

Navin Patnaik's Killer Government Will Have to Go

Wednesday 4 January 2006, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 3 January 2005).

Orissa, a showpiece of NDA-style governance and comprador 'industrialisation', is fast turning into a chilling case study of mafia-police raj. On the second day of the new year, the police gunned down at least a dozen adivasis who were demanding adequate compensation for the agricultural land that the government has acquired from them for a Tata Steel plant. The incident took place at Kalinganagar in Jajpur district near Bhubaneswar. The Navin Patnaik government had acquired 2,000 acres of cultivable land from the local adivasis by paying a meager compensation of Rs. 37,000 per acre. Even as reports of more deaths kept pouring in from Kalinganagar, the Chief Minister was sitting pretty at capital Bhubaneswar, awaiting reports from his bureaucrats without bothering to visit the place for a first-hand survey of the situation.

The smugness with which Navin Patnaik has received the news of the Kalinganagar massacre is rooted in the very policy of industrialization adopted by his government. In the name of rapid industrialization of the state, his government has virtually begun leasing out the entire state to foreign multinationals and Indian monopoly houses. This means massive transfer of land - cultivable and/or rich in forest and mineral resources - and eviction of the existing inhabitants, most of whom are poor tribal masses who depend on their land for their livelihood. From Kalinganagar to Kashipur, it is the same story everywhere - while the people are trying to defend their land and livelihood, the government is busy bulldozing every resistance. People depending on water for their livelihood are not being spared either. Not long ago the fighting fisherfolks of Chilika had also fallen prey to the barbaric bullets of Orissa's trigger-happy police.

Like Orissa, BJP-ruled Jharkhand is also being used as another laboratory for enacting a similar script of mass eviction and police barbarity, all in the name of 'development'. In February 2001, less than three months since the formation of the new state, the Jharkhand police had slaughtered nearly a dozen adivasis who were demonstrating against the government's attempt to resume work on the disastrous Koel-Karo project. While the government has not since dared resume work on the project, it is desperately trying to tamper with the Santhal Pargana and Chhoanagpur Tenancy Acts so as to legitimize the process of usurpation of tribal lands. Attempts are also on to subvert the Panchayati Extension to Scheduled Areas Act so that the panchayats cannot obstruct the process and the affected adivasis and other local inhabitants cannot have any say.

The campaigns of mass eviction that are camouflaged behind the smokescreen of 'development' are however not confined to only tribal belts or mineral-rich states like Orissa and Jharkhand. Almost all over the country, key natural resources including most fertile agricultural land, are being transferred in a big way to corporate control. Tens of thousands of acres of land are being diverted away from agriculture in the name of creation of 'special economic zones'. In West Bengal, the Left Front government's proposal to hand over 5,100 acres of multi-crop agricultural land to the Salim group of Indonesia may have been temporarily stalled in the face of strong protests and the impending Assembly elections, but no less a person than the land revenue minister of the state government tells us that an estimated 50,000 acres of agricultural land are diverted every year for non-agricultural purposes. In Andhra Pradesh, the Congress government led by Rajsekhar Reddy is handing over 25,000 acres of land near Hyderabad to the Ambanis for a special economic zone. Similar moves are afoot in East Godavari district as well.

In the first three decades after Independence, a number of major industries and mines had been set up under the public sector. This first wave of 'development' had created a huge army of refugees, evicting them from their traditional dwellings and sources of livelihood. Some of these people have since been absorbed into those industries and mines, but effective rehabilitation still remains a far cry for many of these 'development refugees'. The current era of economic neo-liberalism has unleashed a second major wave of mass eviction, but this time the prospect of rehabilitation looks far gloomier. The plants being set up are predominately in the private sector and the scale of possible direct employment in these plants is likely to remain low in today's high-tech era. In the absence of adequate compensation and effective rehabilitation, eviction now threatens to mean nothing short of extinction. It is thus not difficult to understand why adivasis are offering such a determined resistance. Genuine democratic forces must all rally in support of the fighting tribal people and challenge the eviction-loaded script of neo-liberal 'development'.

P.S.

* Published in ML Update, a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 9, No 1, 3 - 9 JAN 2006.