

Singur

Union Support for Indian Agricultural Workers and Peasants Resisting Massive Eviction from Farmland

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Agricultural workers and peasants in the West Bengal community of Singur are resisting plans by the state's "Left Front" government to evict some 6,000 poor families from 420 hectares of farmland to make way for a small car factory to be built by the Tata Group, India's powerful multinational conglomerate. The IUF-affiliated PBKMS, which organizes rural workers in West Bengal, is supporting their struggle and has joined the residents in calling for international support to block the forcible seizure of land. The union has also highlighted the growing repression against the residents and their Krishi Jami Raksha (Farmlands Protection Committee).

In recent years, the West Bengal government has been facilitating the extensive conversion of agricultural to industrial land by offering tax and investment incentives to foreign capital. Land is taken from farmers under the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and sold or leased to investors at subsidized rates through the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation. Tata Motors has asked for 410 hectares, although only a tenth of this land is required for the proposed auto factory. The plant will employ 2,000 workers, while up to 30,000 people will lose their land and livelihood, including agricultural labourers, marginal peasants, sharecroppers, cottage industry and other rural workers who would receive no compensation under the procedure.

Singur, 50 kilometers northwest of Kolkata, is fertile agricultural land, with over 60% of the area giving 3-4 crops a year of rice, wheat, jute and vegetables. Despite this, and despite its public pledges to requisition only single-cropped land for industrial conversion, the government has made no effort to locate the Tata project on non-agricultural land. Eviction threatens to plunge thousands of workers into the starvation which has been stalking West Bengal's tea plantations.

The Singur issue, writes PBKMS, "Has become a landmark in the history of land- and livelihood-related issues in West Bengal. If the Government does manage to take over the land in Singur, we expect this to be followed by quick acquisitions in places like Kulpi, where a port and a Special Economic Zone for industry are planned, and in Joonput, where there are plans for a nuclear reactor. A number of PBKMS union members live and work in both these places. The Singur struggle is therefore vital for us. In the meantime police intimidation at Singur, with police jeeps visiting the villages and waking up women in the middle of the night, is continuing."

On September 25, 2006, police brutally assaulted 7,000 agricultural workers and peasants (including 2,500 women) engaged in a sit-in demonstration at the local development office. The demonstrators were charged and beaten under cover of darkness. Some 70 men, women and children were injured and one youth (Rajkumar Bhul) lost his life due to the police beating. Seventy-two people, including 27 women and the entire leadership of the Singur Krishi Jami Raksha Committee, were arrested and only released 2 days later after a special bail petition in the Kolkata High Court. A team of PBKMS activists that visited the area on October 4 was told that the police

arrested even people who were going to the hospital for medical treatment following the police assault.

Parents of the deceased Rajkumar Bhul - a victim of police violence against villagers resisting eviction.

The PBKMS on October 4 met with the families of those injured and killed in police action, and visited two of the villages facing eviction. The union has decided to step up support for the struggle of the Singur Krishi Jami Raksha Committee. On October 8, it plans to join their mass procession at Singur and a citizen's meeting at Kolkata on October 14. PBKMS also plans protest meetings in its own areas from October 11-18. The IUF-affiliated All-India Council of Unilever Unions has also declared its solidarity with the struggle against forcible land seizures by the West Bengal government.

The IUF is calling for protest messages to condemn the police action of September 25 and the continuing police intimidation. Messages should also call for a halt to the use of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes and demand mandatory consultation with agricultural workers' unions and small farmers' organisations as a precondition for land acquisition and conversion.

Click the link in the field above to send a message to the government of West Bengal and the Managing Directors of Tata Motors.

http://www.iuf.org/cgi-bin/campaigns/show_campaign.cgi?c=220

Copies of your messages will be automatically forwarded to the IUF secretariat and to the PBKMS.

View online : [To send support letters](#)

P.S.

* Posted to the IUF website on 10-Oct-2006.