went to the court and managed to secure an order of 'vacating the highway' so as to take the false propaganda to the peak and denigrate the agitators. After being closeted with the state industries minister in a hurriedly arranged secret meeting, Ratan Tata also issued a threat of withdrawal from the project in case the agitation was not called off. CPI(M) leaders immediately jumped to press panic button and spread apprehension of an industrial doom in that event. The way the action and reaction occurred in tandem revealed that the threat statement by Tata was at the instance of the CPI(M) leaders. But the withdrawal threat had no effect on the people. The CPI(M) leaders had not even a slightest of shame in certifying Tata as an entrepreneur with a human face. His departure would spell disaster to the state. This too had no taker. Tata and the CPI(M) alleged that the agitators were adopting violent means, scaring away the plant people and intimidating those preaching for 'industrialization'. Some stray incidents were also planted to support this contention. Yet people were unfazed. They knew that the agitators were absolutely peaceful in their demonstration, remained firmly committed to the cause and did not fall into any trap laid by the CPI(M), its government, Tatas and the corporate sector to incite violence or precipitate trouble at the agitation venue. The movement leaders were willing to sit with the government to find an amicable solution provided the latter agrees to consider the demand of return of land to the unwilling peasants.

When all attempts to undermine the movement and create an image of Tata as the saviour of Bengal went in vain and the people at large could make out that the so-

called cry for industrialization, job-creation and so forth were all show-ups and the real intention of the CPI(M) and its government was to appease the Tatas burying asunder the people's interest, the CPI(M) leaders sensed danger. Overflowing support of the people towards the movement compelled the arrogant CPI(M) government to concede to the demand of return of land hitherto it was unyielding to. No doubt, this was a significant victory that the Singur movement achieved through days of arduous toil and firm resolve.

It was at this point that Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, took an initiative to arrange an across-the-table discussion between the government and the movement leaders. Accordingly, the state government had a team of its ministers and bureaucrats while the movement was represented by a small delegation which included among others, Comrade Manik Mukherjee, Central Staff of our party. After several rounds of discussion, an agreement was reached between the two sides on 7 September, 2008. Governor read out before the press the agreement which was signed in his presence by Nirupam Sen, state Industries minister and Polit Bureau member of the CPI(M) and Partha Chattopadhyay of the Trinamool Congress, leader of the Opposition in the state assembly. It was clearly stated there that "the Government has taken the decision to respond to the demands of those farmers who have not received compensation, by means of land to be provided to the maximum within the project area and rest in adjacent areas as early as possible. Towards this, a committee will be constituted to ascertain the scope and settle the modalities within a period of one week. During this time, the Government will urge the vendors not to make any constructions. Smt. Mamata Banerjee is making an announcement regarding the suspension of the agitation from Singur. The Government and those who have been agitating on behalf of the farmers will cooperate with each other for the benefit of the industry, agriculture and ancillaries."

It was clear that government had

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People stood firm behind unique Singur movement

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consented to find a land-based solution and committed to make available maximum of the returnable land within the site. There was no ambiguity in the language nor was any scope for the content being interpreted otherwise. There was no talk of any alternative solution. As decided, a committee with two members each from either side was formed to recommend modalities of this land-based solution. Honouring the agreement, the opposition leaders announced suspension of the movement and promised to extend all kinds of help to the government in finding out a just solution to the problem within the ambit of the agreement. The committee inspected the plant site and the two members representing the movement side located availability of around 300 acres of vacant arable land within the project area.

Tata-CPI(M) nexus unfolded

But, Tata conveyed its disapproval of the agreement and refused to surrender the land so identified by the committee members making plea of imperativeness of the ancillary units to be in the immediate vicinity of the plant. While the decision was that finalization of the land-based solution would be done only after the committee submitted its report in seven days, the state government after discussions with the Tatas unilaterally announced within 48 hours a new "rehabilitation package for project affected persons in Singur" and splashed the newspapers with advertisements detailing the new package. It was said, *inter alia*, in the offer that only 70 acres of land within the project site and an additional 50% cash assistance to land-losers and bargadars would be provided. Further the government hitherto claiming 'huge' job opportunity in the plant mentioned in the package that "Government will train and endeavour to provide direct or indirect employment for one person per project-affected family with no regular employment or income." Even a layman would understand that this was a vague statement confirming indirectly the view of the agitators who firmly held that there was hardly any employment opportunity in a capital-intensive modern technology based sophisticated automobile unit like

Nano. Thus announcement of the package was a flagrant violation of the agreement the government itself inked in presence of the governor, arbitrarily made the committee defunct and glaringly in compliance with what Tata wanted. Tata also reciprocated by issuing a press note fully backing the package and expressing hope that the West Bengal government's new rehabilitation package will evoke a positive response from unwilling land-losers who had refused compensation.

Obviously, the package was rejected outright by the movement leaders. The government was accused of being in league with Tata and having indulged in a highly undemocratic act unprecedented in the history befitting only the highly autocratic power-mad despots. Had the CPI(M) and its government slightest of will to resolve the issue amicably, it could do that based on the agreement. Scope for some minor adjustments in the quantum of returnable land based on the objective findings of the committee and further course of negotiation was always there. There was no rigidity on the part of the movement leaders including Mamata Banerjee, and others from her party, our party and other constituents. They were willing to arrive at a just land-based solution confining to 400 acres of unutilized land and never wanted the Nano factory having once been in construction to be abandoned. Rather, Mamata Banerjee had proposed that the ancillary industries could well be located on the vacant land just opposite to the project site across the highway and there could be an inter-connection which modern technology can build with much ease. Alongside, there was demand for permanent gainful employment of the displaced persons in the proposed industry.

But the government did not heed to any of these practical implementable advices. Because, the CPI(M) did not want that. After bending down before valiant peasants of Nandigram and being trounced in the panchayat as well as municipality elections, it was apprehensive that if Singur too was added to the list of its consecutive defeats, its prospect in the coming parliamentary elections would be bleak. It also found that despite all its anti-movement propaganda,

distortion and suppression of facts, frantic effort to vend illusion of industrialization, projecting Tata as a kind of angel having descended on the state to take it to peak of prosperity and creating a sort of provincial jingoism centring around Nano and Tata, people of West Bengal could not be coaxed or decoyed.

They were overwhelmingly behind the Singur movement that the Trinamool Congress, SUCI and others had built up in the interest of the peasants, workers, and other sections of toiling people. Since all the hitherto attempted chicanery did not yield any result, the CPI(M) leaders had to think of an alternative strategy to hoodwink people. It felt that in the circumstances, the best option would be to let Tata abandon the project and move out of Singur. In that event, it would get a chance to pass on the entire buck on the opposition and make that an election issue by raising afresh the bogey of industrialization. So after another long meeting with the CPI(M) chief minister, Ratan Tata on 3 October evening informed that he was withdrawing from Singur. Echoing the line of the CPI(M), Tata also lambasted the opposition for his exit and said that he had never faced such kind of agitation. But he was in all praise for the chief minister and industries minister, expressed his 'extreme happiness' over their sincerity, certified them for 'doing the right thing' and assured that he would come back with 'bigger investment' and 'do something for Singur'. (vide Ratan Tata's interviews in Economic Times and Times of India, 08-10-08) So the complicity of Tata with the CPI(M) in the entire gameplan did not remain in the dark.

In a press conference convened on 4 October, Comrade Provash Ghosh, Central Committee member and State secretary, SUCI, rebutted each and every argument Tata and the CPI(M) put forth for the withdrawal. He said that the way Tata and the CPI(M) leaders have spit venom against the people's movement is not just some invectives hurled against the agitating parties but an all-out attack on the fighting people of the state. Tata who had amassed huge wealth by exploiting the people, sucking out every drop of blood from their body, had even the audacity to question as to who was funding the Singur

movement. It was an affront to the people of the state who voluntarily came out with all that they had, in cash and kind, to help the movement. It was queer that this government who had grabbed land on behalf of Tata shedding blood of innocent peasants, perpetrated worst kind of violence and killing in Singur-Nandigram, used mass rape as a weapon to terrorize people is now daring to brand peaceful Singur movement as blood-curdled. Comrade Ghosh reiterated that we are being allotted to various industries. No one protested against that. Even the apprehension that there would be no more investment directed to the state after Nano withdrawal was a damn lie as the industrialists would employ capital wherever they sense profit opportunity, added Comrade Provash Ghosh. In fact, already the Salims, Mittals, Videocon group and others have informed that Nano episode would have no effect on their investment proposals in the state.

People will give further rebuff

But this is soil of West Bengal. What the CPI(M) leaders are thinking would be a boomerang to them. Already they are in much inconvenience as Tata has relocated the Nano factory in Sanand in Gujarat where the land offered for the project is a government-owned land that was earlier cattle farm of Anand Agriculture University. This only confirms what the movement leaders and the people of West Bengal have been harping on. No one objected to setting up industries but wanted those to be on non-agricultural or vested land available in plenty in West Bengal. Tatas after being threatened of similar people's protest in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka where the offers were for agricultural land had to settle for non-agricultural plot in Gujarat. Ratan Tata admitted that he was offered land by the West Bengal government at Kharagpur. The said plot was not a highly fertile multi-cropped one. But "that was far from Kolkata". So he told the chief minister that "if we wanted the project to be showcased to the world as a world-class enterprise, we

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Comrade Manik Mukherjee invited to Venezuela as guest to Latin American Parliament Session

Comrade Manik Mukherjee, SUCI Central Staff and General Secretary, International Anti-Imperialist and Peoples' Solidarity Coordinating Committee, attended the 7th Session of the Latin American Parliament held in Venezuela on 24 and 25 September, as invited guest. The Latin American Parliament is constituted of elected representatives of different Latin American countries with 12 representatives from Venezuela present in the session.

The inaugural session was held at Teatro Teresa Careno auditorium at Salarios Reyna in Caracas, the capital of the country. Comrade Manik Mukherjee was welcomed by Dr. Caralus Wimmer, Vice President of Venezuelan Parliamentary Group and Polit Bureau Member of Venezuela Communist Party and Filinto Duran Chuecos, Deputy, Inter Institutional Affairs and Vice President of Venezuelan Parliamentary Group. As President Hugo Chavez had been abroad the Vice President of the country graced the inaugural session.

On 25 September, the delegate session was held at 'The Great Hall of the People' of the ALBA Hotel in Caracas. It was attended by about 3000 delegates from different countries. The session deliberated upon 'Imperialism and Terrorism' with delegates placing their views. Comrade Mukherjee read out to the house, the address he was requested for.

Comrade Manik Mukherjee was also invited to a special Seminar on 'Socialism in Twenty First Century' held at the famous Simon De Bolivar University. The Seminar was held in two separate chambers. In his speech, Comrade Mukherjee pointed out that he did not agree with this phrase of 'Socialism in Twenty First Century', that has been coined after the debacle of socialism in socialist countries and which implied that since the earlier socialist system did not continue, a 'new' socialism, a newer brand of socialism will be required. But the debacle was not from any lapse or mistake in the concepts and laws of socialism that

Marx and Engels had presented on the basis of their analysis of history and human society. It was Marx who for the first time showed how human society had been class divided and how it passed through the different stages of class division. In this course of history, the socialist system emerged after the capitalist system in a law-governed process with its specific laws and characteristics. Thus there cannot be any 'old' and 'new' socialism; however different may be its concrete form manifested in different countries, everywhere it must be established by overthrowing capitalism through proletarian revolution. Counter-revolution that brought in the debacle of socialism could take place only after the revisionist leadership usurped the power in socialist Soviet Union and shunning Marxism-Leninism followed the capitalist path, that ultimately strengthened capitalism in that country to end into the counter revolution. It was never due to any mistake or limitation inherent to socialism. Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, the founder General Secretary of SUCI and an eminent Marxist thinker of post- Lenin days, had warned long back that the ushering in of revisionism in Soviet Union, if it goes unabated, will bring disaster to socialism. In fact, in accordance to the laws of social changes, revolution was inevitable, socialism was inevitable. Comrade Mukherjee expressed hope that the toiling people of Venezuela will surely establish socialism under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The audience greeted Comrade Mukherjee with high applause.

Comrade Manik Mukherjee also participated in a demonstration in front of the Bolivian Embassy in Caracas held on 26 September expressing solidarity with the Bolivian people in their fight against US imperialism.

After discussion with Comrade Mukherjee, Dr. Caralus Wimmer has agreed to work as a member of the Secretariat of the International Anti-Imperialist and Peoples' Solidarity Coordinating Committee and attend the second conference of



Comrade Manik Mukherjee, Central Staff, SUCI and General Secretary, IAPSCC, addressing the demonstration in front of the Bolivian Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela on 26 September last

the Committee to be held in Beirut in January 2009. Comrade Mukherjee has also left a letter for Hugo Chavez requesting him to extend cooperation towards the IAPSCC and attend the Beirut conference of the Committee in January 2009. Socialist Party led by Hugo Chavez has already joined the Committee.

Moving Nano car project out of Singur

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should have it at a location where we could bring in our best people, give them the best schools, best colleges etc." It was "in deference to his wishes" that "Singur was offered and the location was most suitable." (ibid) And to materialize Tata's ambition, thousands of peasants, bargadars and agricultural workers had to be displaced with brute force and a granary had to be destroyed. Subsidy worth of as high as Rs 800 crores had to be provided from public exchequer to the business tycoon. And the 'trade secret' between the CPI(M) government and Tata could not be disclosed despite public demand. In the whole episode, the CPI(M) had been hand-in-glove with Tata and secured all backing and unstinted support from the ruling monopolists. And the people who were neither

perturbed at the withdrawal threat of Tata nor even a bit shaken after his departure have been able to understand the entire game. So they are firmly behind the movement. As we had mentioned earlier, the Singur movement scored notable victory by compelling the government to yield to the demand of return of land. But the specific demand for return of 400 acres of land to the unwilling peasants is yet to be achieved. The Singur people are making preparations for bigger movement on that issue in the days to come. While Nandigram was a movement against anti-people pro-capitalist policy of the CPI(M) government, the current movement of Singur made the battle lines clearly drawn between the toiling people and ruling capitalism. People will not forgive the servitors and bootlickers of the exploiting rulers.

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