

# Ideas and Policy Paradigms: Explaining the Fall of Welfare Politics in West Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

Why does the state sometimes provide welfare and sometimes not? Why is it able to promote competition on some occasions and not others? We argue that a critical variable in this process is the way the state thinks. State capacity is also a product of the relationship between bureaucratic or technocratic elite and political will. We demonstrate this conjecture by exploring the political economy of welfare under the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM) in West Bengal. We empirically demonstrate that CPIM in West Bengal has shifted its ideology from welfare to trickle down. The paper argues for the salience of ideation within the state and the kinds of synergies that exist between the bureaucracy and the political class in the implementation of such policies. The failure of CPIM in West Bengal can be likened to a tipping point evident in the gradual evolution of trickle-down economics over redistribution as an ideology of governance.

**Keywords:** state capacity, political economy, welfare, bureaucracy, ideas, tipping point, West Bengal

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## **Ideas y paradigmas políticos: explicando la caída de la política de bienestar en Bengala Occidental**

### **RESUMEN**

¿Por qué el estado a veces proporciona bienestar y no otras veces? ¿Por qué es capaz de promover la competencia en algunas ocasiones y no en otras? Argumentamos que una variable crítica en este proceso es la manera en que piensa el estado. La capacidad del Estado también es producto de la relación entre la élite burocrática o tecnocrática y la voluntad política. Demostramos esta conjetura explorando la economía política del bienestar bajo el Partido Comunista de India-Marxista (CPIM) en Bengala Occidental. Demostramos empíricamente que el CPIM en Bengala Occidental había cambiado su ideología del bienestar para goteo. El documento aboga por la importancia de la ideación dentro del estado y los tipos de sinergias que existen entre la burocracia y la clase política en la implementación de tales políticas. El fracaso del CPIM en Bengala Occidental puede compararse con un punto de inflexión evidente en la evolución gradual de la economía por goteo sobre la redistribución como una ideología de gobierno.

**Palabras clave:** capacidad estatal, economía política, bienestar, burocracia, ideas, punto de inflexión, Bengala Occidental

# 观念与政策范式：解释西孟加拉邦福利政治的衰落

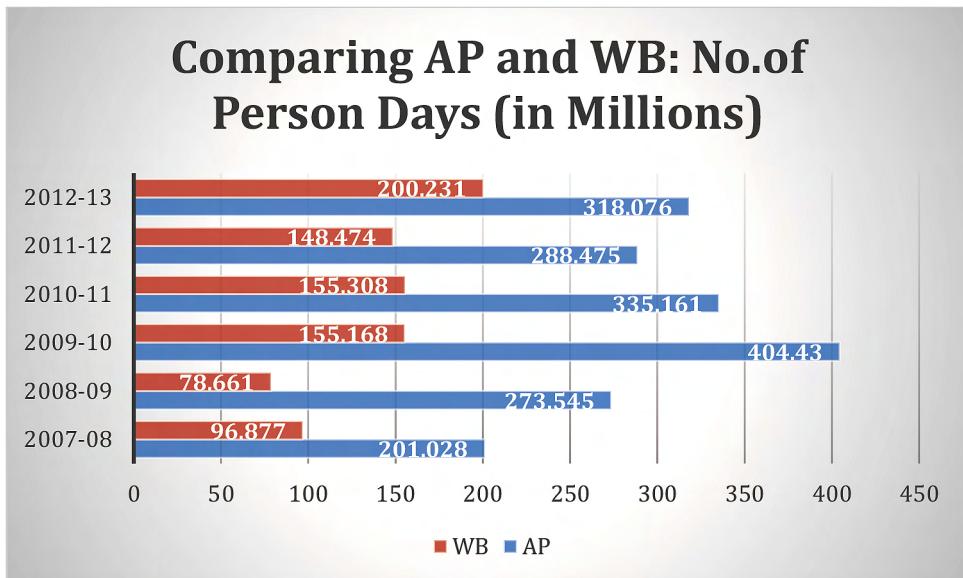
## 摘要

为什么邦有时提供福利，有时却不这样？为什么其在某些情况下能推动竞争，其他情况下却不行？我们主张，在此过程中邦的思考方式是一个关键变量。邦实力也是官僚或技术官僚精英和政治意愿关系下的产物。我们通过探究印度共产党（马克思主义）（简称CPIM）执政下西孟加拉邦的福利政治经济，证明了此猜想。我们从实证上证明，西孟加拉邦的CPIM将其意识形态从福利制度转变为下渗式（trickle down）福利。本文强调了邦内观念形成过程的重要性，和官僚与政治阶级之间就实施这类政策所存在的协同作用类型。西孟加拉邦CPIM的失败可被比作为一个临界点，体现了一种用下渗经济逐步取代再分配的治理思想。

关键词：邦实力（印度），政治经济，福利，官僚，观念，临界点，西孟加拉邦

This article explains the decline of redistributive politics under the rule of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM) in West Bengal. To unravel this decline we probe the failed implementation of the right to work program administered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in the state. Despite CPIM being in power, redistributive politics during the land reforms of the 1970s, declined gradually since the 1990s. In 2006-2007, six person days per rural household jobs were created in West Bengal compared with the national average of

seventeen. The same figures for 2007-2008 were eight and sixteen, respectively.<sup>1</sup> The poor implementation of MGNREGS is even more glaring if we compare it with a star performer, such as Andhra Pradesh. The total number of workdays generated in 2007-2008 was 96 million in West Bengal, compared to 201 million in Andhra Pradesh. West Bengal lagged behind Andhra Pradesh in targeting disadvantaged groups, such as women, scheduled caste groups, and the tribal population.<sup>2</sup> This was despite the fact that West Bengal is more populous and poverty-stricken than Andhra Pradesh. What explains this paradox?



*Figure 1. Number of person days.* Source: Open Government Data Platform GoI and Lok Sabha Questions (answer to starred question no.146 & no.170), Parliament of India

We deploy a layered historical institutional tipping point model of ideational change to explain transformation in policy paradigms and the consequent capacity of a sub-national Indian state—West Bengal—to deliver citizenship rights. The politics of redistribution in West Bengal is well known. CPIM in West Bengal was a strong cadre-based party with deep ideological commitment. Despite this legacy, the party failed in effectively securing the right to work for its citizens. We argue that the legacy of redistributive politics in West Bengal renders it a tough case for the failed implementation of the right to work under CPIM rule. What is even more surprising is that Congress-ruled Andhra Pradesh, with its poor legacy of land reforms, was able to reach the poor more effectively.<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Puzzle***

The case of lackluster MGNREGS implementation in West Bengal is puzzling on two counts. First, West Bengal was one of the most successful cases of land reform implementation in the country. CPIM's pro-poor and anti-landlord social base, coupled with a coherent ideology, produced one of the best land redistribution programs in India. The social base of the party, it was argued, played an important role in manufacturing programmatic politics.<sup>4</sup> It is puzzling therefore as to why the state in West Bengal failed to mount a similar campaign regarding wage employment, despite a legacy of implementing a successful welfare program. Secondly, CPIM was part of the coalition of United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that came to power in the Centre

in 2004. The party was instrumental in demanding the right to work through the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA.<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to dilute the proposed employment guarantee bill was opposed by the party.<sup>6</sup> At the Centre, CPIM was so keen on the program that in 2007, it demanded that National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) be implemented in all districts immediately (and not wait until 2008).<sup>7</sup> CPIM's enthusiasm for MGNREGS at the Centre did not match its lassitude at the state level.

The political economy of welfare politics in West Bengal presents a tough<sup>8</sup> or a least likely case.<sup>9</sup> We would expect that a party with a strong legacy of programmatic welfare policies would also implement the right to work with similar zeal. The sluggish implementation of MGNREGS is especially puzzling in the face of the stagnating agricultural sector in West Bengal.<sup>10</sup> It would have been politically prudent for the party to implement the right to support and further build on its traditional rural base of marginal farmers and sharecroppers. Yet, the state implemented MGNREGS rather disinterestedly.

### ***The Argument***

Why did CPIM, with its strong legacy and credentials in initiating an effective decentralized governance and land redistribution to the poor, decline in its welfare commitment over time? Scholars have tried to explain the decline of the left in West Bengal as a force for empowering the poor. We find explanations for the decline of the left in West

Bengal to be problematic for the following reasons. In *Government as Practice*, for example, Bhattacharya (2016) argues that the CPIM government could not become a transformational force for three important reasons. First, the move toward decentralization through empowering the village government was used instrumentally as a centralizing institution of the state to penetrate rural areas with disciplined cadres, rather than for promoting decentralization. Second, old social identities and forms of oppression remained intact. Third, redistributive measures such as land redistribution were not radical enough to challenge social identities. Finally, there was a lack of ideological commitment to deal with the extant social structure.<sup>11</sup> Nath (2018), like Bhattacharya, explains the persistence of the status quo by arguing that both CPIM and subsequently the Trinamool Congress since 2011 have successfully wooed voters through a process through a process of "cultural misrecognition," where the oppressed are socialized into a world where they cannot see how they are being oppressed.<sup>12</sup>

These arguments posit an explanation for the status quo rather than change. While it is true that West Bengal did not experience a radical revolution, this mode of argumentation cannot explain the transition from a redistributive approach toward a growth-oriented one for engendering development in West Bengal. If social forces were so powerful in transforming the behavior of sub-national states, then how is it that Andhra Pradesh, with a much deeper capitalist penetration, reigned

in more effectively the opponents of the right to work?

Another scholar, Ray (2017), argues that a form of “pragmatism” and the sub-national state’s inability to pursue “programmatic” industrialization and address the agrarian crisis resulted in “preference falsification” of the voters resulting in CPIM’s disintegration.<sup>13</sup> Preference falsification here refers to a situation where individual voters opposed to the ruling party remain unaware that others’ preferences have also changed for a considerable period until the electoral preference tips in favor of the opposition. For the purposes of our paper, Ray agrees with us that marginalization of peasants created a pragmatic camp within CPIM that worked with the hegemonic idea that industrial investment growth will trickle down. What Ray calls “pragmatism” is ideation favoring trickle-down economics. The lack of programmatic implementation of industrialization supported by empathetic land acquisition and the lack of programmatic implementation of the right to work both signaled the rise of trickle-down economics within the CPIM-ruled state in West Bengal. Other states, such Andhra Pradesh, deployed a different model of “pragmatism” or “policy paradigm” that stressed redistribution, as much as they worked to promote industrialization and growth.

Contrary to the above explanations, we argue that a critical variable in this process is the way the state thinks. State capacity is also a product of the relationship between the bureaucratic or technocratic elite and political will. In

this light, we stress the salience of taking a deeper look at the way a state thinks and the kinds of synergies that exist between the bureaucracy and the political class in the implementation of such policies. We argue that the diminishing commitment to welfare over time is an outcome of the decline in the ideational milieu of the political executive toward welfare and rural development.

We hold that a decline of welfare politics in West Bengal follows the tipping point model of economic change. A tipping point is reached after long deliberation and a gradual evolution. This is the earthquake model of change. Tectonic shifts occur under the earth’s crust over a long period of time. When such shifts reach a threshold, we find substantial change, which appears to have occurred suddenly. The tipping point model therefore requires us to establish a gradual and endogenous evolution in ideas over a long period of time. When a threshold is reached, a sudden earthquake can occur. Unlike the threshold of 100 degrees Celsius for water to boil, we cannot precisely tell the threshold at which an earthquake will occur. Seismologists, for example, know that earthquakes are likely in the Himalayan region or that one could occur in Fukushima, even though they cannot precisely predict such activity.<sup>14</sup>

The tipping point model has been deployed to explain changes in policy paradigms. India did not devalue the Rupee, despite foreign pressure in 1966. This was because the Indian state was convinced that import substitution was the pathway out of colonial exploitation in a post-colonial world.

In 1991, on the other hand, the Indian state had reached a tipping point of ideas – there was enough ideational conviction within the government that globalization and greater private sector orientation were necessary for the Indian economy to take off. India opted for globalization, despite the corporate sector being averse to it.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, there is a powerful view that the Right to Information Act (2005) in India was not implemented because of a sudden ideational change within the Indian state under the UPA government that viewed government accountability as essential for democratic governance.<sup>16</sup>

In this paper, we show that the tipping point was reached through a two-layered process. Layering is a process in which a new norm emerges on the fringes of the existing institutional structure and, eventually, replaces the old institution. The process of layering, for example, has been used to explain institutional change in Indian telecommunications from government monopoly to regulated private sector competition. The transformation from anti-labor to liberal labor-friendly institutions also followed layered progression in the case of large metalworking German firms.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, institutional change from the norm of *secrecy* to *openness* with the promulgation of the Right to Information Act 2005 in India is explained through a layered tipping point.<sup>18</sup>

Change in policy paradigm in the case of West Bengal from the idea of *welfare* to *trickle-down economics* can be explained through layered tipping points as well. “Welfare,” or redistribu-

tive politics, is driven by the idea that markets fail and market intervention is required to reach services to the poor. The trickle down model, on the other hand, relies on the view that growth trickles down to the poor and that markets and investments can lift all boats. We demonstrate that in the first layer or phase from the mid-1980s until 2000, the idea of redistribution was gradually overtaken by the idea of trickle down. This decline began with incremental ideological changes within the party, which finally manifested in the adoption of the industrial policy resolution of 1994. In the second layer of institutional progression from 2000 to 2008, the idea of trickle down accelerated to reach a threshold characterized by a complete transition of party ideology away from its rural and welfare orientation to a more urban-based growth and trickle-down ideology. These ideas reached a tipping point when investment-related social unrest ensued in Nandigram and Singur. Welfare considerations were relegated to the background as growth was emphasized. In this two-layered process, the state gradually abandoned the idea of redistribution and adopted the view that growth will trickle down to the poor.<sup>19</sup> By the time MGNREGS was enacted in 2005, there was a substantial decline in the political will to implement a pro-poor welfare program in West Bengal.

We treat each layer as two distinct interrelated phases. In the following sections we demonstrate, in two phases, the process of how the idea of trickle-down economics gradually gained traction in state thinking begin-

ning in the mid '80s, finally consolidating itself by 2008. We propose a tipping point model of endogenous change. CPIM rule and ideational progression with the same party in the very same sub-national state allows us to control variables such as social capital and party systems.

However, before we discuss these phases it is pertinent to answer: how do ideas percolate down to the bureaucracy? In the case of West Bengal, a strong cadre-based ideology drove both the party and the state. In this sense, both the state and the bureaucracy work within that ideological frame. In West Bengal, CPIM's ideology produced the moral purpose of the state. During land reforms, welfare was the hegemonic idea that produced the social purpose of the state. As the idea moved from welfare to industrialization, growth and trickle-down economics attained hegemonic proportions within the ideological paradigm of both the party and the state. It is within these ideological transitions that bureaucracy also operated.

This argument is different from Dasandi and Esteve's (2017), who hold that the political-bureaucratic interface is contingent on a degree of bureaucratic autonomy reminiscent of the East Asian developmental states, making political-bureaucratic interactions intrusive, integrated, collusive, or collaborative.<sup>20</sup> The case of West Bengal in India requires further elaboration, at variance from models based on colonial, East Asian, or Anglo-American typologies. We find that the bureaucracy has relative autonomy with respect

to social actors, within the hegemonic ideological frame of the state. It is shifts in the ideological fabric of the state that result in different outcomes, rather than the varieties of political-bureaucratic interactions. The bureaucracy in West Bengal is essentially a technocratic vehicle, which implemented the vision of a sub-national state governed by an ideological cadre-based party.

## **Phase I 1980-2000**

**W**hat might have been the reason for this ideational reversal from welfare to trickle down? The decline can be attributed to an ideological shift in party's leadership. Shifts occurred within the state on key policy priorities manifesting in ideational repositioning from welfare to growth. The leadership was convinced about the trickle-down effects of the growth model. In the first phase a gradual metamorphosis took place within the state beginning in the mid-'80s. This ideological conversion was in contrast to the previous ideas on pro-poor welfare policies through land reforms and direct rural governance by means of effective decentralization. Two points are discernable in this phase. First, we find a gradual move in favor of growth and industrialization at the sub-national state level, even though the left party in the state was fundamentally opposed to large-scale economic transformation at the central level. This signified an existing polarity within the state between the two paradigms—trickle-down economics and welfare. Some segments

within the state, including the Chief Minister (CM), gradually pursued the trickle-down paradigm and expressed these ideas circumspectly. Second, it can be surmised from the evidence that nascent ideas regarding growth, industrialization, and private capital were jostling for space within the party, with the old policy paradigm privileging welfare and socioeconomic redistribution. Urban-based leaders supporting trickle-down economics replaced the rurally oriented old leadership with redistributive zeal.

### ***Nascent Ideas Favoring the Trickle-Down Paradigm***

Efforts to attract private capital were palpable as early as the mid-1980s. For instance, two major industrial projects were proposed in the state—one was the public-private joint venture between Philips and West Bengal Electronics Development Corporation to set up an electronics complex near Kolkata (then known as Calcutta) and the other was to establish a petrochemical plant in Haldia. Similarly, in 1985, Webel Electronics Corporation Ltd., a subsidiary of West Bengal Electronics Development Corporation, partnered with National Insulated Cable Company of India.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently, shifts in the policy priorities favoring private capital emanated from the highest levels of the executive. This is evident from Jyoti Basu's announcement on May 10, 1990 in the legislative assembly that the state would enter into a joint partnership with both Reliance Industries and

the Tata group. Interestingly, the state lamented the lack of central government's support for establishing industries. In one of the party documents, the Congress government at the center is blamed for dragging its feet on some key proposed projects (mentioned above), "this (industrial neglect by the centre) was done both through a denial of public sector investment as well as licenses for setting up private industries." At the same time throughout the mid-1980s and early 1990s, there were continuous efforts by the top leadership in West Bengal to attract private capital to and promote private capital within the state. This was evident in an internal government note that was circulated in the legislative assembly stating that the private sector can be effectively engaged in public projects in India, providing examples of specific industries such as paper pulp, NISCO, and Krishna Glass Syndicate, to name a few.<sup>22</sup> The note was followed by the CM's declaration in the House on March 25, 1992 that the "private sector should be given a fair trial. They should be allowed to enter core industries like power and steel in a big way. The government is negotiating to sell part of its holdings in several state owned undertakings." The declaration was followed by the decision by two private companies, Peerless Group of Calcutta and Associated Cement Companies Ltd. from Bombay, to jointly acquire (51 percent) of two prominent state owned public enterprises: namely, Greater Calcutta Gas Corporation and Webel Electro Ceramic.

## ***Two-way Movement: Opposing Economic Reforms at the Centre and Gradual Liberalization in the State***

A close examination of the state government's budget speeches from 1991 onwards unravels a process of gradual progression of ideas favoring growth and trickle-down economics within the state. At a rudimentary level, the 1991 budget speech of the Finance Minister, Asim Dasgupta, proposed trickle-down ideas, albeit in nascent forms. The budget stressed self-reliance, with a focus on agriculture and land, on the one hand, while on the other, it outlined the need to develop small scale industries and linking them up with big industrial projects: "whenever possible ... link up, with a social perspective, the small scale units with the mother complexes in the large-scale industrial sector."<sup>23</sup> Even though these initial ideas about growth gradually found ideational roots within the party leadership, some segments within the party were vehemently opposed to the idea of economic reforms introduced by the central government in 1991, stressing self-reliance and denouncing foreign or external trade. However, ideas progressed further by the time the 1993-1994 budget was presented: "*self-reliance* does not mean shifting out from external trade ... we are proposing participation in imports and exports from the position of *self-respect*" (emphasis added)<sup>24</sup>. These policy articulations were followed by concrete policy measures, such as the introduction of an industry incentive scheme in 1992, the postponement of sales tax or increase in remissions for thirteen

years, removal of electricity duty for five years, and the decentralization of the tax structure in 1993-1994 to attract foreign and domestic investment in the state.<sup>25</sup>

While the liberalisation policy at the centre was criticised by the state government, the idea of private capital was gradually promoted in the state. This dual thinking is reflected in a party resolution titled "On Industrialisation in West Bengal," resolved during the Nineteenth West Bengal State Congress of CPIM in 1998. The party reluctantly suggested that

there is *no alternative other than encouraging private capital to invest in the state* even though the policy of economic liberalisation pursued by the central government is creating an impediment to our efforts ... Unless the policies of economic liberalisation are defeated, our state cannot reach its declared goals.<sup>26</sup>  
[emphasis added]

At one level, the party vehemently opposed the new economic policy adopted by the centre in 1991 and the party-affiliated trade unions declared a general strike in September 1993, albeit with limited success. At the same time the economic review of the state in 1992-1993 acknowledged (rather vaguely) that delicensing had resulted in an increase in investment in the state. To take advantage of delicensing, the party introduced a new incentive scheme to attract investment, offered tax concessions, and eased the process

of procuring finance for new investment projects.

### ***Ideational Transition within the CM's Office***

These nascent ideas aligned with the prevailing mood within the CM's office. On numerous occasions from the mid-'80s to the early '90s CM Jyoti Basu expressed his unequivocal preference toward industrialisation and growth unequivocally. Speaking at the Bengal Chamber of Commerce he expressed interest in promotion of private sector and industries for growth admitting that "our incentives to the private sector have increased rapidly." In fact, in 1984, Jyoti Basu travelled to UK, Canada, and the US. It was inferred that the trip was organised in close consultation with some senior executives of Calcutta-based multinationals.<sup>27</sup> The CM's transformed attitude toward investors, private sector, multinationals, and foreign capital bears out in one of his statements in the legislative assembly, "I have been going abroad every year to invite foreign companies and NRI's to invest in West Bengal."<sup>28</sup> Jyoti Basu's ideational inclinations had clearly transitioned from welfare-oriented ideas closer to the rural base of the party to a more urban based industrial outlook post 1991.<sup>29</sup> The establishment of special industry cell in 1990-1991 within the CM's secretariat was symptomatic of an ideational shift occurring within the top leadership.<sup>30</sup> This is evident from his close interactions with private investors, chambers of commerce and efforts to attract foreign capital, an outlook which was perhaps an anti-thesis

to the left tradition in the state. In one of the interviews, CM's chief assistant and party member since 1966, Sujit Poddar, corroborates this transition:

he used to attend Chamber of Commerce meetings, meet industrialists outside government offices and even accept private invitations from them... Though it was a very gradual process, but it was perhaps his biggest contribution to initiate a change in the culture of viewing businesses and businessmen as untouchables.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, prior to 1991 different set of ideas held sway within the party, which was aligned with balanced ideological convictions on both rural welfare and industrialisation. For example, in March 1982, state labour minister, K.P. Ghosh recommended that

through radical re-distributive land reforms a situation can be created where the vast majority of our potential work-force in the rural sector can be provided with jobs ... the problem of unemployment cannot be solved without systematic and rapid economic development, which involves growth of industries as well as agriculture.<sup>32</sup>

The party at this juncture wished to build on its successful land reforms programme stressing the growth of "rural industry" and "rural economy."<sup>33</sup>

## ***Policy Priorities Shift from Rural to Urban***

There was an unambiguous policy shift from rural to urban priorities. This was evident in the Calcutta Mega City Programme initiated by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority in 1994 and the proposed township of new Calcutta in 1995, which subsumed villages, and cultivable land located on the city fringes. Similar transitions occurred at the top from rural to urban-based leaders. For instance, finance minister since 1977 Ashok Mitra resigned from the party over differences on the changing policy priorities. Mitra's disagreement with the ideational shifts within the party is conspicuous in one of his essays:

90% of its (Party's) members have joined after 1977, 70% after 1991. They do not know the history of sacrifices of the party. To them ideological commitment to revolution and socialism is simply a fading folktale. As the new ideology is development, many of them are associated with the party in the search for personal development. They have come to take, not to give. They are learning different tricks so as to appropriate various privileges by aligning with the governing party.<sup>34</sup>

According to Mitra the old vanguard of the party gave way to the new leadership which believed in the trickle down paradigm,

Many of the old people, long time and still party members, who have been through numerous sacrifices and are idealists, are a disheartened, disillusioned lot today. But any organised protest will face party disciplinary action, what will be their support in the twilight of life if the party throws them out?<sup>35</sup>

Our interviews with the existing and former party members validate this change. According to them urban based leaders who lacked rural connections gained significance within the party albeit slowly and held considerable ideological traction with the top leadership.<sup>36</sup> Abdur Razzak Molla, former land reforms minister in the CPIM government and a well-known peasant leader informed us in detail about the camps and programs organised by the party in rural areas for sensitising the leadership and bureaucrats about the issues faced by the poor.<sup>37</sup> Molla conceded that this began changing from the early 90's when leaders with an urban outlook having specific ideas about the 'economic growth model' began to dominate the party.<sup>38</sup> In 2014, a frustrated Molla resigned from the party to join Trinamool Congress (TMC) alleging that the party was run by "managers instead of leaders."<sup>39</sup> A disconnect with the rural milieu manifested as the change in ideas emerged at the top level,

The party had assumed that given the success of the land reforms and end of feudalism in the rural areas via democratic decentralisation, the consciousness level

among rural people must have gone up. The obvious corollary of assuming that the people in the state are now more politically conscious was that they would automatically understand and accept the necessity of a transition to industrialisation.<sup>40</sup>

### ***State Industrial Policy 1994***

Eventually, ideas regarding trickle down growth peaked when the state adopted the industrial policy (IP) of 1994. The conviction regarding growth is reflected in CM Jyoti Basu's statement during the adoption of the state industrial policy (IP) of 1994- “we are all for *new technology and investment in selective spheres where they help our economy and which are of mutual interest* ... We have the state sector, the private sector and also the joint sector. All these have a role to play”<sup>41</sup> [emphasis added]. This was unlike the earlier Jyoti Basu who played a facilitative role during the land reforms (discussed above). This echoed with state's policy statement on industrial development (1994), welcoming foreign ‘technology and investment’ recognising the ‘key role of the private sector’ for growth.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the 1994 central committee resolution stated that

today with deregulation and de-licencing, it is up to the Left Front Government *to initiate steps to attract capital investment in West Bengal*. This can be done only by allowing greater investment of private capital in various sectors. This is the basis on which the *Left Front*

*government has to adjust its policies in West Bengal to meet the new situation brought about by the Centre's policy of liberalisation.*<sup>43</sup> [emphasis added]

Soon thereafter, CPIM leader Somnath Chatterjee, a close confidant of the CM, was appointed chairman of West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC), which was a break from the past practice of appointing retired bureaucrats as chairman. WBIDC was enhanced by top leadership.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, Chatterjee was known to be a liberal within the party with a pro-industrial outlook, but still a lightweight, having become the member of the state committee as recently as 1987.<sup>45</sup> WBIDC was made autonomous from other party arms, such as the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and directly reported to the CM's office.<sup>46</sup> This also gave the party greater control over key economic and industrial policy decisions. Additionally, having a prominent leader of the party and close associate of the CM be chairman of WBIDC sent an unequivocal message of the state's intention for rapid industrialization. The policy imperatives and priorities of the state government were clear. This is evident in Chatterjee's assertion that “We must attract private capital. I don't see any alternative. Where is the money?”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the push for the industrial policy in 1994 was a result of the demands from business and industry associations: “when we were visiting the various Chambers of Commerce and inviting people to invest in the state, they requested us to present a policy

statement explaining our approach towards industrial development.”<sup>48</sup>

Contrast this transformed stance with the party’s industrial policy of 1978, when industrial policy was driven by the imperatives of building a rural base and welfare. Industrial policy at that time focused on generating employment in the industrial and agricultural sectors, encouraging indigenous technology and industrial self-reliance, and the gradual expansion of public sector.<sup>49</sup>

Stagnant industrialisation convinced top leadership to expedite this ideational shift favouring private capital and industrialization.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the state experienced abject industrial stagnation throughout the ’80s and early ’90s. West Bengal grew at less than 3 percent per annum, whereas other states like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were far ahead with 10 percent industrial growth.<sup>51</sup> In this milieu, the top leadership of CPIM found it prudent to pay serious attention to industrial growth. The ideas within the party gradually moved away from welfare toward growth and trickle-down economics. This is in contrast to other states, such Andhra Pradesh, which shows a gradual move toward growth along with welfare, making the state a frontrunner in implementing the right to work.<sup>52</sup>

As a result, by the time MGNREGS was introduced in the state in 2006, CPIM was ruled by urban rather than the rural-based leaders, who were convinced that industrialization and economic growth would trickle

down.<sup>53</sup> The transition from welfare to trickle-down economics was gradual and incremental. In the following section, we show how trickle-down ideas reached a threshold. The state systematically consolidated trickle-down economics over redistributive politics.

## **Phase II 2000-2008**

### *Consolidation of Trickle-Down Economics in State Thinking*

In Phase II (our second layer), nascent ideas about trickle-down economics from the earlier phase reached a threshold. The ideas had unambiguously transitioned from welfare to trickle-down economics when Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee became the CM in 2000. The state now openly promoted industrialization. Speaking on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Left Front government in the state, the CM expressed his conviction and policy proclivities toward trickle down economics:

Ours is an alternative path of development aiming at raising the common man’s standard of living and promoting activities for the overall progress of the State .... In the present economic system of the country, the private sector plays an important role. We urge the private sector to make more investment in order to build a prosperous West Bengal.<sup>54</sup>

These ideas also influenced the policy outlook toward agriculture and rural livelihoods. The top leadership was

now articulating policy commitment for food processing, setting up of agricultural export zones, exporting food products, and collaborating with multinationals, such as Dabur and Pepsi. Simultaneously, attracting investment and exploring opportunities in emerging sectors, such as Information Technology, became a policy priority.<sup>55</sup> A rural livelihood program, such as MGNREGS, would clearly be seen as deviant from the existing thinking within the state government. This thinking filtered from the top leadership to the rural level. An interview with the district level official in Bardhaman revealed his skepticism about MGNREGS and the right to work. Instead, the official advocated building soak pits in the area. This work, however, would obviously benefit the middle class rather than serving the poorest in the rural areas.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, a top party official conceded that Kisan Sabhas (Assembly of Agriculturalists), which was instrumental in the mobilization during land reform implementation, were now opposed to MGNREGS. The middle peasantry, who benefitted from land reforms, now stood against the right to work for the poor, as it would raise local wage rates.<sup>57</sup> Ideational shifts occurring within the party also influenced Kisan Sabhas, which had deployed local level cadres in rural West Bengal for the implementation of land reforms. Shifts in ideas favoring trickle-down economics were so profound that even local level proposals supporting small-scale initiatives, such as building soak pits and weaving mosquito nets, were rejected by leadership.<sup>58</sup>

### **Agriculture to Industrialization**

With Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at the helm, the prevailing ideas within the state government suggested a move away from agriculture. The CM communicated these ideas in no uncertain terms,

Some people think that we can continue with only our success in agriculture; we can improve the economy of the State only through agriculture; even the problem of unemployment can be solved through agriculture .... *We are right now in a transitional stage; based on our success in agriculture we are moving towards rapid industrialisation.* Agriculture alone cannot create new job opportunities and move the economy further. So, *it is imperative to move from agriculture to industry*; it is not agriculture versus industry.<sup>59</sup>

Party members with similar leanings were given important portfolios. For instance, Nirupam Sen was made the industries minister. Sen's views on development and industrialisation were in line with the CM's conviction about the benefits of trickle down growth model. In the face of stiff opposition to Singur's land acquisition, Sen clearly expressed these ideas,

After successful land reforms, the decentralisation of panchayati raj, and the growth we have achieved in the agrarian sector, if we do not go for industrial development, then the entire

economy of the State would go to ruin .... Now, for sustainable growth, the development of the manufacturing sector is vital. Automobiles is an industry that draws huge manufacturing activities both in the small and in the medium-scale enterprises.<sup>60</sup>

The model was to be based on China, the Asian tigers, and Japan, “anywhere in the world, whether in South-east Asia, China or Japan, it is the small and medium enterprises that provide maximum employment and that is going to be one of the most important milestones in the industrial development of our State.”<sup>61</sup> Sen wrote a series of articles in party publications and popular media outlets expounding such views.<sup>62</sup> Unsurprisingly, these ideas found their way in the party’s election slogans for the 2006 assembly elections: *krishi amader bhitti, shilpa amader bhabishyot* (agriculture is our base, industry our future) and *sanskritir rajdhanite boichhe shilpayaner hawa* (cultural capital now witnessing an industrial resurgence).<sup>63</sup>

### ***Opposition within the Party: Old vs. New***

These ideas came in direct conflict with some segments of the state and the left itself. Land acquisition plans by the CM and the Industries Minister was opposed collectively by all partners of the left front, such as CPI, the All India Forward Block, and the revolutionary socialist party. A.B. Bardhan, senior left front leader of CPI alleged a lack of transparency in land acquisition.<sup>64</sup> Agricultural Minister Naren Dey and

Land Reforms Minister Abdur Razzak Molla disapproved of these plans as well.<sup>65</sup> Molla, in hindsight, reflected that leaders who propounded these ideas were urban-based leaders with no understanding of either the rural milieu or on the ground realties.<sup>66</sup> The “old” welfare-oriented party leaders who were a significant part of the land redistribution program, such as Benoy Chowdhury, expressed profound disagreement with this ideational departure, calling CPIM a “government of contractors, by contractors and for contractors.”<sup>67</sup> In fact, Chowdhury’s proposed amendment of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act aimed at comprehensive land reforms was not picked up by CPIM at the state level, even when the central government had cleared it with minor amendments. The reason for this was noted by Debabrata Bandyopadhyay, who was at the administrative helm of the earlier phase of land reforms, “perhaps by that time the LF’s interest in land reforms had waned and it had started its courtship with industry to re-industrialise the state.”<sup>68</sup> Dominant ideas on the judiciousness of trickle-down economics persisted despite opposition from the old welfare-oriented party members. This is evident in the CM’s beliefs, contrary to such opposition,

Unfortunately, some of our friends in the Front fail to understand the situation. They don’t have that vision. They feel what we have achieved is enough. They fail to understand that we cannot stand on that alone—landlessness is on the rise, it is getting

difficult to get remunerative prices for agricultural produce because the cost of inputs in agriculture is increasing; in fact it is difficult to protect even the minimum support price. Therefore, *it is now time to move from one stage to another. We must move towards industry.*<sup>69</sup>

### ***Ideational Transformation:***

#### ***Impact on MGNREGS***

Clearly, an ideational conversion had occurred in the top leadership, from welfare to industrialization. Instead of ideas on growth and welfare progressing together, West Bengal witnessed a decline in welfare, while ideas favoring growth and trickle-down economics became dominant. Moreover, West Bengal lacked the convergence of ideas between the technocracy and the political will, which were essential ingredients for successful policy implementation, such as that achieved in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>70</sup> While some segments of the bureaucracy showed commitment to MGNREGS, it did not find any traction with the top leadership, which was convinced by trickle-down economics.

This can be ascertained from the fact that while the bureaucracy was guided and supported by political leadership during land reforms, there was an absence of similar guidance in the implementation of MGNREGS in West Bengal. MGNREGS was not the highest priority of the CM.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the administrative mobilization that occurred during the land reforms was missing in the implementation of

MGNREGS.<sup>72</sup> The implementation of MGNREGS lagged despite a minister being committed to rural development. In the absence of political will and an ideational shift away from rural welfare, other related departments, such as irrigation, horticulture, agriculture, and fisheries, hardly participated in the program. Representation of the “old” CPIM was also being eroded within the party. Our interviews reveal that the influence of Surjya Kanta Mishra as the minister for rural development had declined in the new millennium, which was evident in the poor implementation of MGNREGS.<sup>73</sup> After all, Mishra was the epitome of the old CPIM, which was committed to land reforms and the eradication of poverty in the 1970’s.<sup>74</sup> In 2011, on the eve of CPIM’s loss to the Trinamool Congress, he was taken off that portfolio.

Similar ideational shifts occurred within the bureaucracy, pointing toward a transition in the politics-bureaucracy interface. Two points emerged from our interviews with the former bureaucrats, corroborating this argument.<sup>75</sup> First, welfare-oriented bureaucrats did not find a facilitative environment to implement MGNREGS, despite their commitment. This was primarily because of the change in thinking within the party and the state (toward industrialization and growth). These interviews juxtaposed this trend with the earlier phase of land reforms, when state thinking was closely aligned with ideas about welfare. Hence, the bureaucracy was operating within the dominant ideational framework of the

state, which had moved from welfare toward trickle-down economics.

Secondly, the nature of bureaucracy itself underwent a change, along with the ideological shifts. Bureaucracy works on the basis of prestige, coherence, and merit. As hegemonic ideas within the state moved from redistributive to trickle-down economics, the prestige of welfare-oriented departments declined. Consequently, industry- and commerce-related postings proved more attractive. Interviews revealed that bureaucrats in the trickle-down economics ideational milieu started preferring industry- and commerce-related postings—this trend was contrary to the earlier phase, when welfare-related departments were desired. Preferences had clearly moved even with the bureaucracy.

### ***The Tipping Point: Nandigram and Singur***

Trickle-down economics reached a tipping point in 2007-2008 with the onset of peasant mobilization against the state in Nandigram and Singur and the way that the party handled land acquisitions from farmers without understanding the rural milieu.<sup>76</sup> A clear understanding of the rural milieu and leadership's direct knowledge of on the ground realities was key to earlier, successful land reforms. Why should Nandigram and Singur be treated as tipping point? First, the proposed industrial projects were the result of gradual and incremental progression of ideas on growth and trickle-down economics, which reached a certain threshold in

Nandigram and Singur. This ideational threshold was in disjunction with existing on the ground realities. Hence, the social unrest in Nandigram and Singur was not sudden, but rather a result of a gradual and cumulative ideational progression.

Secondly, ideas regarding trickle-down economics gradually attained hegemonic status within the state. When these ideas reached a threshold, the state pushed industrial projects with great fervor, often disregarding the advice of central party leaders with a redistributive bent and of the local level leadership. The manner in which the party dealt with these contrarian voices demonstrates that party ideology had irrevocably moved in the trickle-down direction. Senior leaders such as Madan Ghosh and Surjya Kanta Mishra, with substantial grassroots experience and driven by redistributive politics, were ignored. Likewise, top leadership did not take into account the advice of grassroots leadership who were of the opinion that Bardhaman—one of the most fertile areas in the state—would not be a good site for the industrial project. Instead, it was suggested that Bankura, which is a dry poverty-stricken region, not too far from Kolkata, would be ideal for industrial projects. This view did not gain much traction within the top leadership. The failure to accept such proposals points to the reign of trickle-down economics, replacing the old redistributive ethos.

This was evident in the CM's conviction regarding the transition from agriculture to industry (dis-

cussed above). Political will favoring trickle-down economics and industrialization led CPIM to ignore the issue of compensation and the loss of livelihoods for farmers due to the acquisition of land for industrial projects. The well entrenched system of decentralization and peasant assemblies that worked so well for land reforms were ignored. This view is corroborated by one of the senior leaders who held the finance portfolio (1977-1987) of CPIM, Ashok Mitra: “the promise to consult the people before taking crucial decisions was forgotten, *panchayat* bodies and *kisan sabhas* were sidelined, bureaucratic procedures took over.”<sup>77</sup> As a result, for the first time after 1977, the party lost the state elections in 2011.

CPIM moved away from its historical legacy of land redistribution to the poor farmers. By this time, so deep was the ideological conviction of the top leadership favoring trickle-down economics and industrialization that it completely ignored the issue of compensation and the loss of livelihood of farmers on account of land acquisition. This resulted in a peasant movement against CPIM.<sup>78</sup> The symptom of CPIM losing its rural hold was visible in the 2008 panchayat elections, when the party lost a majority of its seats.<sup>79</sup> This was followed by the complete routing of the party in the 2011 state elections. It is possible that the reason that Mishra, representing the “old” CPIM, was brought back as the leader of the opposition in West Bengal was because of the lessons learnt from Nandigram and Singur.

### **Lack of Political Will to Implement MGNREGS**

Clearly, West Bengal did not possess the prerequisite of a powerful political leadership charged with the implementation of MGNREGS. As political will declined at the top, the same local leadership that had worked so well for land redistribution worked against MGNREGS. The local leadership was fragmented and political motivations were driven by vested interests. CPIM cadres with land who needed labor to work in their fields opposed the program, as did construction companies. There was no social audit in West Bengal. Panchayats (village governments) did not bring substantial work under the program because the local leadership had declined in its commitment. In 2015, we found that in the Hirabandh block of the Bankura district collusion between the panchayats, the block development officer and the construction business was at the heart of flawed MGNREGS implementation.<sup>80</sup> Interviews with senior leaders in Bankura and local leaders in Hirabandh revealed that the panchayat leadership had declined over time. Fieldwork suggested that panchayats that had been deployed to implement land reforms with a committed leadership no longer possessed that virtue. Senior leaders of the party, like Benoy Chowdhary, who played an instrumental role in the land reforms, lamented that the “government is corrupt. After 18 years in power, we have fallen prey to corruption. I may be called mad for saying so, but this is the bitter truth.”<sup>81</sup>

Finally, the ideational decline from redistribution to trickle-down economics impacted MGNREGS implementation at four levels. First, as political will declined at the top, even the committed Rural Development Minister Surjya Kanta Mishra could not implement the program. Moreover, the influence of Mishra as Rural Development Minister declined in the new millennium. After all, Mishra was the epitome of the old CPIM, which was committed to land reforms and the eradication of poverty in the 1970s. In 2006, Mishra was taken off the rural development portfolio and replaced by Anisur Rahman, who was, by all measures, a political lightweight and who readily followed instructions from the top. As we discussed above, MGNREGS was not the highest priority of the CM.

Second, the bureaucracy was not sufficiently mobilized to implement MGNREGS. For instance, until July 2008, only a part-time commissioner was in charge of the program. The administrative mobilization that occurred during the land reform phase was largely missing in the implementation of MGNREGS.

Third, as political will favored trickle-down economics at the top, leadership at the local level displayed a similar bent. As a result, the same local leadership that had mobilized for land redistribution worked against MGNREGS. The local leadership was fragmented, and powerful vested interests opposed the reforms process. Contractors, party-backed real estate promoters, and businessmen had entered the

party organization, establishing close connections with party leaders.<sup>82</sup> The enemies of MGNREGS were omnipresent. The same “virtuous” combination that had worked well for redistributive politics now became “exploitative” in the absence of political will.

Fourth, the lack of political will resulted in the lack of interdepartmental synergy—a vital factor in the success of MGNREGS in Andhra Pradesh. Consequently, the CM was not able to ensure the full participation of his cabinet in program implementation. This resulted in a lack of support from and participation of related departments, such as irrigation, forestry, horticulture, agriculture, and fisheries.

Clearly, ideational change within the top leadership made a substantial impact on the techno-bureaucratic elite. The dominance of the idea of redistributive welfare within the state in West Bengal was replaced with the idea of trickle-down economics as a means of improving the human condition. The result: implementation of MGNREGS in CPIM-ruled West Bengal between 2006-2011 was lackluster and fragmented. The state had clearly moved from the redistributive conviction that dominated its thinking since 1977 (evident in its successful land reforms and decentralization) to a trickle-down economics ideology. The state was convinced that industrialization and growth would trickle down to the poor; thus, it implemented MGNREGS hesitatingly and expended substantially more energy on acquiring land for industry for profit.

## Conclusion

Land reforms in West Bengal and the implementation of the MGNREGS under CPIM rule are classic comparable cases in comparative politics.<sup>83</sup> In both cases, the same party was in power governing the same geography. CPIM had been hailed as a pro-worker and small peasant party in the literature on land reforms in India. Why did the party fail to deliver on the employment guarantee scheme, which could have increased the tenure of the party in no uncertain terms? CPIM had been rightly hailed as a pro-worker and pro-landless laborer party in the literature in comparative politics.

The success of land reforms and the failure to implement the right to work within the same state (West Bengal) are puzzling. The geography and the party in power remained the same. What changed? We argue that what changed over time was the ideological position of CPIM from being truly pro-peasant to increasingly buying into trickle-down economics. When the state bought into the ideology of trickle-down economics, it could not successfully acquire land for industrialization in places like Nandigram and Singur. As ideas regarding trickle-down economics peaked and reached a tipping point in 2008, ideas on welfare simultaneously declined to its nadir. We show that the ideas regarding trickle-down economics reached a tipping point in two layers (See Table 1). In the first layer, we find a gradual transition within the party toward industrialization and a growth-oriented model.

The top leadership was becoming convinced about the benefits of pursuing such policies, resulting in small-scale policy adjustments. This shift stood in contrast to earlier ideas about building a rural base and welfare. In the second layer, these ideas are consolidated within the state's thinking. CM and his close team pursued trickle-down economics more vigorously. Key departments, such as rural development and land reforms, which could have played a vital role in the MGNREGS implementation, were demoted in significance and on the policy priority list. Urban-based leaders gained importance within the party, which created unfavorable conditions for MGNREGS. Clearly, rural welfare was not the top priority of the state. This occurred while states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were able to deal with this issue far more effectively. A more redistributive ideology pervading the state would have been able to deal with these issues with greater ease. The contrast with Andhra Pradesh drives home the point that redistributive politics could work, even in an era of neoliberal reforms, although it did not succeed in communist-ruled West Bengal.

CPIM could neither acquire land nor could it implement the very right (to work) at the state level for which it fought at the Centre. The ideology of trickle-down economics had taken over the ideology of redistributive politics. The redistributive conviction of an earlier phase had now been replaced with trickle-down economics at a certain tipping point. The trickle-down model placed much greater emphasis

**Table 1:** ‘Trickle Down’ reaches a tipping point through layering

<p><b>Layer 1 1985-2000 Moderate trickle down</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Polarity of ideas manifesting in opposing economic reforms in the center, while pursuing modest reforms at the state level</li><li>• Small-scale policy adjustments to engage private capital for public-private partnerships. For example, the Haldia petrochemical plant, a partnership between Webel Electronics and the National Insulated Cable Company of India</li><li>• Foreign tours to attract foreign capital</li><li>• Industrial Policy 1994: a departure from the earlier focus on building the rural base and welfare</li><li>• WBIDC was empowered to promote industry</li><li>• Old vanguard close to policy paradigm on rural welfare was ignored</li></ul>
<p><b>Layer 2 2000-2011</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Earlier ideas regarding trickle down economics consolidated within the state thinking with change in leadership, with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as the CM</li><li>• Urban-based leaders assumed importance in the party; rural-based leaders receded into the background</li><li>• Top leadership advocated unequivocal support for trickle-down economics</li><li>• Opposition to trickle-down economics within the party was ignored, leading to the resignation of old party members. The Department of Rural Development and Land Reforms prioritized growth and trickle-down economics</li><li>• Trickle-down economics reached a tipping point with Nandigram and Singur in 2007-2008. Land was acquired with no understanding of and a lack of regard for the rural milieu and on the ground realities</li><li>• Rural and welfare considerations receded into the background. MGNREGS implementation was not the policy priority, despite a committed Rural Development Minister and Secretary</li></ul>

Source: Authors

on helping capital rather than labor, on the assumption that growth will trickle down to the poor. States such as Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, on the other hand, took a different ideational position. These states had moved with the view that growth is necessary for redistribution but it does not necessarily trickle down. This ideational universe created circumstances for growth and redistribution—a possibility seemed impossible in West Bengal toward the end of CPIM rule.

This paper highlights the importance of the power of dominant ideas within the state that cannot be reduced to class analysis alone. After all, it was not mere rhetoric that Manmohan Singh quoted Dante in the budget speech of 1991—suggesting that ideas have power and the time for one idea

(globalization) had arrived.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, the time for redistribution had arrived in many parts of globalizing India—when a pioneer in land reforms in India, West Bengal, simply failed to implement the right to work. This occurred even though the party had lobbied hard for it in the central government. When trickle-down politics replaced redistributive politics, neither could the state in West Bengal acquire land for industrialization, nor could it implement the right to work with the same spirit with which it had carried out land reforms. We find that when policy ideas legislated in the Parliament are not backed by political power at the state level they cannot be suitably implemented. We hold that substantial gain and loss in state capacity depends on how different ideas empower different policy paradigms.

## Notes

- 1 Deepankar Basu, “The Left and the 15th Lok Sabha elections,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 44, no. 22 (2009): 10–15.
- 2 Neelakshi Mann and Varad Pande, *MGNREGA Sameeksha: An Anthology of Research Studies on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2012), 19.
- 3 The Congress Party is traditionally known for favouring the upper and landed classes, in contrast to CPIM. Despite this reputation, Congress-ruled Andhra Pradesh implemented the right to work scheme substantially more successfully than CPIM-ruled West Bengal. Andhra Pradesh’s case shows that a non-cadre-based moderate party, when motivated by a certain ideology, can successfully implement the right to work. Significantly, the party successfully dealt with powerful actors ranged against the program.
- 4 Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: THE Politics of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Atul Kohli, *Poverty amid Plenty in the New India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

- 5 CPIM exerted pressure on the Congress from both within and outside the coalition to implement CMP. According to the party's own sources, it was able to extract the government's commitment to enact NREGA. See "CPI (M) to Pressure Government on CMP Implementation," *The Hindu*, June 7, 2004.
  - 6 For example, the proposal to move away from 100 days' employment to one adult in every rural household to target those below poverty line was opposed by CPIM. See "Polit Bureau Communiqué" (December 18, 2004), <https://www.cpim.org/content/polit-bureau-communique-8>.
  - 7 See CPIM Central Committee Communiqué (October 1, 2007), <https://www.cpim.org/content/central-committee-communiqu%C3%A9-6>.
  - 8 Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).
  - 9 Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in *The Handbook of Political Science*, ed. by E.I. Greenstein (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 79–138.
  - 10 The cropping intensity in West Bengal grew by a meager 2.44% between 1995-1996 and 2001-2002. See Bidyut Kumar Ghosh, "Growth and Variability in the Production of Crops in West Bengal Agriculture," *Trends in Agricultural Economics* 3, no. 3 (2010): 135–146.
  - 11 Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya, *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
  - 12 Suman Nath, "Cultural Misrecognition and the Sustenance of Trinamool Congress in West Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 53, no. 28 (2018): 92–99.
  - 13 Subhasish Ray, "How Hegemonic Parties Decline: Theory and Evidence from West Bengal," *Economic & Political Weekly* 52, no. 17 (2017): 27–32.
  - 14 See Rahul Mukherji, *Globalization and Deregulation: Ideas, Interests and Institutional Change in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Himanshu Jha, "State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change: The Case of the Right to Information Act in India," *Pacific Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2018): 309–328; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917; Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Explaining institutional change: ambiguity, agency, and power*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
  - 15 Mukherji, *Globalization and Deregulation*.
  - 16 Jha, "State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change."
  - 17 See Rahul Mukherji, "Interests, Wireless Technology, and Institutional Change: From Government Monopoly to Regulated Competition in Indian Telecommunications," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 2 (2009): 491–517; Kathleen Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve: the Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004).
- For similar accounts of layering also see, E. Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2001); Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—And Turned its Back on the Middle Class* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster 2010); Jeffrey Henig, "Education Policy from 1980 to the Present: The Politics of Privatization,"

in *Conservatism and American Political Development*, ed. by B. Glenn and S. Teles (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008): 291–323.

- 18 Jha, “State Processes, Ideas, and Institutional Change.”
- 19 This is different from Andhra Pradesh, which shows an incremental move toward both redistribution and growth.
- 20 Niheer Dasandi and Marc Esteve, “The Politics–Bureaucracy Interface in Developing Countries,” *Public Administration and Development* 37, no. 4 (2017): 231–245.
- 21 Ritanjan Das, *Neoliberalism and the Transforming Left in India: A contradictory manifesto* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 98.
- 22 Das, *Neoliberalism and the Transforming Left*, 98.
- 23 *Government of West Bengal Budget Speech*, Financial Year 1991-1992. See Das, 97.
- 24 Das, *Neoliberalism and the Transforming Left*, 97.
- 25 See Kenneth Bo Nielsen, *Land Dispossession and Everyday Politics in Rural Eastern India* (United Kingdom: Anthem Press, 2018), 23; Rina Agarwala, *Informal Labor, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 133.
- 26 See, CPIM 19th West Bengal State Congress, 1998, as quoted in Das, 132.
- 27 Sumanta Sen, “Jyoti Basu to visit US, UK to get funds for industrial development in West Bengal,” *India Today*, June 31, 1984.
- 28 West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, March 25, 1992. See Das, 101.
- 29 For instance, Jyoti Basu, the new deputy CM and state Home Minister in the United Front government of 1967 directed the police to not intervene in the peasant movement against the landlords.
- 30 Das, 102.
- 31 See Das, 101.
- 32 Speech by the State Labour Minister (K.P. Ghosh), Government of West Bengal, while inaugurating the “Training Programme on promotion of Self-Employment” at the Administrative Training Institute, Bidhan Nagar, Calcutta (March 15, 1982), [https://archive.org/stream/inernet.dli.2015.101076/2015.101076.West-Bengal-Vol23-29-No-2-16july-aug1980\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/inernet.dli.2015.101076/2015.101076.West-Bengal-Vol23-29-No-2-16july-aug1980_djvu.txt)
- 33 Speech by the State Labour Minister (K.P. Ghosh)
- 34 Ashok Mitra on Nandigram. *MR Online*. This is a reprint of an article that appeared in Anandabazar Patrika on November 14, 2007 (accessed May 20, 2019), <https://mronline.org/2007/11/20/ashok-mitra-on-nandigram/>
- 35 Mitra, *MR Online*.
- 36 This aspect came up repeatedly during our interviews in August 2018 with old party leaders like Surjya Kant Mishra, Madan Ghosh, and Abdur Razzak Molla.
- 37 Indeed, during Operation Barga, the party organized reorientation camps to sensitize the bureaucracy and local leadership regarding the issues of the poor. In these camps, thirty to forty sharecroppers, along with officers from land and other related departments, met together in

a rural setting to discuss rural issues related to land and poverty. The main objective of the camps was to give the rural poor a chance to provide their own perceptions of and solutions to their situation. See D. Bandyopadhyay, “Land Reforms in India: An Analysis,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 25/26 (1986): A50–A56.

- 38 Author’s interview with Abdur Razzak Molla, Kolkata, August 31, 2018.
- 39 “Senior CPIM leaders quit Party,” *The Hindu* (July 27, 2014).
- 40 Abdur Razzak Molla, as quoted in Das, 140–141.
- 41 Communist Party of India-Marxist “Thirty Years of West Bengal Left Front Government,” (2007), <https://www.cpim.org/content/thirty-years-west-bengal-left-front-govt>.
- 42 “Policy Statement on Industrial Development 1994,” *Government of West Bengal*, 7–8.
- 43 See 15th Party Congress of CPIM, 1995, in Das, 103.
- 44 Jürgen Dige Pedersen, “India’s Industrial Dilemma in West Bengal,” *Asian Survey* 41, no. 4 (2001): 658
- 45 “Somnath Chatterjee holds the key to West Bengal’s Industrial Revival,” *Sunday* 22 (January 28, 1995).
- 46 Aseema Sinha, “Ideas, Interests and Institutions in Policy Change: A Comparison of West Bengal and Gujarat,” in *Comparing Politics Across India’s States: Case Studies of Democracy in Practice*, ed. by Rob Jenkins, 20 (forthcoming).
- 47 As quoted in Sinha, “Ideas, Interests and Institutions,” 22.
- 48 Ritanjan Das and Zaad Mahmood, “Contradictions, Negotiations and Reform: The Story of Left Policy Transition in West Bengal,” *Journal of South Asian Development* 10 no. 2 (2015): 199–229. Excerpt from Introduction to Nirupam Sen, *Bikalper Sandhane*, Kolkata NBA, 2008 (in Bengali).
- 49 “Industrial Policy of West Bengal 1978 Government of West Bengal,” *Social Scientist* 6, nos. 6/7. Also see Pedersen, “India’s Industrial Dilemma.”
- 50 “Thirty Years of West Bengal Left Front Government, CPI (M)” (accessed July 4, 2019), <https://www.cpim.org/content/thirty-years-west-bengal-left-front-govt>.
- 51 Deepita Chakravarty and Indranil Bose, “Industrializing West Bengal: The Case of Institutional Sickness,” Working Paper No. 83, *Centre for Economic and Social Studies* (2010).
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Apart from Naren Dey and Razzak Molla, some old party members, such as Shyamlal Chakraborty and Chittabarta Majumdar of CITU and state committee members Benoy Kumar and Kali Ghosh, disagreed with these ideas. See Das, 252.
- 66 Interview with Abdur Razzak Molla, Kolkata, India, August 31, 2018.
- 67 Arup Kumar Sen, "Life and Times of a Good Communist," *Mainstream Weekly* LIII, no. 40 (2015).
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- 70 Such convergence worked well in Andhra Pradesh, which successfully implemented MGN-REGS. For such arguments, see Mukherji & Jha, "Bureaucratic Rationality"; Mukherji, Zarhani & Raju, "State Capacity and Welfare Politics."
- 71 Author's interview with a retired Secretary of Rural Development, July and December 2015.
- 72 Author's interview with a retired Secretary of Rural Development.
- 73 Author's interview with senior and retired bureaucrats, Kolkata, July and December 2015.
- 74 In the late 1970s, Surjya Kanta Mishra and Jamshed Ali launched an effective onslaught against the landlord class in the West Midnapore district. Jamshed Ali lost his life during that time fighting for the cause. Author's interview with Surjya Kanta Mishra, Kolkata, July 2015.
- 75 Interviews with senior and retired bureaucrats, Kolkata, July and December 2015.

- 76 In 2007, CPIM acquired farmland in Nandigram to set up a chemical hub without appropriate consent. There were widespread protests by farmers regarding land acquisition. A similar protest began in 2008 in Singur against the land acquisition for a manufacturing plant for Tata Motors.
- 77 Ashok Mitra, "With No Apologies - What the Left Front did Wrong in West Bengal," *The Telegraph* (May 20, 2011), [https://www.telegraphindia.com/1110520/jsp/opinion/story\\_13997495.jsp](https://www.telegraphindia.com/1110520/jsp/opinion/story_13997495.jsp)
- 78 In 2007, CPIM acquired farmland in Nandigram to set up a chemical hub to garner investments in the state without taking them into confidence. There were widespread protests by the farmers regarding the land acquisition for the Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Fourteen people were killed by police, who were attempting to control the protestors. Similar protest started in Singur in 2008 against the land acquisition to set up a manufacturing plant for Tata Motors. Both Nandigram and Singur were rallying points for the Trinamool Congress in the attempt to start a political movement against CPIM.
- 79 Partha N. Mukherji and Bhola Nath Ghosh, "Democratic Decentralism, Party Hegemony, and Decentralisation in West Bengal," *Sociological Bulletin* 59, no. 2 (2010): 199–215.
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- 81 Ruben Banerjee, "Left Front Government in West Bengal is Corrupt: Benoy Chowdhury," *India Today* (January 15, 1996), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiасope/story/19960115-left-front-government-of-west-bengal-is-corrupt-benoy-chowdhury-833354-1996-01-15>.
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- 83 On the Mills method of difference, see Arend Lijphart, "Comparative politics and the comparative method," *American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 682–693; King, Keohane and Verba, *Designing Social Enquiry*.
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