

On Nandigram

We the undersigned, who have long been associated with the Left movement in the country, feel deeply pained and anguished by the loss of lives and injuries suffered during the police action in Nandigram on March 14. Nobody belonging to the Left would ever justify repressive action against peasants or workers who are the basic classes of the Left. The tragedy at Nandigram on March 14 was an entirely unanticipated, unjustified and unfortunate turn of events, whose exact origin and course should be established through a proper inquiry. The Left Front government meanwhile has announced the removal of the police force from Nandigram, has reiterated its policy that no land will be acquired for industrial purposes without the consent of the peasants and other people concerned, has put on hold all land acquisition, and has put a halt to the construction of special economic zones (SEZs) until the central legislation on SEZs itself, to which the Left has always been opposed, is suitably amended. And the CPI(M), the leading partner of the Left Front, has asked for a judicial inquiry into the tragedy. Under these circumstances, and in view of the fact that the state government has committed itself to recompensing the families of the victims, all efforts must be made so that tension subsides and normalcy returns to the area, allowing the numerous refugees, who have been driven out from there and living in makeshift camps, to return home. We appeal to all concerned not to let the wounds of Nandigram become festering sores.

AMIYA KUMAR BAGCHI, *Kolkata*,
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MALINI BHATTACHARYA, *Kolkata*,
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PRABHAT PATNAIK, *New Delhi*,
TEESTA SETALVAD, *Mumbai*
D N JHA, *Delhi*, RUCHIRA GUPTA, *New Delhi*.

Neglect of Children under Six

The following is an open letter to prime minister Manmohan Singh:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the neglect of children under six in the Union Budget 2007-08.

You may remember meeting some of us on December 19 last year (just after "Bal Adhikar Samvad"), when we discussed the FOCUS Report, the rights of children under six, and the recent Supreme Court judgment on Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). At that time you had assured us that the UPA government was committed to the universalisation of ICDS, as stated in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP), and also to the implementation of the Supreme Court judgment. We are, therefore, startled and dismayed that this commitment is not reflected at all in the Union Budget 2007-08. The allocation for ICDS (Rs 4,761 crore) has barely increased in real terms, and is virtually unchanged as a proportion of GDP.

It is a mystery to us how the CMP commitment and Supreme Court judgment can possibly be implemented within such meagre budget allocations. The Supreme Court judgment requires an increase in the number of anganwadis from the present 9.4 lakhs to 14 lakhs at the very least by December 2008. Higher allocations are also required to enhance the quality of ICDS services. Based on fairly conservative calculations of the requirements of "universalisation with quality", the National Advisory Council had recommended (in November 2004) an allocation of at least Rs 9,600 crore for ICDS in 2007-08. This figure needs upward revision in the light of the Supreme Court judgment, yet the actual provision in the Union Budget 2007-08 is not even half of this conservative estimate.

As per this budget, the government of India will be spending less than Rs 5,000 crore this year on children under six, who represent more than 15 per cent of India's population. This

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Economic and Political Weekly

Economic and Political Weekly

Hitkari House, 284 Shahid Bhagatsingh Road, Mumbai 400 001

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compares with Rs 96,000 crore to be spent on "defence". This is a staggering and unacceptable imbalance in budget priorities. The contrast is all the more shocking at a time of growing evidence (particularly from the National Family Health Survey) that there has been no substantial improvement in infant and young child nutrition, including optimal breastfeeding practices, during the last eight years, in spite of runaway economic growth.

We urge you to intervene and ensure a fairer deal for children in the Union Budget 2007-08 as well as in the Eleventh Plan. We also take this opportunity to reiterate our appeal for

more active political leadership on children's issues, including the universalisation of ICDS.

JEAN DREZE, N C SAXENA,
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Not Correct

In the text of my article 'Classes and Communities' (March 17, 2007), I had written, "Raymond Aron (1964:43) pointed out that in *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*, Marx

enumerated a set of eight distinct classes; in *Class Struggles in France* he also listed eight classes, but it was a somewhat different set of eight". This was changed to read "*In Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*, Raymond Aron (1964:43) pointed out that Marx enumerated a set of eight distinct classes; in *Class Struggles in France* Aron also listed eight classes, but it was a somewhat different set of eight". The change will lead the reader to think that I believe that the author of *Class Struggles in France* was Raymond Aron which, of course, is not correct.

ANDRE BETEILLE
New Delhi

(The error is regretted. -Ed)

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