

Hegemony: Explorations into Consensus, Coercion and Culture

**A workshop at the University of Wollongong
14 &15 Feb 2005**

Panel 6

Neo-liberalism as Hegemony: the national effects

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**Neoliberalism as Hegemonic in Asia:
The Case of West Bengal, India**

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Introduction

The intensification of globalisation has marked the ascendancy of neo-liberal paradigms in development thinking. Its impact in the Asia-Pacific region has brought about significant social and cultural change. Over the last decade developing countries such as India have pursued policies of economic liberalization. The unswerving faith in liberalization policies as the solution to the overall improvement of the standard of living of the population underpins the state's rationale for forging ahead with the economic reforms. The middle class is said to have expanded greatly and benefited from the structural adjustment reforms to the economy and industry. Based on fieldwork among lower middle class households in the Indian state of West Bengal, this paper examines the concrete experiences of those affected by these policies. In particular we examine the ways in which the reforms have made inroads into the lives of people who were ardent supporters of a different way of thinking.

According to a number of authors neo liberal approaches have become the new orthodoxy in development (Brohman, 1995; Portes, 1997; Gosovic, 2000). The resurrection and hegemony of market driven approaches identify state intervention as inefficient and counterproductive and thereby call for developing countries to privatise state owned enterprises, adopt a range of stabilisation measures to address balance of payment crises, and limit public expenditure. The deleterious effects of these policies on Asia's poor (Scrase, Holden and Baum, 2003) and the positive consequences for the 'new rich' (Robison and Goodman, 1996) are evident. However, beyond these dichotomous analyses the ways in which local communities, classes and specific cultural groups confront, challenge or acquiesce to the shifts in a non-interventionist approach of the Indian national, and West Bengal state government in economic and social policy, remains relatively unexplored. In the Indian context, the competing narratives of the supporters of the reforms (Bhagavati, 1993, Ahluwalia and Little, 1998) and their critics (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Chandrashekar and Ghosh, 2002; Chakrabarti and Cullenberg, 2003) of the reforms conveniently ignore the varied experiences of those who do not fit neatly into the extremes of the social spectrum. By contrast our research¹ explores the complexities and contradictions of a segment within the middle classes who remain both supporters of the New Economic Policies yet skeptical of their benefits. The influences of the changing nature of policy orientation in West Bengal are crucial to understanding the responses of people in this study. Whilst remaining critical of liberalisation, many of our informants espouse the government rhetoric of work place restructuring and global competitiveness. By presenting an analysis of the underlying reasons for employees to reproduce the government ideologies of work efficiency, this paper draws attention to the ways in which their discursive understanding is formulated and mediated.

¹ This paper is an outcome of a long-term research project on the social consequences of globalisation and economic liberalization in India. It was funded by an Australian Research Council small grant and a visiting fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies, University of Amsterdam and University of Leiden. A University of Wollongong Strategic Development Research grant further supported this research. We are grateful to our informants for their generous participation in this project. Finally we would like to thank graduate research assistants Gillian Vogl and Karen Linton.

Discourses of Global Efficiency and the Dynamics of New Workplace Culture

We begin by considering some of the critical scholarship on the role of neo-liberal ideologies in shaping the subjectivities of workers that provide an useful backdrop to understanding the responses of people in this study. How is it that some workers reproduced ideologies of work efficiency, often, in the face of, and in conjunction with, the countervailing life-long thinking and practices? We found that the notions of efficiency, privatisation and deregulation were rapidly gaining currency as the central motifs of the everyday workplace language and practice. However, this phenomenon did not appear automatically, it certainly had help, from both governments and international inter-governmental bodies such as the IMF and World Bank, whose views are relentlessly propagated in the generally pro-liberalisation media. From these influences, the discourses of “efficiency” have developed a lifeforce of their own in that they have become significant in developing new understandings of how individuals should govern themselves.

Harvey (1990) among others suggests that the promotion of the work ethic, the nobility of efficiency and productivity, and so on have been made possible through both persuasive socialisation and coercive maintenance. In this view the State takes a pro-active role in social production. The inculcation of the population with particular ideologies of the workplace are seen in terms of a power bloc formed between the owners of capital and the political class. The fundamental principle involved in the dissemination of capitalist logics, such as the deployment of ideals of “efficiency” and “flexibility”, and so on, is the security and maintenance of the economic system. However this was not merely a case of imposition of these ideologies, but the articulation of a common value system through the incorporation of ideological elements from other groups (Mouffe 1981:230). While the dominant class may incorporate elements from other groups, they do this in a way that still maintains their dominance. Through this hegemony they are able to legitimise certain ideologies.

The most spectacular example of a hegemonic project in the form of state activism in promoting capitalist relations of production and the construction of the appropriate workforce can be found in Stuart Hall’s (1988) analysis of the Thatcherite project. According to him the discursive articulation of common objectives embodied in this program was purely aimed at disciplining people for capitalist market solutions, paradoxically with their “consent” – the strategy of connection with ordinary people. Despite being a highly contradictory approach, it was nevertheless able to construct ‘unity out of difference’ (1988: 166). “Common-sense” was remade, wherein the terminology of the market was “normalised” in combination with the disciplinary themes of order, family values and respectability – a package that formed the everyday conception of what constituted the ‘national identity’. From the point of view of naturalising workplace discourses of efficiency this neo-liberal hegemonic project constructed a popular morality. This was the development of a ‘practical material-ideological force’ that has a language, which maps out social reality clearly and unambiguously (1988: 143). Highlighting the inherent morality of efficiency and flexibility the message for workers was suffused with their common issues and problems. The wisdom of the nation was entwined in notions of efficiency in the workplace; to reject this would be amoral. Many of our informants deployed similar moral discourses of hard work in the service of the nation, that have resonances with earlier narratives of anti-colonial nationalism.

According to Branislav Gosovic (2000: 447, 448), a type of global intellectual hegemony (GIH) has become one of the major characteristics of neo-liberal globalisation of the 1990’s. This hegemony is perpetuated through the frequent use of particular terminology and clichés that legitimise this paradigm, imbuing it with positive qualities. In the language of GIH, neo liberal globalisation is packaged as new, modern, scientific, results orientated and inevitable.

Any questioning of this paradigm is dismissed as old fashioned. Public institutions are represented negatively and as inefficient in contrast to private institutions (Gosovic 2000:450, 453). He adds further (2000: 452) that individuals, particularly those who are in the service of governments, may have their own reasons for not speaking out against neo liberalism, including their desire to keep their job and obtain promotions. Bourdieu (1998) discusses the insecurities that have become normative under the paradigm of globalisation as playing a significant role in the institutionalisation, and thus the adoption of particular market discourses into the language and actions of workers. The growing unemployment and casualisation of the workforce has shaped the actions and responses of many workers, breaking down any form of resistance, and more often than not, setting worker against worker. In light of these market articulations, and indeed out of fear, workers strive to become **the most** efficient, flexible and productive worker in an organisation. These forces affect everyone whether employed or not, 'the awareness of it never goes away: it is present at every moment in everyone's mind (1998: 82). People living under globalisation constantly feel that they are replaceable; as a result there is a definite sense that people come to regard work as a privilege, 'a fragile threatened privilege' (Bourdieu, 1998: 82), and, most certainly not a right.

Fear of retrenchment was certainly ever present among some of our respondents. However, what struck me most was the growing prominence of a political rationality that is geared towards delivering an increased call for personal responsibility. Here the strategy of replacing old-fashioned regulatory techniques with techniques of self-regulation conceived by Foucauldian scholars² may be relevant. Moreover, as Beck (2001) suggests, the ideal individual worker will take responsibility for their part in the creation of an efficient and responsible enterprise. The "price" of individuality means taking personal responsibility for any failure or misfortune. The benefit being that individuals can now feel a sense of control in that they are 'not passive reflections of circumstances but active shapers of their own lives, within varying degrees of limitation' (Beck, 2001: 167)

These competing perspectives offer some insights into the reasons for our respondents espousing the rhetoric of efficiency. However, the most salient feature of their acquiescence is the technocratic solutions that underpin market discourses. Technocratic solutions have a degree of appeal among our respondents due to their familiarity with the modernising discourses of rational planning characteristic of developmentalism in post-colonial states, regardless of political ideologies. Therefore the Left Front's pragmatic embrace of market solutions, which are now being reconfigured as 'rational' progress towards better developmental outcomes, appears to our respondents, as being part of a continuum, not a radical departure.

Globalization, Liberalization and New Economic Policies: The Indian Case

Throughout the 1990's the International Monetary Fund (IMF) derived structural adjustment programs were implemented in India. In July 1991 the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated. West Bengal developed its own NEP in 1994. In a dramatic reversal of protecting domestic industrial capital, the current economic reforms aim at liberalizing the economy

² Neo liberalism had led to a model of rational economic action which functions to legitimise and reduce governmental regulation. The government itself becomes a sort of enterprise whose position is to universalise competition and create market shaped systems of action. Neo-liberalism does not locate the rational principle for regulating and diminishing the interference of government in a natural freedom. It instead places it in the context of an artificially arranged liberty that is with the economic rational individual in the form of entrepreneurial and competitive behaviour (Lenke 2001:200).

from various bureaucratic regulations and controls that are said to have stifled growth³. Making the economy more efficient through increased market orientation is the major goal of the reforms. The central strategy is to secure a greater share of the global market in industry, trade and services through increased productivity. This is in marked contrast to the post independence developmental strategy of self-reliant economic growth and the rhetoric of 'socialism'. Under the earlier five year plans the government played an interventionist role in industrialization through the public sector, which assumed the 'commanding heights' through licensing and regulatory mechanisms. The new market oriented state ideology and economic reforms are confusing to many people. This was particularly the case in West Bengal, which has been ruled by a coalition of left political parties since 1977, dominated by the Communist Party of India, CPI (M). Initially opposed to market reforms in its rhetoric, the Left-Front government has now become vociferous in its attempt to attract foreign transnational corporations into the state. The Left Front's position is central to our analytical concerns.

The pro and anti-liberalisation narratives can co-exist in India because coalitions of advocates have been built by the sequencing and timing the reforms in such a way that acceptable reforms have been instituted quickly, while difficult elements have been instituted in a piecemeal fashion, so that resistance has been minimised (Jenkins, 1999). One of the ways that this has been achieved is through the particular nature of Indian federalism, where state governments have had to be supportive of the reforms (Saez, 2002) as the 'second generation' reforms have shifted the burden for attracting investment to the states (Pedersen, 2000). The Left Front has faced enormous difficulties in reconciling its electoral loyalties, ideology and the perceived necessities in an era of liberalisation. The growing schism between its ideological predilections and the reality of its economic problems has resulted in two different criticisms. Those favouring the continuity of state intervention assert that the indiscriminate entry of imports leads to deindustrialisation and the loss of agricultural markets. They argue that the opening up of areas of national interest to competition cripples much of the progress that has been achieved in the rural areas. Others critics such as Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003, 235-244) argue that the defence of the pre-reform Indian economy - particularly state enterprises in the name of self-sufficiency and freedom from foreign interference - is indefensible from a Marxist perspective and dismiss the position of state enterprisers as the political space of effecting change to "socialism." However, such an abstract and sterile debate between the advocates of 'market socialism'⁴ and 'correct' Marxist analysis misses the very important point of what aspects of state intervention in development might mean to people as a vehicle for achieving equality and social justice. The deleterious effects of liberalisation policies notwithstanding, anthropologists show the importance of nuanced responses to policies at the local level (Winslow, 1995; Hackenberg, 1999). More significantly, as Hann (2000; 2002) has demonstrated in his ethnographic accounts of transitional economies, it is equally important to examine the meaning socialist ideologies have for the aspirations of ordinary people, the significance of its emancipatory rhetoric and practical benefits. Suffice to say that for many people in West Bengal the CPI (M) has been a symbol of some remarkable transformations and catalysts for others (Lieten, 1996). These conflicting approaches to planned development are reflected in the narratives of our informants.

³ For a detailed discussions see *Social Dimension of Structural Adjustment in India*, 1991.

⁴ See Frankel, 1997.

Significance of Analyzing the Lower Middle Classes

We are concerned with studying this class fraction for a number of reasons. Firstly, this group is of particular significance given the elasticity of the category 'middle class' found in many accounts. In India over the past decade much has been said about the growth of the middle class as a consequence of the globalization of the economy (Deshpande 1998; Kulkarni 1993; Lakha 1999). As noted above the state's rationale for forging ahead with the economic reforms is an outcome of the policy shift towards neo-liberalism on a global scale. On the one hand, neo liberal states are more concerned with raising national incomes by enhancing the wealth of the well-off than by uplifting needs of the poor. On the other, at the level of social science theory there is a great deal of interest in the life styles of the 'new middle class' on the basis of consumption as the new definer of group identity (see Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995). Yet, as Murdock has argued the theoretical shift to questions centered around identity, consumption and difference 'has coincided almost exactly with the neo-liberal revolution in economic and social policy' and cautions that to ignore the specificities of class is tantamount to colluding with the 'marketers' deceitful celebration of an undifferentiated expansion in choice and opportunity' (Murdock 2000: 8). Elsewhere we have demonstrated that a homogenous Indian middle class as being the undoubted beneficiaries of New Economic Policies is untenable (Ganguly-Scrase 2000; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 1999, 2001). Their responses to globalisation of the Indian economy are contradictory: while they welcome aspects of cultural globalism embodied in the media they remain highly critical of the uninterrupted entry of foreign capital (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003). Secondly, it is important to bear in mind the problems of combining the lower and upper levels of the middle classes in Asia. Ideological and policy shifts in development to the open support for structural adjustment have resulted in the differentiation of the middles classes in India (Deshpande 1998). Thirdly, while the lower middle classes in Western Europe and North America are increasingly becoming proletarianised, even lower levels of these strata in contemporary Asia may regard themselves very differently. Therefore these groups should be regarded as class fractions rather than a single unified class (Sen and Stivens 1998: 15).

Socio-Economic Background

We are concerned with studying a class fraction - that is, the lower middle-class. For the purposes of our study, we have defined the lower middle class in Bengal in terms of both a particular economic bracket and a cultural milieu. Their mean household income is just under Rs10,000 per month⁵. In terms of culture, this group forms part of the Bengali *bhadralok*. The term is multivalent but means most of all 'respectable people'. The *bhadralok* were distinguished by their refined behavior and cultivated taste, but not necessarily substantial wealth and power. They emerged as a new social group in the late 18th century in Bengal and were the first to gain entry into urban professional occupations. Although originally linked to upper castes in contemporary Bengali society, they are a distinct status group (in the Weberian sense), which is neither coterminous with caste nor class (Mukherjee, 1975). Changed from their original position for two centuries as a reasonably well-off, educated and highly cultured status group, the *bhadralok* are now a heterogeneous group and often indigent. They still seek education above all for their children and attempt to maintain a veneer of their once high social status by engaging in writing, music and the arts, but the economic reality of the present has meant that the penchant for cultural pursuit, their traditional status symbols, are disappearing. Conspicuous consumption has increasingly

⁵ The approximate exchange rate at the time of fieldwork was Indian Rupees (Rs) 40.00 = US\$1.00. Thus, their monthly household income ranges from US\$50-200.

become an important determinant of status (see Scrase 1993). It is important to note that the downward mobility of the *bhadralok* began several decades ago following the partition of Bengal and prior to current globalization.

The self-ascription of informants was often couched in terms of being lower middle class. Indeed, their use of the Bengali term *nimno moddhobitto* (lower middle class) suggested the same classification. Presenting a striking contrast to the real poor, other terms used were ‘ordinary folk’, or ‘common folk’, ‘people of limited means’ or simply ‘those dependent on a salary’. The image of a regular salary earner is a powerful one in Bengali culture, which both suggests a distinction from menial wage work as well as earnings from trading. However, it also disguises the real incomes of those civil servants who supplement their total household income by taking bribes. During our fieldwork no one claimed that they were poor, despite their lack of material wealth. On the contrary, there were attempts to distance themselves from the poor in subtle ways.

The group we studied was largely white-collar, salaried persons. Our respondents consisted of clerks, lower professionals and administrators, sales and service personnel. However, sociological attempts to operationalize class derived from occupational categories and income only partially explain the position our informants. As suggested earlier that these groups are best understood as class fractions. Suffice to say that neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist accounts shed some light on the social location of a marginal middle class consisting of non-manual wage earners and low-grade technicians.⁶ The narratives of our informants explored in this paper are derived from participant observation and in-depth interviews with low-ranking salaried workers and their families in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and in Siliguri in North Bengal.⁷ Fieldwork was conducted over a four-year period (1998-2002). Utilizing a snowballing method a total 120 people were interviewed (60 in each city) and there were several key informants who we have regularly re-interviewed.

Findings

Mutually suspicious views existed among public and private sector employees. Public sector workers equated the private sector with insecurity and exploitation while some within the formal private sector assumed that their counterparts within the public sector lacked work discipline. Such perceptions were rarely grounded in experience or knowledge of the other

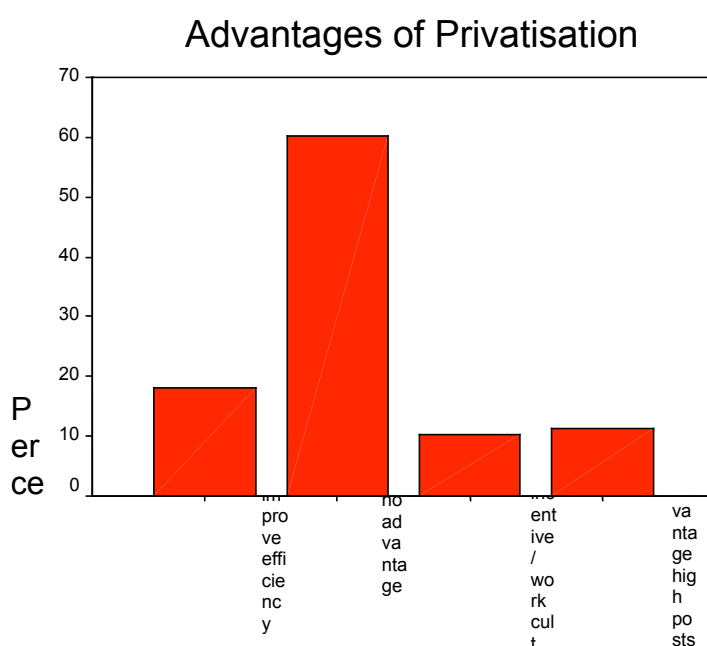
⁶ In neo-Weberian terms, following the sevenfold (seven scales) stratification model developed by British sociologists Goldthorpe and Hope (1974), this group forms part of Class II (lower professionals; technicians; lower administrators; small business managers; supervisors of non-manual workers) and Class III (clerks; sales personnel) – in their terms, the ‘lower white collar classes’. In neo-Marxist terms, following the work of Erik Olin Wright and his colleagues, they may be seen to be in a contradictory class location, – semi-autonomous, professional employees laying somewhere between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie (Wright 1985; Wright et. al 1989). We utilize these categories to specify the occupational characteristics of our respondents in terms of their market capacity and thereby show their location within the modern economy. Ultimately however, we do not claim that any of these definitions are completely adequate in analyzing class relations in Bengal. It has been argued that in West Bengal ‘... class stratification is imbedded to a great extent within the hierarchy of castes’ (Sinha and Bhattacharya 1969: 56). More significantly, a complex interlinkage of economic position, status and caste relations and the dynamics of political power shape the formation of social classes in West Bengal. For accounts of class formation based on detailed household statistical data, participant observation and case studies, see Chatterjee (1979: 1-31) and Bardhan (1982: 73-94).

⁷ On the whole, most studies highlight a range of macro political-economic transformations taking place in India (see Bhattacharya 1999; Nagaraj 1997; Oshikawa 1999; Pedersen 2000; Corbridge and Harriss, 2000; Chandrashekhara and Ghosh, 2002). With few exceptions (Lakha 1999; Van Wessel 1998) there is a paucity of ethnographic research on the social consequences of changing economic relations.

side. While some respondents' views working within the private sector were largely shaped by media discourses, the public sector workers' critiques were by and large centred on the practices of small firms that lack the protection of government employment. Beyond these extremes were a number of differing positions: the generational divide, public sector workers' own assertions of the need to be more efficient and the critical consciousness of highly politicised workers. The latter's world views were informed by class analysis and subsequently present us a critique of the ethos of market citizenship which asserts that a broader recognition of the disadvantages stemming from privatisation and deregulation-disadvantages not just to self, but others will also suffer. These conflicting sentiments are explored below.

Privatisation

The tables below demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of respondents disputed privatisation could bring many benefits to people in West Bengal.



* N-120

Disadvantages of Privatisation (n=77)

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less govt jobs = higher unemployment	13	16.9	16.9
	informal sector = lower pay/less training	12	15.6	32.5
	no disadvantages	6	7.8	40.3
	lack job security/entitlements	46	59.7	100.0
Total		77	100.00	

This is directly related to their attitudes towards the nature of the private sector. Quite a few people (17%) argued that privatisation would lead to job losses and contribute to growing unemployment. There is a further recognition that the advantages of privatisation of a state enterprise are confined to those in managerial, professional and high tech positions.

For many lower middle class people ‘private’ is synonymous with small-scale firms. Located within the so-called informal sector⁸, these companies offer low salaries, little or no job security, and lack any well-founded labour protection laws. Insecurity and uncertainty in these organisations was the basis for rejecting privatisation. The majority of those employed in the ‘unorganised’ sector basically have no awareness of the work practices of Transnational Corporations or even large private companies like the TATA Corporation (India’s own multinational, which provides numerous benefits). Many government employees are similarly unaware of employee benefits offered in large corporations. If they lose their jobs, then it is more than likely they will end up employed in the unprotected small-scale private sector. Among lower middle class households white collar work in secure government jobs is much coveted because given their level of education and skills the alternative is manual unskilled work- it is the only marker of status differential with poor. Such deeply held social and cultural meanings also underlie their reasons for slighting privatisation. Perceived low status of such enterprises within their families points to a preference for a government position that was considered to hold a special status. They appealed for continued government intervention, without which they feared job losses. Some were well aware that given their level of education and training, it was unlikely that they would gain entry into positions in major companies or TNCs.

Respondents repeatedly emphasised the safety nets offered in government employment. Not only was private enterprise characterised by insecurity; it was inherently driven by a profit motive. By contrast government organisations were identified as being more humane. They often compared the callous attitude of the private sector with the compassionate nature of the state. Although it was young people who most readily embraced privatisation and positive views of the private sector, when they directly confronted some of its deleterious effects, they became its trenchant critics. As a young police woman noted,

In the police department if I work I will definitely receive my wages whereas a private firm can be closed all of a sudden. Then the payments are stopped; there are clashes between labour and the owners in private firms. It makes me furious when we get complaints from the daily wage earners that they are turned out without payments by the owners

A striking metaphor was used to describe the shift towards privatisation. One informant likened it to loss of access to nutritious food. He noted,

If privatisation takes place, there will be less freedom for the workers, no matter what position they hold. When the population has been nurtured on high quality food, they cannot consume just anything that is put on their plate. It will not be suitable to your health or even

⁸ In his ground-breaking article, Breman (1976) argues that the informal sector cannot be analytically separated from the formal sector as an economic compartment or labour situation. He demonstrates that the two sectors are not mutually exclusive, but are part of the totality of the productive system. For our purposes the distinctiveness in employment in these two sectors stand only in so far as formal sector workers are protected by labour legislations while rights and benefits of those engaged in the “unorganised” sector are limited. This distinction should be labelled in terms of an “unprotected” sector.

palatable to your taste! The shift toward privatisation is similar. The conditions will be psychologically damaging for the whole workforce and to the individual.

(Technical officer, educational training institute)

The metaphor of blood donation was applied to the public sector itself and therefore public servants were considered as blood donors. Its demise implied society's denial of their contributions. A junior reference assistant at the National Library made this pointed remark:

We cannot privatise everything. For example, those who donate blood to save lives of others, it is unfair to let them go without acknowledging their contribution. Similarly, this place is giving every drop of blood to create the brainpower of tomorrow. That is, it is preparing the future generations. At first glance, it may not seem financially feasible since this process costs a lot of money, doesn't it? But its future rewards are unquantifiable.

A number of binary opposites characterised the respondents' evaluations of the state and private enterprises. While the former was characterised by universal rules and was for the benefit of all, the latter was entirely driven by profit motives, left to the vagaries of its owners and managers. Other oppositions were:

Impartial (state) : **Personality driven** (private)

Neutral (state) : **Arbitrary** (private)

Merciful (state) : **Authoritarian** (private)

Freedom (state): **surveillance** (private)

The objectivity and open-minded nature of government bureaucrats were compared to the personal whims of employers in private enterprise. From the perspective of low ranking clerical employees personal vendettas of owners and managers in private enterprise were a concern. Some typical responses included,

In a government organisation there are universal rules and regulations that applies to everybody. In a private organisation you are under the constant surveillance of the owner. If you make a mistake in a government organisation, the officers are impartial. They will examine the situation and will judge accordingly. They will not have a personal vendetta against you because you made a mistake. Nor will they do you special favours because you happen to be in their good books.

(Male aged 31, Driver, state university)

Some one is always looking over your shoulder. I suppose we are relieved of that kind of authoritarian outlook in a semi-government and a cooperative set up.

(Woman aged 48, Purchasing Assistant, textile cooperative)

In private organisations you can sack an employee according to the proprietor's whim. It may have nothing to do with the performance of the employee. In government jobs unless you have done anything illegal, you cannot be got rid of like that.

(Woman aged 51, Lower Division Clerk, Reserve Bank of India)

They over work you in a private firm according to their whim. In

government service you get promoted according to merit. In private enterprise, if the like you, they'll promote you. If they don't you are stuck.

(Male aged 34, Library Clerk)

Asserting that IMF clauses on adjustment were farcical, a number of key informants argued that economic liberalisation was a policy choice engineered entirely by powerful classes and the government of the day proceeded in an undemocratic fashion to implement them. However, others countered the claims of citizens being excluded from the decision-making process by arguing that the reforms had not been implemented according to their original plans. These conflicting perspectives were primarily determined by their respective location in public and private sectors. Optimistic about liberalization, a number of formal private sector workers felt the ethos of hard work and efficiency inherent in the private sector should prevail among government employees. To put it another way, their current misery was attributed to their own failure. It goes without saying that such unforgiving attitudes were partly the result of never having worked in a public institution and was further reinforced by relentless media commentaries on state inefficiency as we have noted earlier.⁹ They are also consistent with notions of increased call for self-responsibility of workers.

In recent years the positive appraisal of private enterprise for its dynamism, initiative and offer of incentives have captured the public imagination/ come to dominate public opinion. Employees here are extolled with the virtues of punctuality, diligence dedication and enthusiasm. The public sector is its obverse: bureaucratic and unproductive; its workers lethargic. Advocates of private sector efficiency included workers from large private corporations, private school teachers and a handful of highly qualified civil servants and young people in general. The popularly held opinions concerning government employees, particularly their tendencies to skive off were universal among all of our respondents from the private sector. More often than not pre-existing disdainful attitudes towards public sector workers underpinned their assessment and assumptions. Typically they were from genteel social backgrounds -who had never worked nor had intended to obtain employment in the public sector. The case study of a tertiary educated single woman in mid-30's most vividly illustrates some of these preconceived ideas.

Tapati currently works as freelance project worker. Her average estimated income per year is Rs 48,000, of which she sets aside to Rs 4000 per month. The family income is over Rs 25,000 per month. This was not always the case. During her early 20's the family faced a calamity, losing the head of the family to untimely deaths. Both her father and his elder brother died very suddenly. As the eldest child it was left to her to find employment. As she explained, "my mother said to me, 'try to find a job –something in the technical area, perhaps. The other children are still studying. You've got to do something'..."

Interviewer: So, what did you do? Was there any chance of a government job?

Tapati: Never! I was going to sit for the WBCS. But then...well, I looked at the Government offices. They are filthy; dirty files everywhere; filthy walls, beetle nut spit stained on the walls. Horrible! It is the opposite in a private firm. Clean offices, nice neat reception area. People are polite. No, I've never been interested in getting a government job.

⁹ See Maclean, 2001

Interviewer: Do you still feel the same way?

Tapati: Most definitely! You go and stand there and no one even asks you to take seat. It is like they are doing you a favour. It is their job to help the public- aren't they public servants?

Interviewer: What about your friends and other family members? Do they have a different opinion about government employment?

Tapati: Most of my friends are in the private sector, in the corporate sector, in newspapers. In their opinion privatisation is a good thing. In this country people don't work in the public sector; there is a lack of a work culture. What a strange thing! I mean you draw a salary and you don't want to work? Everyday there is this meeting, that rally. Hopeless.

Interviewer: do you know many people that go to protest rallies? Would you say this would be a majority of workers?

Tapati: Er...yes, only a minority...

Interviewer: How do you think privatisation has affected the rest? Most of the population doesn't work in the public sector.

Tapati: How do you mean the rest?

Interviewer: I mean the entire the informal sector. Some people have two to three jobs just to make ends meet.

Tapati: Yes, some people work in casual jobs, part-time jobs. They work until 6 in the evening. And then from 6 onwards, they might have another job. Yeah, it's like that.

Interviewer: We tend to get upset when we see government workers taking it easy. May be they got jobs at a time when you could get a government job. Do you ever see anything like that in the private sector?

Tapati: No, no. Inefficient people just won't be able to get in. A person might be interviewed several times. There will be an IQ test. I've seen this with my own eyes. Forget English or shorthand or typing. That is just taken for granted. Then you will have your interview. The panel will be very fussy, very selective about whom they get. In government service you sit for the PSC or WBSC. That's it. I am not talking about high-ranking posts, just ordinary jobs. After you are selected, there is no accountability.

While such pre-disposed negative opinions towards government employees explains the hostile attitudes of some respondents, it is worth noting that even some of the more reticent and self-reflective respondents were also highly critical of the idleness of government employees. For example, a devout Christian for whom working hard was a moral salvation explained,

...the indiscipline that you find among government employees is completely absent in our work place. Whenever I had had to deal with workers in government departments, when ever, I've had to go to a government office, I have observed that they are always *fanki mare* (bunking off). They tendency for *fanki mara* is highly prevalent among them. We cannot imagine that kind of behaviour here. To be here for 9 hours and doing nothing is unthinkable. They are doing this day after day. We cannot even sit around for one minute.

(Male, mid 30's Senior Technical Assistant, large private corporation)

When asked whether he regarded this to be true of all government organisations, he replied, “No, naturally not. But there are some offices which does not have any work-culture what so ever.” Older state employees endorsed similar criticisms of their own colleagues: “The biggest problem with government employment is the opportunity for *fanki mara* (loafing around). You can't do that in private enterprise!” (Male, early 40's, Technical hand, Public Sector).

To immerse oneself in one's work was a badge of honour for private sector employees. Derisive of their counterparts in government service many were at the same time resentful of the security they enjoyed. These contradictory sentiments are captured by the following conversation with a clerk in a small accounting firm within the informal sector:

Respondent: We keep very busy here compared to a government organization. A government employee works for 2-3 hours, at the most, in a day, whereas here we work for 8 hours, if required, instead of the mandatory 7 hours. This is the difference.

Interviewer: You've worked here for a while then, what would say are the advantages of working in a private organization?

R : I don't notice any such advantage. Rather, I feel that a government organization is better that way; it offers more security, more benefits than private organizations. However, may be **there are benefits for people who hold very high positions. For us, there are none. (original emphasis)**

(Accounts Assistant, aged Age-38; Education-BA; Income-Rs.1400)

While private sector workers dismissed their public sector counterparts for lacking the qualities of diligence and punctuality, they were well aware of their own exploitative conditions and became resentful. Some were embittered by the shabby treatment they received from their own firms. Despite their outward praises of their own firms during formal interviews, some spoke in private about pending insecurities, particularly in transnational corporations that were experiencing global down turn, pressure to relocate, restructure and rationalise. Employees in a transnational corporation had been amidst uncertainty for the past three years. The corporation's global strategy is to transform the company by gradually shutting down some of its large manufacturing units, to sub-contract out production elsewhere and the parent company to be more involved in marketing its products. The management had not informed the employees the full details of their future. During our fieldwork most workers relied on the print media for information. At that time it was being speculated that an Indian company would take over. Stunned by the new developments workers were anxious whether they would retain their jobs and existing benefits. Apart from attractive salaries workers currently enjoy a number of entitlements – medical benefits, LDA, free lunch, crèche, transport allowance and the company's own transport service for workers. For them it was unthinkable that such a 'solid' company in which some families had worked over two

generations would face the threat of closure. Rumours of the take over created disquiet about the new management's commitment to honouring their existing facilities and conditions.

Contradictory attitudes towards the public sector also prevailed among teachers in private schools. While they continually asserted the superiority of their institution over government schools, they were anxious to down play the insecurities of their own jobs. Similar inconsistencies existed among public sector workers. A minority claimed their colleagues were idle. Therefore they felt privatisation would not be a bad idea to enforce diligence. Some well-qualified workers remained ambivalent towards their colleagues, implying that public sector workers did not work as hard as they should. Their ambivalence stemmed from their self-confidence as well-trained employees who felt immune from retrenchment. Since they had entered the posts through rigorous competition they were quite sanguine about retaining their jobs, but were also mindful that many would lose their jobs if privatised. Unlike most workers in government organisations opposed to privatisation due to a collectivist orientation, this group maintained an individualistic and technocratic approach to achieving efficiency in the public sector. However, they acknowledged that that full-privatisation would be detrimental to vast majority of the population. For example, a number of administrative and clerical workers in the postal service felt that partial privatisation was desirable in order to be more competitive. While courier services could be privatised, but it was essential to keep the price of postage stamps low for the general public. Similarly a number of respondents from Doordarshan who were its vigorous defenders for its important role as a socio-cultural institution -welcomed the technological innovations, which they felt would enhance professionalism of their divisions. Ideological influences of self-regulation were very strong among this group. We will consider further their adherence to the neo-liberal ethos of self-responsibility later in this paper.

It is evident that experiences within a given type of work setting have shaped the outlook of employees. Since these were largely value orientations that were difficult to quantify, we specifically explored the experiences of respondents who had initially worked in the private sector and then joined government service. They compared both sectors and found that private sector work was monotonous and offered no freedoms. The latter was highly valued by many people. The absence of autonomy and freedom in private enterprise were at the heart of their critique. It was also a moral critique directed at the inherently profit driven motive of private enterprise which was always prone to rationalisation and staff-cuts.

Many of our respondents were keen to point out the qualitative differences between the two sectors. These were regarded as special conditions that money could not buy. Accordingly they argued that privatisation would not necessarily improve efficiency.

Privatisation Improves Efficiency of Organisation (N=117)

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	14	12.0	12.0
	no	41	35.0	47.0
	don't know	6	5.1	52.1
	N/A	25	21.4	73.5
	no response	31	26.5	100.0
Total		117	100.00	

Some departments such as education and health care that is for the public good should not be privatised. In general, their views were characterised by a collectivist orientation: privatisation was not merely detrimental to the self, but a broader recognition that others will also suffer. Many of these employees had been involved in long-term political activism, though not always as CPI (M) cadres.

The following comment from someone who had shifted from private sector to public sector challenged the commonly held view of the absence of work culture in the latter:

There is an usual assumption that in the government sector there is no work culture, but if you look around here everyone is deeply involved in their work. You won't even find this kind of commitment within a private firm. No I'll never want privatisation.

One respondent currently working in a government job was previously employed in a private company. He denounced the private sector in the following way:

Listen, I was in a scientific organisation before I came here. Things were very different to this place. Everything was run for a commercial purpose; for a profit, how to make profit. Certainly progress can be made, but you can't apply the same ethos in government. You just can't engage in any risk taking activity. You have the fear that this belongs to the government and you can't do as you wish.

Similarly a driver working in an educational institution was highly critical towards privatisation.

No, I don't think privatisation will benefit common people. To run an educational institute takes huge amount of funds. If the government doesn't fund it, do you think the private sector will? I don't think so.

As public sector employees they defend its continued existence. The table above showed that only a minority (12%) felt privatisation would improve efficiency of government organisations. Although some respondents acknowledged the deficiencies of government departments, they were dismissive of the critiques of inefficiency and the absence of work culture. Instead, they asserted that the shortcomings were trivial and we should not obsessively focus on them. More significantly they challenged the bogey of privatisation (the popular rhetoric of privatisation?) that is often paraded as a punitive threat to discipline the workforce. One informant surmised, "...if this place is privatised there is no guarantee that it would be more efficient or that people would work more." To most low-ranking government employees workers were not responsible for inefficiencies; it should be attributed to poor management. They argued it was the innovative management practices that enhanced efficiency of an organisation rather than privatisation. The onus on managers to enhance the efficiency of an organisation will be considered in the final section of this paper. In general, they were emphatic that government departments should not be judged according to the private sector performances since some key institutions and utilities cannot be privatised. Their main concern was that once privatised these economic assets would be sold off to transnationals at very cheap rates – a recognition that it was not beneficial to common people. Their fears appear to be well founded as demonstrated by the cases of privatisation of utilities elsewhere (see Beder, 2003).

Militancy of workers, the lack of a work culture and the subsequent failure to attract foreign investment are familiar themes that receive a great deal of media attention in West Bengal.

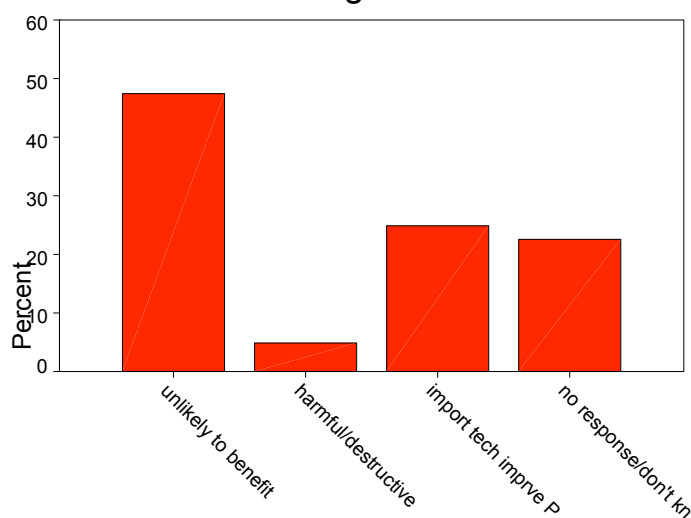
Dispelling some of the myths surrounding the notoriously bad labour relations Bannerjee et. al (2002) show that since the 1980's man days lost through strikes are low compared to other states. While Datt (2002) shows that more days were lost due to lockouts than strikes, Pederson (2000) suggests inadequate infrastructure rather than labour militancy is responsible for industrial stagnation and absence of investment. However, these arguments are of little help to the people who have been retrenched.

Foreign investment and infrastructure

According to Winslow (1995) the decreasing faith of development planners in centrally controlled economies and government-led programs to achieve economic growth and development have led to the renewed emphasis on governments to support industry with infrastructural investment in roads and electricity. That is, while neo liberal policy prescriptions emphasise privatisation of economic assets and limit government intervention, they also advocate much needed investment in infrastructure to bring about desired outcomes. Utilising these principles, Bajpai and Sachs (1999) have evaluated the progress Indian states have made in reforming their economies to encourage private investment in infrastructure. Although their approach overlooks the political and class dimensions of investment, their neo classical typology show a mixed report card for West Bengal. In their view, the state has undertaken the necessary reforms in the industrial sector, while being a poor performer in the power sector and tax reforms. They classify West Bengal as an intermediate performer in terms of growth, lagging behind south Indian states.

Intense public debates have continued on investment and infrastructure. Our respondents remain unconvinced transnational corporations will do anything positive concerning investment which will benefit Indians. They remain suspicious towards privatisation and foreign capital. In other words, in accordance with their nationalist orientation, they not only want foreign investment to be favourable to Indians, but also are entirely sceptical that this would be possible.

West Bengal Conditions improve through
more Foreign Investment



While respondents' views reflect anti-colonial in attitudes, especially among the older generation, there have been a considerable shift in views have come to dominate public discourse, which in turn have crept into everyday life.

There have been two remarkable shifts in orientation that reflect the schisms of the Left Front. The first is the necessity of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs); the second is the view that reproduces the rhetoric of efficiency, only this time it is in relation to the state. The arguments in favour of SAPs to redress the crisis of the balance of payments are widely accepted. Many of the respondents argued that though inherently just and rational, bureaucratic procedures of the state might be cumbersome compared with the speed of private enterprise. Even those opposed to privatisation on ideological grounds nevertheless urged that government organisations should also become efficient.

Work efficiency

The ways in which workers internalised and reproduced the rhetoric of efficiency became most apparent when we interviewed a number of workers in a newly established training and research institute, which was set up with government funding. Currently it holds an autonomous status. However, it is envisaged that ultimately it will become self-funding. We were particularly interested in this organisation since it was new endeavour and many of its clerical and technical personnel were recruited from both experienced private and public sector employees. While many of the public sector employees were on "deputation," from other divisions, the private sector employees had all resigned from their previous posts. The experience and attitudes of these workers provide an insight into the ways in which workers internalised and reproduced the rhetoric of efficiency.

Most of the clerical and technical workers expressed an overall positive view of the organisation and their own career mobility within it. One of their favourite preoccupations was the efficiency of government organisations in order to be viable. This view has become all pervasive among many workers who are at pains to assert that their organisation is the most efficient. It is markedly different from those who say that performance of government departments should not be evaluated according to private sector measures.

Respondents deployed the language of managerialism to enhance efficiency while rejecting privatisation. Frequently used terms to describe the qualities that individuals and their co-workers possessed were 'flexible' and 'embracing strategic changes'. In general, they were apprehensive about the negative social consequences of liberalisation, and feared that privatisation would result in large-scale retrenchments. However, they advocated that the approach of imposing strict work discipline in private enterprise should also apply to government employees. A common saying was, "No, I don't want privatisation. But, I want people to work as if it was a private organisation." A project officer remarked,

We are operating like a private company for all intent and purposes. We earn for ourselves. You will find people working here till late at night, on holidays. We do not clock on and off like some government servants.

The ideal was to simultaneously increasing manpower and to maintain efficiency through the use of technology, although respondents were divided about its impact on the workforce. While some felt unemployment would increase, others were optimistic about re-training and employment generation. A postal clerk explained his vision,

I think instead of privatising it, we should use more of the latest technology, so that we can provide best service to the public. For

instance, we could take up courier services. If we could provide such services, the public would turn to us in a greater numbers. For this, we have to boost our infrastructure.

Ultimately most hoped that the state would form appropriate policies to stave off privatisation. Yet, their main defence was they had formed the necessary qualities of being strategic and efficient.

Hegemony and strategic self-interest

The dilemma for many respondents was that they highly valued the freedoms allowed in the public sector. Equally they expressed concern over the abuses of these very privileges.

Many respondents feared that without the work ethic they would face the threat of being closed down. On the one hand nowadays there is a realisation that publicly owned enterprises should be profit oriented- operate like the private sector. On the other hand people also criticised the notion of this new ethos of market citizenship. As noted above many were concerned that aspects of the public sector that cannot be privatised.

The respondents' logic of reproducing the rhetoric of global efficiency lies in the pervasive influences of the ideologies that associate efficiency with privatisation. Their legitimacy arises from the articulation of a common adherence to liberalisation policies, especially the valorisation efficiency, which incorporates ideological elements from various powerful groups. Here Gosovic's (2000: 450, 453) notion of Global Intellectual Hegemony and its negative portrayal of public institutions as inefficient in contrast to private institutions have particular resonances. It is easy to see how people have internalised the state ideology of global efficiency, particularly the young, because of the terminologies and clichés that are deployed in the public domain to propagate it. Yet, as Kagarlitsky (1996) has shown official ideologies no longer really convince anyone. It is more that alternatives to the dominant ideologies are neutralised and dismantled by those in power. Thus any counter ideologies filter through in such a fragmented way that they do not pose a genuine alternative. Some of our respondents and key informants expressed their disenchantment with liberalisation only in private.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that our informants espouse the government rhetoric because they are deceived by ideology. Clearly they use themes of competition and deregulation in complex ways whereby they neither reject nor accept them. In other words, our respondents do not subscribe to neo-liberal ideologies in a uniform and coherent way. Some may hope to gain a few advantages from them even though this may be illusory. This strategic self-interest is combined with a shift in political rationality, which is geared towards delivering an increased call for personal responsibility. Their acquiescence towards self-regulation results from the reconfiguration of earlier discourses of self-sacrifice, hard work and rational planning necessary for nation building.

Generational divide

Mores associated with privatisation have permeated more broadly among youth. Their positive attitudes towards privatisation of government enterprises stem from the decade long public debates of government inefficiency, the concomitant declining support for the Left Front's ideology in urban areas, and the contradictory messages from elders within their own families. During fieldwork we found that despite older people's fierce defence of the public sector, suspicions towards foreign capital and privatisation, they remained very critical of laziness of workers in government organisations. Many framed their critique in terms an

erosion of the work ethic within their own generation and pointed to the commitment of younger people to work hard, often drawing on the experiences of their own children.

Young people routinely incorporated the language of efficiency and the much needed work culture of public sector workers in their everyday conversations. Oft repeated remarks included, “I think privatisation is good. You can work hard and you will be rewarded,” “...government organisation is good too, but I have no problems with privatisation”, “...you can genuinely work in private enterprise” and “people committed to hard work can get job satisfaction in private organisations – it does not happen in government jobs”. Some were quick to point out the casual atmosphere in government offices compared to their previous experience in the private sector: “in my previous job I was fully immersed in my work. Here you get a lot more leisure” and “see, you are able to interview me here. This would not have been possible in a private organisation!” Ria a young teacher noted most severely

...in the private sector if anybody, having a commitment to work, has the intention as well as the capacity—then he can do so. This attitude is positively a disadvantage in a government organization!”

Ironically at the evangelical Christian school she worked paid less compared to a government school and she was very critical of the light hearted approach of students to her subject, Bengali and the lack of serious intellectual debate among teachers. Yet, she proudly declared that she was among a cohort of teachers recruited for their dedication to hard work and accepted the continual surveillance in the school

If I compare us with a government organization – there is no work culture at all in government offices. This is not the case here... They always monitor what we are doing. Everybody does it, they oversee it.

Such statements reverberate with deeply rooted parental and familial influences of hard work and just rewards.

In contrast to older workers’ anxieties over uncertainties and fear of job losses, young people were unfazed by the prospect restructuring or closures of their work places. As a young receptionist confidently explained, she could easily obtain employment elsewhere:

We were told six months prior to the closure of the East West airlines. It was not a shock to me. We were told; we knew well ahead. Then a lot of us tried to get jobs in other airlines. I got a job with the Royal Jordanian airlines. But it had odd hours and I was already married. So I didn't take it up. Then I looked around and found this job.

Despite recognising the failure of the airline to compensate her of the three-month salary owed to her when she was retrenched, she was not embittered and felt optimistic that greater opportunities would appear in future.

Arguably, it is among the youth that the Left Front’s own schism comes sharply into focus. We identified a number young people from rural areas who were firm supporters of the CPI (M). We interviewed a number of college students and workers who were living away from home in hostels. Whilst sharing the generally optimistic attitudes of urban middle class youth towards liberalisation, some felt a cautious and gradualist approach to privatisation was necessary. Others ideologically opposed to privatisation reproduced the discourses of efficiency.

The following case study of a twenty three year old probationary library assistant typically reflects the sentiments of young people. It is Ganesh’s first job in government service. For the past three years he worked in a number of private libraries as a casual and in a video and

audio library. As he was interested in library science, he volunteered in the local library in his village. While working full-time he began a course in librarianship. In his current job it was more than his youthful enthusiasm that led him to conclude “My goal is to provide a quick service to the readers. I’m trying to reorganise the library. It has been in shambles for a long time.” His views affirm the emerging entrepreneurial spirit among employees in some government departments. He echoed the views of senior staff in this newly established educational institution:

They say that people in the government sector don’t work and therefore you have to privatise. That is necessary in some organisations, to develop and to become more efficient. We are already efficient. We work hard.

At his hostel we found Ganesh regularly engaged in heated debates on liberalisation, especially with economics students. He presented a classic textbook explanation of liberalisation in positive terms, while maintaining that it was not proceeding properly.

Manmohan Singh was very pro-liberalisation. With the exception some key sectors, he just wanted to go forge ahead with economic reforms, he was pro free trade. He had also emphasised the development of infrastructure. . The idea of competition in the market place and criticisms of the licensing policy convinced me.

I don’t think protectionism worked very well because it resulted in monopolies. The quality of goods didn’t improve. Now we have competition, so we have access to high technology and quality goods...Successive governments haven’t really formed any cohesive ideas about economic liberalisation. One minute they are saying this and the next minute something else. They are procrastinating. This creates confusion in the public mind.

Role of Management and efficiency

According to most of our informants, poor management was responsible for “sick industries.” Many attributed inefficiency to poor management rather than the alleged absence of a work culture among employees, arguing that privatisation itself would not solve the problem of inefficiency of public enterprises.

Responses differed according to their individualist and collectivist orientations. Those who professed they were already efficient, reproduced neo-liberal ideologies emphasising the importance for individuals to be responsible for the success of their organisations. This was markedly differed from collectivist perspectives, which rested their general critique of liberalisation on an anti-privatisation stance. While the critique of militant employees were consistent with their political orientation, the responses of some highly unionised unskilled employees revealed a curious sentiment. On the one hand their identification of the “class enemy” embodied in the capitalist class only applied to private enterprise. On the other they maintained a deferential attitude towards public sector managers. We have already alluded to the importance low-ranking employees attached to the role of management in facilitating efficiency of an organisation. Management in the public sector were considered to be in possession of superior knowledge and higher education.

The differing assessment of managers in terms of their ‘superior knowledge’ refers to techniques of management. Modern management techniques comprise the ability to maintain rationality through expert knowledge, and yet remain sympathetic to the needs of employees. This managerial model is compatible with furthering the interest of capital while

simultaneously averting conflict between capital and labour. Although the relationship between capital and labour are inherently antagonistic, they occur within a diversity of labour processes. Capital also needs worker cooperation, creativity and commitment. According to Thompson (1990), this encouragement needs to be more than a material lure or ideological coercion. It appears that in some of the publicly owned enterprises in West Bengal, bureaucrats highly skilled in managerial techniques have been particularly effective in eliciting consent and cooperation of employees by obscuring the antagonistic relationship between management and workers. This was evidenced by the acquiescence of those subscribing the ideologies of managerialism, but also that of some militant workers. The latter noted most emphatically that the success and failure of an organisation was dependant on the capabilities of talented managers who were able to negotiate good relations with workers to bring about the best outcomes. They firmly believed that in all organisations the staff and management were intimately bound up. A good manager had the capabilities to “manage change” by introducing innovative practices to enhance efficiency.

Respondents at times expressed a highly respectful attitude towards managers and bureaucrats. This is in part due to *bhadralok* reverence of education and knowledge. High-ranking officials in government departments are drawn from the Indian Administrative Service, a highly respected and valued occupation among the Bengali middle class (if not the whole of India). Therefore the comparison that some respondents drew from organised sector private enterprises is that although there may be better pay in this sector, managers were seen as whimsical and personality driven whereas public sector officials were stable and rational and therefore worthy of respect. Alongside their general contempt for private enterprise, they also noted the lack of talent and decision making power among its managers. Contrasting the rational actions of public sector managers with profit motives of private enterprise, they also challenged the popular perception of wastage in government. Some typical responses included:

Those who are in charge in government have the knowledge and the requisite qualities to run a complex organisation. This is lacking in private enterprise. You just can't wake up one morning and decide that you are going to have a lock out or close a college because you are running a loss. In private enterprise you're here today and gone tomorrow.

And

In private enterprise you might be in this office for a year and then moved to another. So, you try to squeeze the best deal, you take short cuts. In government you have to follow rules and regulations and can't do as you please. In private enterprise a new fellow comes, he prepares a budget, creates a new strategic plan. In two years he is gone and another chap comes along and makes a new plan. So, what happens to the plan that was already in place, the money that was invested and the work that is already underway? You stop what has been done and you start again. What a waste! In government organisations even when the MD has left and a new one comes, he will carry out what is in place.

It goes without saying that since a significant proportion of our respondents were completely unaware of the management practices in large private corporations, their appraisal of private sector managers is quite distorted. Contrary to the popular perceptions of our respondents, managers in large private firms are no less qualified and are drawn from similar social backgrounds as the public sector managers, who were held in high esteem by our respondents. State bureaucrats and CEOs of large private corporations are more than likely to have shared their training in the same prestigious educational institutions. Indeed management firms such

as Tata Consulting services have been at the forefront of providing the necessary expertise to corporations and more so to translational firms since liberalisation. Yet, it is worth noting that respondents in large corporations did not praise their management even though they spoke at length about advantages and benevolence of corporations that provided medical benefits, transport, childcare, schooling and so on.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the ways in which people give meaning to notions of efficiency and how they struggle with the contradictions that emerge as they navigate the terrain between government rhetoric and the reality of their own lives. A number of people in this study have internalised the state's rhetoric of global efficiency is precisely through the continuum of earlier state discourses of modernisation and scientific rationality. A major reason for the talented managers being able to solve their problems was their firm belief in the modernising discourses of techniques and rationality. For some the transition from scientific socialism to scientific managerialism was made possible by the very process of modern education and political socialisation.

Ultimately, this research shows that there exists an essential and ongoing tension between the state and labour in West Bengal, especially in the urban areas. The uncompleted struggle is one whereby the Left Front government has to ideologically convince the urban middle classes of the benefits of privatisation and of the state's New Economic Policy. However, NEP presupposes an individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit, which, in comparison to other states, has not been strong in West Bengal. Moreover, Bengalis see the benefits of collective action and unionisation, a view strongly and commonly held despite one's political allegiances. In the final analysis, the Left Front government's attempts to implement workplace change are looked upon suspiciously as a means to undermine worker's rights and to take away the protection of the state, a protection fought for and won over several decades.

The particular world views and lived experiences of the lower middle class show at one level an antipathy toward liberalisation and globalisation and yet, on another, they express a desire for India, and Indians, to move forward and compete in an increasingly globalised, cosmopolitan world. Economic liberalisation is by no means an accepted dogma. In various ways there is evidence of fundamental dissatisfaction, frustration and mistrust with the process.

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