

# LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Asokendu Sengupta

30 YEARS! Left Front came to power in 1977. Even the people who had no faith in communism probably looked forward for a positive change in education, industrial and agricultural growth, employment etc. and, above all, people wanted return of democracy, human rights. People wanted removal of the so-called Chatra Parishad-Yuba Congress Culture. Now let us examine the scorecard, gains and losses. We confine ourselves in the field of education only.

Immediately after assuming the office the first Left Front Government declared that it would bear responsibility of all, government and non-government, educational institutions as regards the salary and ensured security of services. That's the best thing that a government can do for the teaching communities. West Bengal teachers at all levels had been fighting for their democratic rights, dignity and decent regular pay since independence. This teaching community of West Bengal was in fact the leading light in the history of teachers' movement. The decision of the LF Government was a gift to the teachers of this state. This had inspired the teachers' movement in other states and forced many other State Government to follow this example. Three cheers!

The LF Government very often claim that they had stopped the 'GANA TOKATUKI'(mass copying) and brought back order in the field of education. This claim is not true. During the last phase of the Naxalbari Movement we indeed witnessed all sorts of disorder and anarchy in every sphere of life in West Bengal and the field of education was no exception. But, at the same time we must admit that a large section of our teachers tried their best, sometimes actively sometimes passively, to resist that. A section of students, though unorganized, also built up resistance in different parts of Bengal. The state power came down

heavily to crush the Movement. The people of West Bengal witnessed on the one hand the terror unleashed by the so-called misdirected Naxals and the State oppressions and atrocities on the other. After successfully eliminating the 'miscreants' the S. S. Roy government came to rule this state and it lend a hand to authorities of the educational institutions to wipe out disorder and lawlessness. We can at best say that the Left Front Government gave finishing touches to the work of restoration undertaken by the previous government and a section of teachers and students. We must not deny the courageous act of teachers and students.

Some people in the government bubbling with some sort of revolutionary ideas, deleted SAHAJPATH and removed English from the primary curriculum. But, why? They practically refused to explain and started abusing the critics. Removal of English helped mushrooming English-medium schools throughout the state. Most of the students learnt neither English nor did they understand the importance of vernacular. At the degree level introduction of compulsory additional language made the language teaching a farce, the teaching of Sanskrit was practically abolished. Absolutely wrong language policy made the society cripple.

First ten years of left rule was devoted in fighting the ghosts of elitism and feudalism in the field of education In the name of democratization of education they unleashed a frontal attack on the tradition and distinctiveness of institutions. Centers of excellence were their eye-shore. The new education policy devised by the Central Government was rejected with despise, Navodaya Vidyalaya was denied entry, private investment in education was resisted, the importance of technical and vocational education was neglected, they failed to appreci-

ate the importance of technology based education and frontiers of modern sciences. But why? This was their way of fighting capitalism and neo-imperialism. This is their interpretation of struggle. Interestingly these Marxists had no alternative programme. In the nineties they meekly surrendered to the capitalistic pattern of education by allowing private capital in the field of education. With the official patronage investors established in Bengal some sub-standard technical colleges. We find the government in the role of facilitator and corroborator.

Steadily and surely it is revealed that the govt. is run not by the law of the land but by the party dictum and curriculum. We are not governed by the elected people at the Writers' Buildings but by the party headquarters at Alimuddin Street. Party bosses dictate everything from village level primary school to university. Party captured all educational bodies, took complete control of appointment and governance. Even the Public Service Commission was not spared. The party left no room for dissent voice. They appointed their own chowkidars everywhere. In the name of democracy they hounded and gagged all opposition. In the S. S. Roy regime, the Chatra Parishad with the help of local goons didn't allow SFI in many colleges and universities to participate in union election. But, this ploy didn't work for long because one group of CP opposed another group, and the party had no control over factionalism, rather factionalism was encouraged. The CPM enacted the same play scripted by S .S. Roy more intelligently in a very organized manner. In this regime students' union elections have been held regularly but in all universities and in almost all colleges the SFI candidates are elected unopposed.

Since the inception of the 3rd Left Front Government, at least, we find that over 90% of our budgetary allocation goes to salary head only. That means that development has come to a halt. The government even failed to provide enough fund to maintain or support the existing infrastructure. With the help of hollow promises in the budget proposals, manufactured statistics, party control over print and electronic media and mass organizations

this government has propagated a concocted story of success. "Under the Left Front rule, the achievements in the field of education and health are unique and unparallel in India" the official document claimed. (PASCHIM-BANGER SIKSHACHITRA : TAKHAN O EKHON – The Education Scenario of West Bengal: Then and Now, Dept. of Information, Govt. of West Bengal.)

A large section of our intelligentsia confirmed this story for reasons better known to them. Possibly in the name of discipline and allegiance they either toe the party line or preferred silence. Unfortunately many Bengali intellectuals feel that it is better to side with corrupt myopic leftists than to join hands with 'untouchable' non-Marxists even for a good cause.

Some organizations like UNICEF, IIMC, and ISI etc. stated in unequivocal terms that the statistics provided by the state government is not reliable. Some educationists, like Bhabatosh Datta, Rabindra Kumar Dasgupta, Santosh Bhattacharya, Sushil Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Sunanda Sanyal, criticized the government for politicizing the education, for systematic devaluation of the education system, for destructing the basic values and structure of education. They criticized the myopic vision and lack of education policy of this government. Many experts felt that every attempt of capturing control over education in the name of democratization was to strengthen the party organization even surrendering the aims and objectives of good and effective education. The government did not care to pay heed to criticism. Some reports like the Bhabatosh Datta Commission Report were pushed under the carpet.

When Buddhadeb Bhattacharyya became the Chief Minister he publicly admitted that the progress in the field of education under the Left Front Government was not satisfactory. Through such candid statements, some admissions, some gestures the new CM tried his best to build an image without making any change in the style of functioning of the government or the party. The purpose was served, he created an illusion and some people looked forward hopefully. Now have a look at the performance of Buddha Government. Since, the

central Government is run by the UPA of which CPM is a partner and since Buddha has successfully earned the confidence, blessings and patronage of the Prime Minister as well as the UPA chairperson Ms Sonia Gandhi it may be expected that the report of the central agencies will try to portray his image in bright colours. Let us have a look at the report of the central agencies.

The Annual Report of the MHRD, 2006-7 has shown that in the field of primary education growth rate of West Bengal is below national average. Its high Drop-out Rate, low Gross Enrollment Ratio, failure in Teacher Education etc. pushed the State to 32nd position in the list of composite Educational Development Index of 35 Indian States and Union Territories. The Scheduled Casts, Scheduled Tribes, Minority Communities and other weaker sections of the society suffered most under the left rule, this government never made any sincere effort to provide educational facilities for them.

This government failed to arrest gender disparity, the report says. The Comptroller and Auditor General criticized the state government for its failure in implementing the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan schemes. The CAG didn't depend on the report of the government only and made independent enquiry through an organization called SRRI (Social and Rural Research Institute). In its report the CAG pointed out the non-performance of the government, nepotism, malpractices and corruptions.

The incidents of Singur and Nandigram have unmasked the Government and its chief. They are desperate in regaining the lost ground, regaining the mass support. Now they may hope that the illiterate folk, the misinformed and ill-informed part of the society under the influence of the cadres and party will protect them. But, that won't be. The oppressed, the under-privileged, the deprived sections are raising their voice against the tyrants.

No Pasarán. They shall not pass.