

Condemn Arrest of Binayak Sen

We strongly condemn the arrest of Binayak Sen, general secretary, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Chhattisgarh [PUCL (Chhattisgarh)] and vice-president, PUCL (national) under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 2004 and Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act (CSPSA), 2006. Binayak Sen is a very well respected civil rights activist of long-standing who has the rare ability to integrate his medical profession with his activism. He had come to Bilaspur on May 13 to attend his clinic and was informed by the city SP, Bilaspur to reach the local thana for recording of statement. When he reached the thana, he was arrested.

The arrest of Binayak Sen has come after a week long false charges by the SP Raipur that he is a Naxalite. In the last few days, the police had made similar public statements against some other PUCL (Chhattisgarh) activists and democratic rights activists, including Rashmi Dwivedi and Gautam Bandopadhyay.

Arresting of civil and democratic rights activists is neither new nor original. The experience of various civil rights organisations, including the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee over the last two decades is enough proof of how the state has attacked those who have questioned it and exposed the truth behind fake encounters, disappearances and rapes that form an integral part of the operations of its forces. In the present context, it is well known that the Chhattisgarh government has been indulging in the most brazen brutality in the adivasi areas of the state to suppress the Maoist movement. Binayak Sen's untiring work in documenting the atrocities and violations committed by the state forces in the guise of the Salwa Judum has earned him the ire of the police. PUCL (Chhattisgarh) and other democratic activists have been raising their voice and campaigning against

these illegal and inhuman practices, and for this service to democracy, the familiar allegation of being a "Maoist" is made against them.

When the UAPA was amended in 2004 after the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002 and when the CSPSA was enacted in 2006, we expressed the apprehension that it would be used against democratic movements and activists, and the apprehension has been proved right.

We condemn the arrest of Binayak Sen and demand his immediate and unconditional release.

K BALAGOPAL, *general secretary, Human Rights Forum, Andhra Pradesh*

G K RAMASWAMY, *convenor, People's Democratic Forum, Karnataka*

NAGRAJ ADVE, *secretary, People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi*

D SURESH KUMAR, *joint secretary, Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee*

SUJATO BHADRA, *secretariat member, Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights, West Bengal*

Post-Nandigram West Bengal

Sumanta Banerjee deserves thanks for his thought-provoking article entitled 'Moral Betrayal of a Leftist Dream' (April 7). He has expressed his anguish over the current turmoil in West Bengal after the Nandigram episode. Nobody will dispute his observation that over the last 30 years of its rule, the Left Front government led by the CPI(M) has betrayed the aspirations of the people in not being able to carry the process of land reform to its logical culmination and in failing to fulfil the basic needs of the people. What is happening in West Bengal today is the implementation of a political line that is against the interests of the toiling masses. One

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wonders whether CPI(M), or for that matter, the left parties in the front, still believe in the basic tenets of Marxism. A clear perception of the class nature of the state and a steadfast commitment to a proletarian dictatorship should be the hallmark of a party that professes by Marxism. A party which claims to be the vanguard of the working class should ensure that all its strategies and tactics are geared to that end.

But with the government of India opting for liberalisation in the context of globalisation, the Left Front is caught in a catch-22 situation. There are pressures from its urban middle class base to go for rapid

industrialisation so that this section derives the economic benefits thereof. However, the zeal shown by the West Bengal government in implementing its industrialisation programme has not been taken piously by the rural middle class. In the absence of any serious politicisation, even the CPI(M)'s rural support base is raising the banner of revolt against the Left Front.

A political vacuum seems to reign in post-Nandigram Bengal. If the Left Front in general, and the CPI(M) in particular, is not successful in re-establishing its political credentials in quick time, a desperate political situation may emerge. Congress, or for that matter, Trinamool Congress are too discredited politically to fill the void. Mamta Banerjee may play her

role as a next door didi, but it is doubtful if she can stand up to the challenge. The various Naxalite and Maoist groups are too disarranged to offer an alternative left platform. Under the circumstances, howsoever cynical it may sound, there is a distinct possibility of Bengal being engulfed by the reactionary politics of north India, based on caste and religion. If such a scenario emerges, it will be a sad day for left politics in Bengal, which has been nurtured by thousands of dedicated men and women who will be remembered by history for their courage, sacrifice and compassion for the downtrodden.

SUBIR RAY

Pant Nagar, Uttarakhand

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