

INDIAN PEASANTRY IN STRUGGLE FOR FOOD, LAND AND PEACE.

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The Central Kisan Council, the executive organ of the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasant Association) held a three day session in Patna (Bihar) during the last week of June.

This was the first meeting of the Council for four years, since, from the beginning of 1948 all its members were either in jail or forced to work underground. It was only a result of the recent general election, after which the Government of India and the various State Governments had to withdraw the warrants for their arrest that the majority of the Central Kisan Council members could come out and work legally. Even now, Comrade Parulekar, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Council, is in jail and Comrade Teja Singh Swatantra, a member of the Council, has a warrant for arrest pending against him.

The reactionaries ruthlessly suppressed the peasant movement. The office of the All-India Kisan Sabha itself and its various Provincial and District Offices were closed in 1948. One of the members of the Council, Comrade Jayanti Parikh, was shot dead in jail in 1949. Thousands of active Kisan Sabha workers became victims of repression. The number of those killed by the police and by gangs armed by landlords amounts to several thousand.

The peasants showed that they cannot be cowed by atrocities. The atrocities of the reactionaries evoked greater resistance on the part of the peasantry in their struggle for their just cause, and the Government had ultimately to relax the repressions. The heroic resistance of the peasants of Telengana, the peasant struggle in Andhra, and Malabar (Madras State), in Tripura and in other areas of India during the last 3½ years showed that the peasant movement in India cannot be broken by terrific onslaught unleashed by the landlords and their Congress Government. Nay, more. At the first available opportunity i.e. during the general election, the peasants of these areas gave a crushing blow to their oppressors. They demonstrated that they can defeat the offensive of the enemy ensure the right of organisation and struggle.

The Central Kisan Council met in June and discussed the major issues affecting the life of the Indian peasantry.

I.

The most vital issue affecting Indian economy today is the scarcity of food. Reports of widespread famine come from many parts of the country, particularly from southern areas. While in "normal" years nearly one-third of the population in India suffers from malnutrition, this year the famine has assumed more serious forms. The states of Madras, Travancore-Cochin and others are in the grip of famine. Famine is rife particularly in the Andhra area. The peasants live mainly on grass, roots and cocoa-nut leaves. Epidemics are raging in the country, carrying off thousands of people.

The imperialist policy of turning India into a producer of raw materials for the U.S.-British monopolies played havoc with our economic life. During the course of 40 years of the 20th century, India was converted from a surplus food producing country to a country with food deficit. It was this that led to the disastrous Bengal famine of

1943, when some 4,000,000 people died of hunger. The recurrence of famine in India is the result of British exploitation and of the bourgeois-landlord yoke.

Ever since 1947, Prime Minister Nehru and other spokesmen of the Congress have been repeating that now that we are free, as they put it, we can solve our food problem. The Government actually fixed 1951 as the target year in which agricultural production should have grown to a degree that there would be no necessity for food imports. But it was precisely in 1951 that India had to import the maximum amount of food in her history.

This was the serious situation which the Congress Government had to deal with immediately after the general election. But it had no intention whatever of reversing its anti-people's policy. The peasants demanded that landlord land be turned over to them without compensation, that they be ensured long-term and cheap credit, liquidation of the debt and easing of the tax burden. It was essential to increase the purchasing power of the peasants, to enable them to use artificial fertiliser, implements, etc. The Congress Government, however, decided to initiate a policy of attacking the consumer.

First of all, the Government reduced the subsidy that it had been paying for the high-priced American imported food-grains and thus raised the price paid by the consumer. This single "measure" of the Government led, for example, to a 30-50 per cent increase in the price of wheat.

The Government of India cynically stated that the rise in price of food-grains and the subsequent lessening of demand on the grain stocks was to the advantage of the country. This was followed by the introduction of a new policy of withdrawing price controls and the controls over the supply of food-grains, first in Madras and then in Bihar and U.P.

Justifying this policy, the Chief Minister of Madras said: "Those who raise food-crops with considerable difficulty and anxiety and those wholesalers who buy and store grains and the numerous traders who distribute them among consumers should all consider themselves as trustees and patriotic citizens of the Republic and comrades of the Government". Here, therefore, was a clear policy of leaving the consumer to the tender mercies of the big landlords, wholesalers and others who control the huge stocks of grain.

II.

The Central Kisan Council, therefore, had to lay down its policy with regard to the food situation. It characterised the Government's food policy as a policy "designed to relieve the Government entirely of its responsibility for supplying food to the people at a price which the mass of the people can afford to pay". The Council also noted that "precisely such a policy has been for long urged on the Government of India by the Anglo-American imperialists who have been demanding that the 'wasteful' expenditure of money on feeding the people should be stopped in order to find the resources for the so-called development projects."

Regarding the policy of de-control over distribution and prices of food-grains the Council noted that the result of this new policy of the Government was a sharp price increase on the so-called "open market" due to the fact that merchants got hold of large stocks of food for speculative purposes.

As against this anti-people's policy of the Government, the Council adopted a resolution in which it gave its own policy based on the following principles:

1. Rationing should be maintained in all cities and other industrial areas and towns and cheap-grain shops opened in the rural scarcity areas.
2. Stocks, necessary for rationing and cheap-grain shops should be accumulated through procurement from big landlords and others who hold huge stocks, and by imports from all foreign sources, for which immediate negotiations should be started with the Soviet Union, China and other countries.
3. Fair prices should be paid for the grain procured internally.
4. Utmost efforts should be made to get the price of imported grain reduced; and if these efforts fail, the Government should subsidise the sale of grain so as to make it available at cheap rates.
5. An intensive drive should immediately be started to increase the production of food-grain. It is necessary to stop evictions of peasants, reduce rent, interest, taxes and other burdens on the peasantry; it is necessary to give all cultivable waste lands to peasants and agricultural labourers for cultivation, provide at cheap rates credit and other facilities like seed, implements, etc. It is necessary to develop irrigation facilities.

III.

The Council had also to express itself on the Government of India's "Five Year Plan" and the so-called "Community Projects" that formed part of the same.

The national-democratic movement in India has always held the view that planning the development of our culture and industries, essential improvement in the standard of our rural and urban masses, is impossible unless fundamental social changes are effected. The Indian National Congress itself had to tell the people at one time that the antiquated land tenure and taxation systems stand in the way of all social-economic reforms.

However, the moment the Congress became the ruling party it abandoned this anti-feudal struggle. It came to an understanding with the Princes and big landlords by so "reforming" the Princely order and the system of big landlordism that all the Princes and big landlords maintain their tight grip over the people. What the so-called "reforms" have meant is that, while the Princes and big landlords get huge sums in compensation, while many of them still have in their possession thousands of acres of land, the rent, interest and tax burdens on peasants have not been reduced even to the slightest degree.

The Congress Government has the temerity to pretend that it can solve all the rural problems within the framework of the present feudal order. It proposed doing this through the "Community Projects". Each of these "projects" will cover 50-100 villages which are supposed to be the first targets of the process of reconstruction. It demagogically proposed improvement in the technique of cultivation, introduction of new rural industries, educational advancement, medical facilities and cultural uplift in the countryside. But the vital question for the peasants—the thorough overhauling of land relations—was not reflected in these "projects".

The 'projects', in fact, are intended solely to prevent the mass of the peasants from organising themselves and bringing about basic changes in land relations. In

addition, these “projects” are to be implemented in consultation with, and under the direction of, the representatives of the U.S. Government in India because these projects are part of the “Indo-U.S. Technical Co-operation Agreement”. The Central Kisan Council, therefore, condemned it as “anti-national and against the interests of the peasant masses of India”. Furthermore, “It is a plan for strengthening the strangle-hold of American imperialism in our rural economy”.

The Council noted that the Government’s “Five-Year Plan” in general, and the “Community Projects” in particular, will facilitate the importation of American capital on the condition that the key position of our agriculture together with other vital sectors of our national economy will be handed over to American experts responsible to nobody but the American monopolists. The Council, therefore, warned the people against such a surrender of national interests—a surrender which is being prepared by the Government—and exposed the anti-peasant nature of the Nehru Government’s promises of “planned” development of the country.

Far from solving any of the major problems calling for immediate solution, the Council said, it will accentuate each one of them in the interests of the American imperialists, the Indian monopolists and the feudal landlords and exploiters of various types.

One of the features of the “Community Projects” is the introduction of the so-called co-operative farming without abolishing landlordism. According to this, those peasants who have less than the economic holding will be obliged to join the cooperatives, while the landlords, including even the absentee land-owners, will receive big rent from the peasants. Furthermore, “The tenants, sub-tenants, tenants-at-will and sharecroppers who constitute the overwhelming majority of the peasantry, will be atrociously divested of whatever limited rights they possess and transformed into wage-labourers... The big landlords and rich peasants will decide the fate of the vast mass of poor and middle peasants”.

The Council, therefore, declared that: “It will do all in its power to unite the people and rouse the peasant masses into such a powerful movement as can seal the doom of the imperialist dominated, anti-national plan which the Nehru Government seeks to introduce”.

IV.

The peasants of India are deeply interested in the preservation and consolidation of peace for it is their experience that during the first world war, and again during the second world war, their conditions deteriorated to an enormous degree. Official and unofficial investigators have proved by figures that apart from a very narrow stratum of rich peasants and landlords, the debt owed by the entire rural population has increased, while its wealth and annual income declined several-fold during the war.

It was during the war years that the Government did its utmost to cut to the maximum extent the opportunities of the working people for organisation and struggle. War years have always seen the enforcement of emergency legislation, bans on democratic newspapers and public progressive organisations, arrests and imprisonment on a mass scale and every form of repression directed against the parties and organisations of the common people. The reactionary forces are seeking to hinder the struggle of the Indian peasantry and their working class and other allies for full democracy, for the abolition of landlordism and for a free and prosperous country.

The All-India Kisan Sabha has always taken an active interest in the struggle against war and fascism. This is all the more necessary today because our economy which is already in a state of crisis will further disintegrate and the life of our people, already miserable, will become intolerable. The Council, therefore decided that the All-India Kisan Sabha should take an active part in developing a very wide peace movement.

The Council, however, noted that there is a false understanding with regard to the role of the peasantry in the present day peace movement. There is a tendency, the Council stated, to consider the peace movement as the exclusive function of the Peace Committees, deserving at the most moral or individual support of the Kisan workers. The Central Kisan Council, therefore, draws attention to the need to get rid of this misunderstanding of the peace movement and directs all units of the All-India Kisan Sabha and Kisan workers to take up the struggle for peace as one of the most important tasks of the Kisan Sabha—a task which must be taken up both in co-operation with the Peace Committees as well as independently by the Kisan organisations from their own platforms.

In addition to the task of carrying on a campaign for a Pact of Peace between the Five Big Powers, the Council decided that special Conferences of Peasants for Peace should be held at State, Provincial, District and lower levels.

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Such are the major issues on which the meeting of the Central Kisan Council took concrete decisions.

The Council also discussed a number of other urgent issues, including unity between the All-India Kisan Sabha and the United Kisan Sabha.

This latter is an organisation composed of some who had been in the Kisan Sabha for a very long period, but who in the 1940s left it. The tremendous changes that have taken place during the last four years in the economic and political situation of the country have sharply brought out the necessity of these two organisations merging into one and developing the movement of the peasants on an all-India scale. Since this has been realised by both sides, the talks have reached an advanced stage. Representatives from both sides have been carrying on negotiations on the actual steps to be taken to bring about the merger. It was, therefore, decided that this should be carried forward so that the merger can be brought about as early as possible.

The peasants of India are intensifying the struggle for land, bread, freedom and peace. Ever greater masses of peasants are demanding that the Government change its policy of hunger and misery, increasing numbers of them are participating in the peace movement, voting for the progressive and democratic candidates fighting selflessly against the reactionary ruling Party—the Indian National Congress. The multimillion peasant masses in India, in close alliance with the working class and under the leadership of the Communist Party, will realise their cherished aspirations.

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Third All-India Peace Congress

The III All-India Peace Congress held in Jullundur on September 12-14 was attended by some 350 delegates and more than 5,000 guests. The Congress adopted decisions aimed at consolidating peace in Asia and throughout the world.

The Congress adopted resolutions “For a Pact of Peace”, “Concerning Peace in Asia”, “Peace and Indian People”. In a special resolution the Congress voiced approval of and expressed wholehearted support for the forthcoming Peoples’ Congress for Peace.

The Congress adopted a resolution “Women and Peace”, which contains a call to the women of India urging them to take an active part in the fight for peace.

The resolution “For Peace in Korea” points out that continuation of the hostilities in Korea is fraught with a serious threat to world peace and therefore the Indian people declare that they will have nothing to do with the actions directed against mankind which are being perpetrated in Korea in the name of Uno, and associate themselves with world public opinion which has denounced these actions. In its resolution “On the Union of South Africa” the Congress denounced the racial discrimination practiced there by the Malan Government and expressed its support for the heroic struggle waged by the people against this policy.

In a resolution “The Near and Middle East” the Congress evaluates the heroic struggle waged by the peoples of the Near and Middle East against the machinations of the U.S.-British imperialists as a “big contribution to the cause of maintaining peace”.

In a resolution on Japan the Congress expresses its wholehearted solidarity with the struggle of the Japanese people against the separate “peace” treaty “which is fraught with a serious threat to peace not only in relation to the people of Japan but to the peoples of all the countries of Asia and the Pacific also”.

On September 14, a popular demonstration took place in Jullundur in honour of the Congress. In addition to 10,000 citizens of the town, peasants and workers from other towns of East Punjab and from the neighbouring P.E.P.S.U. States took part in the demonstration.

After the demonstration the Congress held its final open session in the town square of Jullundur. It was attended by more than 15,000 people.

The Congress delegates—people of most diverse political convictions—pledged to fight actively for a stable and lasting peace.

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