

NOTE

“Development with Dignity”

A B writes :

The ruling Marxists like their Gandhian counterparts are behaving like fascists to implement neo-liberal policies. They cannot think of alternatives and surrender abjectly to big business. The way they are stealing agricultural land and destroying the peasant community and food security as well, all in the name of industrial revolution, is unprecedented. But there are alternatives.

In this respect, attention may be drawn to an extremely important and unnoticed monograph written by the noted economist, Prof Amit Bhaduri. The book, entitled **Development with Dignity**, has considered whether the unemployed and underemployed labour force of the country can be involved in a path of development that offers them a decent, although not affluent, standard of living as well as a sense of participation, without reducing them to mere wage slaves.

This principal measure recommended by Prof Bhaduri is the construction of capital assets with the help of this labour force. This is not a new idea, and one must consider its feasibility. Prof Bhaduri has not evaded this task. He is aware that such a massive programme will require large quantities of inputs like steel, cement etc.

Besides, implementation of such a programme will generate much larger demands for food grains, clothing etc on the part of workers. Prof Bhaduri is pertinent enough to point out that at present, three industries of India are running with excess capacity, and they are, steel, cement and cotton textiles. So, the problem is not as difficult to tackle, as it seems at the first sight. When Prof Bhaduri wrote this monograph, there was a large buffer stock of food grains. This stock is now much lower. But following his own chain of reasoning, it can be argued that since India now has a large reserve of foreign exchange, essential food imports should be no problem.

How to raise the necessary finances? Here also the author is sharp to point out that merely the printing of notes can finance such a programme, and there is not much to be afraid of inflation. He has asserted that India, given her present overall economic situation, must not lose this opportunity.

It can be safely guessed that Manmohan Singh and his likes, given their politico-economic compulsions, will not at all heed such recommendations. Buddha Bhattacharya & co might say, “Well, the proposals of Prof Bhaduri are all right. But how can we implement them? After all, we do not have the right to print money.” Here one alternative way might be suggested. The affluent in West Bengal may be taxed in order to raise funds for industrial development. Of course, such a measure would incur the wrath of the affluent sections of people, who own flats, colour television sets and cars, and also some

of those who dream of having the Tatas' dream car. But if the Left Front Government really has the people on its side there is no reason why such a policy should not be taken up in right earnest. Such a measure, by transferring income from the affluent to the underprivileged, will also reduce the index of economic inequality. This is not relief giving; this is enabling the people to participate actively in the process of development.

Yet here the dilemma lies. A government that has already committed itself to the profit maximizing Tatas, Salims and Ambanis can ill-afford to antagonize the affluent of the state, notwithstanding the double standards practiced by Sitaram Yechuri et al. Citing the instances of China is not of much help, because it is already known that the distorted pattern of development there has already generated a serious crisis that the Chinese government cannot brush aside.

